



FROM PING PONG TABLES TO PURPOSE

Exploring the dimensions of an attractive workplace

Linnéa Sandberg & Matilda Olsson

Essay/Thesis:	30 hp
Program and/or course:	Master's Programme of Strategic Human Resource Management and Labour Relations
Level:	Second Cycle
Semester/year:	St/2023
Supervisor:	Ulla Eriksson-Zetterquist
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Abstract

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- Aim:** This study aims to understand how companies within the ICT field construct themselves as attractive workplaces in a highly competitive labour market. The research question seeks to investigate which dimensions of work representatives from the companies emphasise as attractive.
- Theory:** Using the lens of institutional theory offered ways to understand the institutional pressures in the ICT field through the concept of isomorphism. Furthermore, the theory enabled to understand the agency of organisations, brought out as institutional work and translation of institutional isomorphic pressures to fit the organisational context.
- Method:** A comparative multiple case study design and qualitative approach underpins the study method. 20 interviews were conducted, comprising of two interviews from each company. The participants consisted of several HR/People and culture professionals, and one IT director. The analysis was made using a thematic approach, beginning with initial coding of the data, continuing with focused coding, and lastly summarising each organisation. Lastly, the summaries were compared to one another, to highlight potential similarities and differences in the cases.
- Results:** The results show that the case organisations comprising the sample emphasised eight dimensions of how to construct themselves as an attractive workplace. The eight prominent dimensions of attractive work are learning and development, flexibility, purpose, employer brand, community and culture, well-being, office, and salary. Some of the dimensions are shown to be connected and contradicting to each other. Additionally, the findings indicate that the companies apply various practices to align to the dimensions of attractive work.

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Sincerely,

Linnéa Sandberg

Matilda Olsson

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1. Introduction

This chapter begins by addressing the problem statement to establish understanding of the research. It then proceeds to outline the aim and research question. Finally, it highlights the importance of the study and provides an overview of the content structure.

1.1 Problem statement

Digitalisation has been exploding during the last decade, which has increased the demand for IT skills, especially noticeable as an effect of the COVID-19 pandemic (OECD, 2022).

Evidence shows increased levels of labour shortages in numerous industries, whereby ‘information and communication technology’ (ICT) peaked during the first quarter of 2021 (OECD, 2022; Eurofound, 2021). In EU, the trend of labour shortages within the information and communication sector is especially prominent, which may derive from the digital-intensive transition within countries and companies during the pandemic (OECD, 2022).

In 2020, the Swedish statistical authority (SCB) published a pilot study that indicated an estimated labour shortage of more than 7000 people with an education in computer and system science based on the labour force barometer from 2019. Among the 26 investigated educational groups, computer and system science indicated the second-largest shortage (SCB, 2020). The employer organisation IT & Telekomföretagen (2020) argues that the problem will grow even bigger, indicating that 70.000 people will be missed by the year of 2024.

Some of the highly sought-after competencies include system development, artificial intelligence (AI), IT security, UX design, game development and 5G technology. In general, there is a scarcity of competent workers caused by age demographic changes in most industrialised nations, causing businesses more difficulty finding suitable candidates (Horbach & Rammer, 2022; Henkens, Remery & Schippers, 2008; Ortlieb & Sieben, 2012). It is essential for businesses to recruit qualified people since an organisation's competitive edge is dependent on excellent human resources (Wright, McMahan & McWilliams, 1994).

In efforts to manage the attraction and retention of people in a situation where the availability of a desirable workforce is inadequate, constructing an attractive workplace becomes crucial (Dabirian, Paschen & Kietzmann, 2018). Former studies have researched attractive work, arguing for various work values and dimensions that affect people's choice of employer.

Biswas, Allard, Pousette and Härenstam (2017) argue that to stay effective, companies need to understand the importance of forming strategies regarding how to attract and retain personnel. In a competitive labour market, composing an attractive workplace has emerged as a critical component of all companies' economic success and sustainability. As the company's survival depends on its employees, the strategies of retaining and attracting talented people becomes vital (Biswas et al., 2017).

1.2 Aim

The aim of this study is to understand how companies within the ICT field construct themselves as attractive workplaces in a highly competitive labour market.

1.2.1 Research question

- *Which dimensions do companies emphasise as important when constructing an attractive workplace?*

1.3 Significance

The study is relevant to the Human Resource Management literature due to the subject of which dimensions that are considered to constitute an attractive workplace in a globalised and scarce labour market. The context of the study are companies operating in Sweden that want to attract information and communication technology (ICT) workers. This context is particularly interesting due to the current digital intensive transition and scarcity of labour, which imposes challenges of employee attraction and retention. This study will contribute to knowledge about how organisations that want to attract ICT workers work with issues related to employee attraction and retention, and how they are connected in a larger context. By applying the lens of new institutional theory, isomorphic tendencies in the field uncovers various external pressures that are reinterpreted by organisations and acted upon through agency.

1.4 Disposition

Below follows the disposition of the thesis to guide the reader through the content. The study begins by introducing a thorough review of previous research on labour shortage followed by an explanation of the factors that contribute to labour shortage. The conceptualisation of

attractive work will be discussed, focusing on the perceptions of employees and what dimensions of work that are considered attractive in previous research.

In the third chapter the theoretical framework of new institutional theory is presented, and thereby how the theory is used to analyse the empirical data. The fourth chapter provides an overview of the research design. Followed by a description of the sample and the data collection strategy, analytical approach, data quality, ethical considerations, and limitations.

In the fifth chapter the empirical results are outlined. Focusing on the research aim and question, by presenting the eight dimensions of attractive work that the companies emphasised. These were found to be learning and development, flexibility, purpose, employer brand, community and culture, well-being, office, and salary.

The sixth chapter discusses and analyses the empirical results, revealing relationship between the dimensions such as connections or contradictions, and the external impact. The eight dimensions of attractive work is analysed in relation to previous research. Additionally, new institutional theory is applied to analyse the empirical data concurrently. In the final chapter, the study is concluded through a recap of the main findings, describing the contribution to the research field, and discuss limitations and propose further research.

2. Previous Research

This chapter provides an overview of previous research of labour shortage and attractive work. Beginning to describe some explanatory factors of labour shortage. Following sections will conceptualise attractive work and outline perceptions of what is considered as attractive work. The point of departure will be from an employee perspective, outlining what dimensions of work that have been identified as attractive in previous research.

2.1 Labour shortage

There seems to be different streams of opinion regarding the factors contributing to labour shortage. Henkens, Remery and Schippers (2008) argue for the demographic changes in terms of the aging population in most western countries. This will be expected to lead to scarcity of labour during the upcoming decades. Horbach and Rammer (2022) elaborate that skill shortage will affect firms' ability to be innovative, which could have a negative spill over on the entire economy. One cause of skill shortage is the challenges posed by an aging society, coupled with the increased demand for knowledge-intensive work that surpasses the number of young workers entering the labour market. The authors claim that the educational system has not been able to keep up their educational content in response to digitalisation (Horbach & Rammer, 2022). According to a study by SCB (2020), there is a noticeable lack of people with a variety of educational backgrounds, especially in the field of IT. The study demonstrates that there is a considerable gap between the current market demand and the availability of candidates with relevant educational background. This is further supported by the employer organisation IT & Telekomföretagen (2020), which estimates a shortage of 70,000 individuals with IT education in the upcoming years.

However, Capelli (2015) presents a contrasting viewpoint, suggesting that companies may be exaggerating the current and anticipated future skills mismatch in job requirements. The author argues that those writing the reports claiming labour and skill shortage have an interest in the outcome of governmental policies. Thomson, Veall and Sweetman (2018) use confidential LFS micro-data from 1987 to 2016 to analyse the claim of labour shortage of ICT workers in Canada. The factors that evidently prove labour shortages are increased real wages, increased working hours, and decreasing tenure and average age within the

organisations. The results provide the picture that the persistence of labour shortage after the IT boom in the mid-2000s has not been the case in Canada. They suggest that it could be due to increased immigration which has led to minimising the increasing of ICT wages (Thomson et al., 2018).

Overall, digitalisation has led to increased demands for IT competence which poses challenges for companies aiming to attract such competence, leading to a shortage of labour. Although authors like Capelli (2015) and Thomson et al. (2018) are claiming that the shortage of labour is exaggerated, there seems to be little evidence of a non-existing shortage. Several authors argue for high competition of IT competence, which indicates that the labour market is suffering from labour shortage to some extent which has implications for organisational strategies of how to attract and retain employees.

2.2 Conceptualising attractive work

Biswas et al. (2017) present a historical overview of how the concepts of attractive work and workplace have been studied. A lot of the research are rooted in sociotechnical systems theory, primarily focusing on the quality of working life (QWL). During the 1970s and 1980s, the focus was to develop models to redesigning jobs, leading to improvement in job satisfaction and attractiveness of work. Furthermore, to understand the implications of interaction across hierarchical levels. Later research, brought out by Antonovsky (1987) focused on the health aspects of work. Arguing for the importance of contextual sensemaking, in terms of comprehensibility, manageability and meaningfulness of work, for the work to be attractive (Antonovsky, 1987).

Biswas et al. (2017) describe that other researchers have focused on conflicts between main stakeholders within an organisation, which was found to be a high-risk factor in terms of stress among employees. Arguing for the importance of balancing multiple stakeholders when asserting that the organisation has shared values throughout, failing to do so could result in negative implications for the organisation. Another perspective of the concept of attractive work is drawn based on motivation theory. The main argument of this stream of research is that when establishing processes of motivating employees, the organisations are at fault for solely focusing on extrinsic rewards and punishments but should also include aspects of intrinsic rewards. The intrinsic rewards include feelings of satisfaction, needs, motivations and expectations. The idea is to increase motivation by making work more attractive, rather

than to adjust terms of the employment. Overall, the early research has been focusing on finding key elements that motivate employees and make work meaningful (Biswas et al., 2017).

2.3 Dimensions of an attractive workplace

Biswas et al. (2017) argue that a healthy work environment, including both physical and factors pertaining to psychosocial components of work, is essential in attempts to increase job attractiveness. An ideal workplace avoids physical dangers, promotes involvement and autonomy, and provides adaptable tools to accommodate diverse needs, ultimately facilitating a more efficient and comfortable work environment. A healthy physical and psychological work environment fosters variety, social interaction, and ongoing learning, all of which are essential for professional and personal growth. In addition to the previously mentioned aspects, a healthy work environment also encompasses gender equality, fairness, respectful and trustworthy interactions, democratic leadership, and social support. Equally essential is the establishment of a balance between an employee's personal and professional lives (Biswas et al., 2017).

Subjective experience of having a sense of purpose, value, and impact in one's work is crucial for both the organisation as a whole and for each individual employee, as it stimulates motivation, job satisfaction and performance (Fletcher & Schofield, 2021). Fletcher and Schofield (2021) define meaningfulness in the workplace on two levels. The first one is 'meaningfulness in work' defined as "*the value of the task goal and purpose, judged to the individual's own ideals of standards*" (Thomas & Velthouse, 1990, cited in Fletcher & Schofield, 2021, p.672). This experience is primarily connected to the sense of job-fit and social interactions in the teams. The second is 'meaningfulness at work', reflecting senses of belonging and identification with the organisation. Strong corporate cultures with leaders who are transformational, and visionary is part of building that sense of meaningfulness (Fletcher & Schofield, 2021).

Organisational culture is also argued to have a connection to an organisation's attractiveness and influencing people's choice of employer (Biswas et al., 2017). People are more drawn to businesses whose cultural values mirror their own. Findings indicate that regardless of the compensation package offered, both men and women prefer an organisational culture

characterised by support. Suggesting that beyond monetary rewards, the presence of a supportive work environment is highly valued by employees (Biswas et al., 2017). A study made by Kontoghiorghes (2016) argues that high performance cultures affect attraction and retention positively. Organisations with high performance cultures are flexible and adaptable to their external environment and exhibit high levels of employee engagement, dedication, and motivation. Employees situated in a dynamic and responsive setting will additionally engage in development which results in learning and personal growth (Kontoghiorghes, 2016).

The advent of digitalisation has significantly transformed the nature of work, where individuals increasingly carrying out their work outside of office (Andersson, Crevani, Eriksson-Zetterquist, & Tengblad, 2020). According to Contreras, Baykal, and Abid (2020), remote work is considered attractive due to its positive implications on job performance and job satisfaction. Their research indicate that remote work can lead to reduced stress levels and enhanced work-life balance for employees. However, the authors acknowledge that remote working can also have negative implications. The absence of physical proximity to colleagues and the blurring of boundaries between work and personal life may lead to social isolation, decreased motivation, and exhaustion, particularly for driven workers who find themselves working longer hours than they would during regular business hours (Contreras et al., 2020). Barhate, Hirudayaraj, and Nair (2022) also highlight significant challenges in the virtual working environment during the COVID-19 pandemic. However, their research indicate that leaders experienced a positive impact on team relationships. The virtual environment necessitated leaders to adopt inclusive, transparent, and vulnerable communication approaches, especially when addressing the challenges associated with remote work. This shift in communication style fostered stronger connections between leaders and employees (Barhate et al., 2022).

Mäkikangas et al. (2022) examines knowledge workers experiences of remote work during the outbreak of COVID-19 until the first quarter of 2021 at a university community in Finland. In the beginning of the enforced transition to remote work, a quarter of the workers demonstrated increased levels of engagement which continuously remained stable. However, one fifth of the workers comprising the sample experienced a decrease in work engagement transitioning into remote work. Their findings indicate that the group of workers that struggled during remote work predominately were younger employees with less qualified

education. Other findings suggest that organisational actions like information, support, remote practices, and the occurrence of functional equipment and usage were important to favour engagement (Mäkikangas et al. 2022).

Another important dimension when choosing employer can derive from the degree of disclosed information about salary. In a study by Verwaeren, Van Hoye, and Baetena (2016), a correlation between signalling theory and specific information about reward is evident. More specifically their result shows that when compensation and benefits is specified in a job advertisement it leads to increased levels of job pursuit and person-reward fit, as potential applicants judge an organisation's values and culture as attractive based on their perception of the compensations and benefits disclosed. Thus, candidates use the available information about rewards to create an opinion about other organisational characteristics (Verwaeren et al., 2016).

Elmholdt, Elmholdt, and Haarh (2021) conducted a study on a well-being initiative that involved digital employee self-tracking. Their research sheds light on the complexities associated with implementing such initiatives aimed at creating an attractive workplace. The self-tracking of health was introduced as a benefit offered by the employer. However, the study revealed that it allowed for remote management of employee health. Furthermore, employees experienced stress to meet the targets of sleep, and were concerned about sharing health data with their employer. Nevertheless, by becoming aware of their own sleep-related health, the employees had the chance to improve and became more alert, which helped them exercise self-control. Overall, the use of self-tracking in the workplace can lead to ambiguous control, emphasising the necessity of approaching wellness initiatives thoughtfully, acknowledging technological limits, and consider employee privacy and well-being (Elmholdt et al., 2021).

2.4 Perceptions of attractive work

The understanding of attractive work can be influenced by the national context at the macro level (Biswas et al., 2017). Employees' preferences regarding different dimensions of work may vary among nations due to differences in culture, history, economics, and political and managerial systems (Fisher & Yuan, 1998). Results from country-specific reports by Randstad (2021a) on employer attractiveness reveal that in Sweden, workers prioritise a

positive work environment, interesting work, work life balance (WLB), job security, and a competitive compensation and benefits package when choosing their employer. According to the findings for India, the most crucial dimensions when choosing an employer were WLB, compensation and benefits, a safe work environment in relation to COVID-19, job security, and strong management (Randstad, 2021b). This variation indicates the importance of understanding the context that your organisation is operating within, as it can affect what dimensions of work is perceived as attractive. Furthermore, depending on industry, people's perception of attractive work can vary (Biswas et al., 2017).

The perceptions of attractive work can deviate tremendously between people, and one person's perception can change during life (Biswas et al., 2017). For example, flexible work can be considered to be an attractive dimension for people in the age of having children but that need could later change into something else. Lamberti, Banet, and Criado (2022) suggest that sociodemographic affects how employees perceive the character of their work as attractive or unattractive. For junior employees, drivers such as leadership and salary are important. Whilst for senior employees working environment are of greater interest than salary. This emphasises the importance of heterogeneity when constructing an attractive workplace (Lamberti et al., 2022).

Earlier research on millennials indicates that generations over time are similar in their attitudes to work (Deal, Altman & Rogelberg, 2010). The authors argue that while there are some aspects that can differentiate between generations, their correlation to work remain ambiguous and non-significant. However, one societal shift between the generation of baby-boomers and millennials is a transformed family structure. Today, it is usual that the core family exist of one parent, a homosexual couple, or that parenthood is delayed compared to previous generations (Deal et al., 2010). Contrary research argues for significant differences between generations, leading to implications in attitudes to work (Simoneaux & Stroud, 2010; Parment, Dyhre & Lutz, 2017; Molander & Olsson, 2019). Baby boomers have proven to stay longer at the same employer, and they value a good working environment, high salary, and status (Simoneaux & Stroud, 2010). Generation X, millennials, and Z values high flexibility and WLB, where the latter additionally seeks for work that promotes self-fulfilment (Parment, Dyhre & Lutz, 2017). Additionally, generation Z has expectation of fast career opportunities and a decentralised organisational structure, which is something to consider when structuring attractive work (Molander & Olsson, 2019). The expectations and views of employer

attractiveness among the new generation and the intention to seek employment at a company is covered in a paper by Kumari and Saini (2018). Among career advancement, WLB, and CSR, the first played a significant role in millennials' perception of employers as attractive and the basis of what motivated them to seek employment. As a result, employers who do not provide professional growth run the risk of losing their employees, particularly the younger ones (Kumari & Saini, 2018).

Löow (2020) states that the design of an attractive workplace should not only consider the current employees, but also potential ones. The study emphasises that it is beneficial for companies to consider dimensions of attractive work that is suitable and reasonable for potential employees, and even for the larger society, as it will reduce the risk of overlooking those whom the organisation wants to attract. By ignoring the perception of the external environment, companies may end up reinforcing unattractive aspects (Löow, 2020). Biswas et al. (2017) also recognises the importance of an outside perspective. However, highlights the importance of insights and organisational experience of existing employees when constructing an attractive workplace.

2.4.1 ICT workers

Given the globalised context in which they operate, workplace attractiveness for ICT workers has frequently been regarded as important (Biswas et al., 2017). It is a young aspiring group that appreciates technocracy and calls for more rapid career advancement. Marks & Huzzard (2008) conducted a study focusing on attractive work for creative professional employment, specifically the ICT sector in Scotland. Their research shows that ICT professionals value a high level of autonomy at work. As opposed to salary as an extrinsic incentive, values such as WLB, flexible work hours, and employee perks related to time out of work appears as more crucial factors. Though, they relate negatively to the organisation if these factors minimise changes for professional growth. The fact that WLB has grown to be a crucial component of attractive work is explained because the shifting age demographic of ICT professionals, indicating a change in life phases that implies a need for a balanced working life (Marks & Huzzard, 2008). Furthermore, Biswas et al. (2017) argue for the importance of actively supporting challenges of diversity in the ICT sector. This is particularly crucial because teams in this sector often comprise individuals from various geographic locations and time zones. In a comprehensive study based on 15 000 employee reviews, Dabirian et al. (2018) identify

eight important values for current and former IT professionals in their job. These values were framed as employer value propositions (EVP's) and the ones that were proven to be of the highest importance were social connection and a friendly and supporting culture. Following that, rewards, salary, and benefits were found to be of high importance. Additionally, having interesting and meaningful work tasks that enables development was identified as another important value. Lastly, the perception of the brand as attractive was also highlighted as a significant value for IT professionals.

Hall, Beecham, Verner, and Wilson (2008) conducted a systematic review of previous literature, analysing 49 studies examining the motivations of software professionals. Their analysis reveals that, in 20 of these studies, the most important motivator was to feel 'identification with the task'. This refers to factors such as clear objectives, personal interest, understanding of the task's purpose and how it fits into the bigger picture, as well as the production of an identifiable piece of high-quality work (Hall et al., 2008). In addition to this, the authors found that involvement, a sense of belonging/supporting connections, and teamwork were significant motivators for software professionals. Supportive management and effective communication were further pointed out as of importance. Furthermore, the study identified that technically challenging and varied work duties are especially significant for this group. Career prospects and opportunities for development were also found to be motivating. Lastly, salary and benefits, feedback, job security, and recognition are other motivating variables that have been observed in numerous studies (Hall et al., 2008).

Previous studies have addresses various work values and dimensions connected to attractive work (Kontoghiorghes, 2016; Verwaeren et al., 2016; Contreras et al., 2020; Fletcher & Schofield, 2021; Elmholdt et al., 2021). Composing an attractive workplace has emerged as a critical component of all companies' economic success and sustainability in a competitive labour market (Biswas et al., 2017). Some have been comparing national differences (Biswas et al., 2017; Randstad, 2021; Fisher & Yuan, 1998), others have focused on the variation between different age groups to bring an understanding of the different needs that people have depending on life circumstances (Lamberti et al., 2022; Ronda, Valor & Abril, 2020), and finally some studies have recognised the group of ICT workers, contributing to the understanding of how this professional group perceives attractiveness (Hall et al., 2008; Biswas et al., 2017; Dabirian et al., 2018).

3. Theoretical approach

In the following chapter the theoretical framework of new institutional will be outlined.

Development of different streams within the theory will be explained and elaborated upon.

The last sections describe limitations of the theory and its' applicability to the context of the study.

3.1 New Institutional Theory

New institutional theory stems from the recognition that organisations are not isolated entities, but rather embedded within a broader institutional environment that shapes their behaviour and practices. This institutional environment consists of other organisations and together they construct taken for granted norms, values, regulations, and cultural beliefs that exert pressures on organisations to conform and gain legitimacy (Greenwood, Oliver, Lawrence & Meyer, 2017). Recent authors have broadened the perspective further through the concept of agency, which complexifies the relationship between organisations and their institutional environment (Oliver, 1991; Lawrence & Suddaby, 2006; Czarniawska & Joerges, 1996).

3.1.1 Organisational fields, homogenisation, and isomorphism

Meyer and Rowan (1977) describe institutionalisation as when social practices, obligations and actualities become taken for granted rules in society. Organisations are driven to implement practice of rationalised concepts of work, which they do to gain legitimacy. Institutionalisation of practices, routines and more, act as powerful myths which organisations implement and act upon ceremonially. Institutional myths about certain practices and processes are not necessarily efficient and rational, thereby organisations buffer formal practices by de-coupling them from the actual practice of organisational work (Meyer & Rowan, 1977). DiMaggio and Powell (1983) were early contributors of new institutional theory, critiquing the predominant focus on organisational variation in previous organisational theories. They argue that organisations, over time, become similar and homogeneous in their structures and practices. To understand this process, they introduced the concept of organisational fields, which are networks of organisations that share similar products,

resources, suppliers, customers, or other characteristics (DiMaggio and Powell, 1983). Within these fields, organisations interact and engage in collective activities that contribute to the construction of shared meanings and practices (Scott, 1995). Homogenisation in a field occurs because of structuration, whereby organisations try to gain legitimacy and acceptance of others, as they are perceived as compliant with established norms and expectations of that specific field.

DiMaggio and Powell (1983) highlight that when organisations face pressures to conform, they tend to make rational choices to align with prevailing norms and values. They identified three types of isomorphic pressures that drive this conformity: coercive, mimetic, and normative isomorphism. Coercive isomorphism occurs when organisations face external pressures from powerful actors such as the state, regulatory entities, or influential stakeholders. These pressures can be formal, such as legal requirements, or informal, arising from cultural expectations and social norms. Organisations conform to these pressures to avoid sanctions, maintain relationships, and secure resources. Mimetic isomorphism, on the other hand, occurs when organisations imitate the practices and behaviours of other organisations, particularly in times of uncertainty. By imitating successful organisations, they seek to reduce uncertainty and gain legitimacy. Mimetic behaviours can be manifested consciously or unconsciously, and they can contribute to the homogenisation of practices within the field. Normative isomorphism emerges from professionalisation processes and the establishment of professional norms. Professionals within specific occupations or industries strive to define standard practices and rules to ensure the legitimacy of their field. Universities and professional associations play a significant role in shaping these norms through education. Organisational actors socialise into these professional norms and conform to them to gain legitimacy and recognition. It is important to note that the three types of isomorphism are not mutually exclusive, and they often interact and reinforce each other. Organisations may experience multiple forms of isomorphism simultaneously.

3.1.2 Agency

While the traditional focus covers the understanding of relationships of organisations and their field and how institutions govern action, recent developments in new institutional theory have expanded the understanding of organisational fields and isomorphism by giving greater recognition to the agency of actors. Oliver (1991) emphasise that organisations actively

interpret and strategically navigate the pressures they face, considering factors such as the motivations behind the pressure, the actors involved, the content of the pressure, the mechanisms of influence, and the contextual factors that shape their responses. Lawrence and Suddaby (2006) introduce the concept of institutional work which emphasise the recursive relationship between actors and institutions. Emphasising that actors posit agency in relation to their organisational field and do not passively conform to institutional pressures. Actors in this context are organisations that are acting intentionally to create, maintain, and disrupt institutionalised structures and practices through institutional work. When tensions in the institutional environment arise, organisations make sense of how to relate to the external demands through actions (Lawrence & Suddaby, 2006).

Another perspective that recognises actor's agency in relation to the institutional environment is the translation perspective posed by Czarniawska and Joerges (1996). The authors suggest that the process whereby practices, and structures spread between organisations are enabled through translation. While a traditional view on the spread of practices argue that they transfer in their original shape from one organisation to another, the translation perspective considers the process of adaption and translation of institutional level practices to make them fit the organisational context (Czarniawska & Joerges, 1996). While institutional work engages in deliberate efforts to shape or influence the institutional environment itself, the translation perspective tries to explain how organisations respond to institutional pressure at the organisational level and not on the reverse influence.

3.2 Critique and limitations

The fundament of institutional theory neglects power dimensions in the environment which people operate within, which leads to a great risk of missing important explanatory aspects of phenomena and occurrences (Munir, 2020; Willmott, 2015). We acknowledge that DiMaggio and Powell's (1983) theoretical framework have been considered as obsolete by researcher in the field. Hence more recent perspectives who consider agency in relation to institutions has been taken into consideration, to extend the understanding of the recursive and complex relationship between institutions and actions.

3.3 Institutional theory in the context of this study

The theoretical foundation of this study relies on an interweaving of perspectives within new institutional theory. The concepts of agency (Oliver, 1991) translation (Czarniawska & Joerges, 1996) and institutional work (Lawrence & Suddaby, 2006) offer valuable insights in perceiving organisations as active. However, there is value in considering DiMaggio and Powell's (1983) theoretical framework of isomorphic pressures that shape organisational fields. Isomorphic pressures provide a lens to analyse the forces that shape organisational practices and explore the mechanisms through which organisations conform to norms or external expectations. The concept of organisational fields and isomorphic tendencies allows for an examination of the interdependencies and relationships between organisations within the same field.

4. Methodology

Below follows an outline of the research design, description of the sample and the data collection strategy. Concluding with a description of the analytical approach, data quality, ethical considerations, and limitations with this study.

4.1 Research design

This study is inspired by interpretivism and constructionism. These approaches are closely related to each other, and they focus on the perception, interpretation, and construction that people have of the reality (Ritchie, Lewis, McNaughton Nicholls & Ormston, 2014). Considering the aim of the study, a qualitative research method with interviews was chosen to be appropriate, as it enables for an explorative and deep understanding of the studied phenomena of attractive work in the set context of organisations within the ICT field (Creswell, 2009). The essence of qualitative method is to capture the meanings that individuals or groups attach to certain social phenomena (Creswell, 2009). Thus, allowing the study to unfold knowledge of how organisations construct themselves as an attractive workplace (Ritchie et al., 2014). The collected data have been driving the knowledge of the phenomenon of attractive work, allowing the theory to be dynamic in relation to the results. An initial interview guide was created with support from previous research and was later revised in consultation with the supervisor. As the thesis is written in collaboration with one case company, we were able to conduct a pilot interview with the gatekeeper to ensure capturing of intended data. Over time, the aim and research questions of the study was refined, and the scope of previous research was adjusted to fit the objectives of the study. Hence, the point of departure for this study is inspired by the abductive logic, implying a back-and-forth perspective between observations and theory (Ritchie et al., 2014).

4.2 Comparative multiple case study design

This study uses a comparative multiple case study design implying exploration and comparison of ten organisations operating within the Swedish labour market, aiming to attract ICT workers. The purpose of a comparative multiple case study in qualitative research is to explore variations and manifestation of a phenomenon in different settings (Ritchie et al.,

2014). According to Yin (2018), the multiple case study enables an understanding of the data both within and across each instance. A further distinction made by Baxter and Jack (2008) is that a multiple case study allows the researcher to examine several cases to identify trends and variations of a phenomenon. This design was appropriate in relation to the aim of understanding how companies in this context construct themselves as an attractive workplace. The comparison in this study is centred around the processes, views, and understandings of attractive work within the different case organisations based on size of the business. Overall, the industry belonging of each company is not considered in the comparison, except from two of the organisations being consultancy firms. Other distinctions regarding the case companies were deliberately excluded in the comparison to ensure anonymousness.

4.3 Sampling

Designing multiple case studies involves making decisions about the conditions under which the cases are selected (Ritchie et.al, 2014). Further, how many and which selection criteria's that decide which participants to include in the sample. As mentioned above, the case companies have been selected on the criteria that they are organisations that employ and seek to attract ICT workers. Furthermore, we made sure to create a balanced sample regarding the size of the organisations. Five of the companies comprising the sample are identified as small (<1000 employees), their pseudonyms are company C, D, E, H and J. The other five companies are accounted as big (>1000 employees), their pseudonyms are company A, B, F, G and I. (see Table 1. Sample of companies and respondents)

Our selection criteria concerning the respondents were employees with an insight in the design of an attractive workplace from a strategic point of view (HR-professionals or manager within IT). We primarily reached out to professionals within the area of HR/People and culture from each company, as we considered that group to have the most extensive knowledge of the strategies of constructing an attractive workplace. To gain access to relevant participants we have used LinkedIn as a way of establishing the initial contact. As we were interviewing two participants from each company the first contact paired us with one of their colleagues, suggesting a snowball sampling method (Bryman, 2018). The target population is not random, and not dependent upon any sociodemographic characteristics (gender, age, education), but rather purposive and based on context, profession, and characteristics of the company. As we write this thesis in collaboration with one case company, we were able to get

in contact with some of the participants through our gatekeeper. We have conducted two interviews within each company, 20 interviews in total.

Our respondents are categorised into three groups based on their roles:

- HR/People and Culture
- IT Director
- Talent Acquisition

Table 1. Sample of companies and respondents

Company	Company size based on number of employees*	Industry	Interview person 1	Interview person 2
A	Big	Manufacturing	HR/People and Culture	HR/People and Culture
B	Big	FMCG**	HR/People and Culture	HR/People and Culture
C	Small	IT consultancy	HR/People and Culture	HR/People and Culture
D	Small	SaaS	HR/People and Culture	Talent Acquisition
E	Small	ERP Systems***	Talent Acquisition	HR/People and Culture
F	Big	Manufacturing	HR/People and Culture	HR/People and Culture
G	Big	Infrastructure	Talent Acquisition	HR/People and Culture
H	Small	SaaS****	HR/ People and Culture	HR/People and Culture
I	Big	SaaS****	HR/People and Culture	IT Director
J	Small	IT consultancy	Talent Acquisition	HR/People and Culture

* Small company <1000 employees and big company >1000 employees

** Fast-Moving Consumer Goods

*** Enterprise Resource Planning Systems

**** Software as a Service

4.4 Data collection strategy

To gather data, the qualitative method of interviews was acquired using an interview guide. The essence of conducting interviews is to capture the respondents' perceptions of the studied phenomena without neglecting feelings or attitudes. The character of the questions in the interview guide was sparse, open and non-leading. This brought flexibility to the conversation and enabled for further questions to be asked (Charmaz, 2014).

The empirical data is based on 20 interviews with representatives from ten separate companies, two respondents from each company. This study has explored the perspective of representatives of the organisation; hence the outcomes is from an employer perspective and not the perceptions of ICT workers themselves. Both of us were present for all interviews, enabling one to lead the interview and the other to write a summary of each interview as it went on. 14 interviews were conducted physically in the respondents' office, and six were performed digitally using Microsoft Teams. Each interview, conducted with prior permission, had a duration of approximately 45-60 minutes. The interviews were recorded using either a telephone or the recording feature in Microsoft Teams. To understand how the organisations construct themselves as an attractive workplace, and further what dimensions of work they emphasise as important, the questions of why people are attracted to the company, what motivates them to stay for a longer period and reason for why they choose to leave the company were the main focus in the interviews. The interview guideline focused primarily on these three key areas as they contributed to data of how the organisations construct themselves to be perceived as attractive workplaces. Furthermore, various themes related to dimensions of work was asked to each interview person. (See Appendix 1. Interview guide) The interview guide was adjusted after input from the supervisor at the university and the gatekeeper at the case company in accordance with the abductive approach of this study. Questions were added and withdrawn as the interview process proceeded, leaving room for flexibility during interviews with the respondents.

4.5 Analytical strategy

When the collection of the data through interviews was completed, the recorded material was transcribed. The method of analysis followed a thematic approach, enabling us to explore, understand and find trends in the data and perform a comparison of the companies' practices and perceptions of attractive work (Flick, 2014; Ritchie et al., 2014). The first stage was to perform initial coding of each transcription. Based on the initial codes, focused coding was done for each of the transcriptions. The focused codes from each interview were brought into a company specific summary that included the focused codes from both interviews of each company. Throughout the process, the data was reduced from approximately 400 pages of transcript to 30 pages of summaries in total, comprising of two-three pages of text for each company. To find the prominent dimensions of the study, the summaries were once again

coded, and eight themes were identified. The themes were identified through material from the summaries and transcripts, going back-and-forth to perform a detailed analysis and comparison of the companies, using quotations from various interview persons and summarising findings in our own words. In the final stage of analysing the data, we applied the lens of new institutional theory and previous research related to the identified dimensions.

4.6 Data quality

Issues of objectivity and impartiality in qualitative research may relate to the data analysis process carried out by the researcher(s) (Bryman, 2018). Four guiding criteria have been sought to ensure the trustworthiness and authenticity of the empirical results. The first criteria '*credibility*' has been considered through extensive mailing and approval of all quotes included in the study. A few adjustments were made in accordance with respondents' opinions, ensuring a higher degree of accuracy in relation to the result. The '*transferability*' of a study refers to how well the study's conclusions can be applied to contexts other than the one studied. By adopting a multiple case study design in the context of companies seeking to attract ICT workers, the findings from this study can be generalised to a variety of companies and industries. '*Dependability*' implies that transparency is accounted for, this was made through an information letter about the aim of the study, a solid exposition of the methodology and overall described adjustments throughout the process. The fourth and last criteria '*confirmability*' serves the purpose to enable other researchers to derive results back to participants in an understandable manner. To facilitate confirmability in this study, each transcript and summary was coded by both researchers and discussed in concert. Eventual biases were also considered throughout the entire process (Bryman, 2018).

4.7 Ethical considerations

All the recordings and transcripts from the companies have remained confidential throughout the process, using pseudonyms for each company in the stored material. All the respondents have been kept anonymous, using pseudonyms to tie the companies to the correct interview person. It was important to ensure secure management of data and inform the participants of the purpose of the study, and their rights to end their participation at any time. All the respondents have given consent to be recorded and after the transcription of the data, the recordings have been deleted. The transcribed interviews were coded and the two interviews

from each company was put together into one company specific summary, to be able to conduct a comparison between the companies in the result. The used quotes were sent to each respondent who approved its accuracy and notified any corrections, to give the interview persons the opportunity of sorting out any misunderstandings and hence consider their integrity. After the study had been completed, all material connected to the study have been deleted to ensure that the information will not end up in the wrong hands.

4.8 Limitations

The sampling process may be affected by biases as we primarily reached out to respondents from the group of HR/People and culture. This might have rejected perspectives from other professional groups. Further, the sample is uneven in terms of the proportion of private and public organisations. Private organisations are overrepresented in the sample as it only includes one public organisation. For the scope of this study, we had to limit ourselves in terms of depth and breadth of the analysis, and it might be possible that we have neglected relevant dimensions in the empirical data. It may also be possible to find alternative explanations of the connections and contradictions between the identified dimensions, thus the study might not account for all possible factors and outcomes.

5. Results

This chapter includes a presentation of the empirical results to answers the research question of which dimensions of work that the companies emphasise as important when constructing an attractive workplace. The results show eight dimensions, which are separated and presented individually. Various practices related to the dimensions of attractive work are continuously described.

As part of the interview, the respondents were asked to describe why people are attracted to their organisation, what motivates them to stay for a longer period, and finally, why they leave. As illustrated in figure 1, the empirical results identified eight dimensions that the respondents emphasised as important when constructing an attractive workplace. It is noteworthy to mention that the results derive from the perspective of representatives from the companies and not the perceptions of ICT workers themselves. To begin, learning possibilities and opportunities for professional growth was by far the most frequently expressed dimension of an attractive workplace and the reason why employees stay for an extended period. Although the respondents express a variety of experiences about remote work and its implications, it is recognised as a key dimension in attracting and retaining employees in the ICT field. Something else that all respondents recognised as of importance was the dimension of purpose, both in terms of fulfilling and stimulating work tasks as well as being part of a company that strives for a higher purpose that benefits society. Multiple respondents mentioned employer brand as an important aspect of why people are drawn to their company. The employer brand was reinforced by people's identification and engagement with the brand, their products, and the fact that they considered it a secure option. Community and culture is another dimension that several respondents stated was important in terms of long-term job satisfaction and a reason to stay, including a flat hierarchical structure, supportive culture, and team cohesion. Well-being and activities that promote mental and physical well-being was another dimension that the representatives mentioned as attractive. An aspect that was frequently mentioned, but in a negative way, was the fact that an open landscape office setup was unattractive to ICT workers, as they believed it made it difficult to focus due to noises in the office. The ability to recognise the value of ICT talent in terms of

compensation and to follow the exponential wages in the market was highlighted as a challenge by almost all of the companies in the study.

Figure 1. Prominent dimension of attractive work identified in the empirical data

Learning and Development	Flexibility	Purpose	Employer Brand
Community and Culture	Well-being	Office	Salary

5.1 Learning and development

All respondents acknowledge learning and development as an important dimension of attractive work influencing why people are attracted to the company, why they stay for a longer period and if inadequate, reason for why they choose to leave the company. The dimension of development opportunities and career advancement is discussed on various levels and below follows a comparison of how the companies are structuring their work.

The processes of learning and development varies between the companies but on a general level all companies offer their employees work-related training. All the big companies A, B, F, G, and I use a Learning Management System (LMS), where employees learning can be monitored in a sophisticated system. In addition to having an LMS, these companies offer both central courses that apply to all employees and specific courses targeted towards specific roles, for example ICT workers. Additionally, employees at Company G create their own learning content *“Many teams develop their own kind of content based on their roles and takes own learning initiatives within their teams”* (Interview person 2, G). Among the ten companies, the two consultancy firms C and J has the least internal processes for learning and development, though they offer their employees a variety of courses.

“We work a lot with courses and trainings, it could be anything from a coding course to develop as an engineer and we approve like 95% of the requests.” – Interview person 1 (J)

A philosophy of continuous learning in the daily work is present within company A, B, D, E, F, G, H, and I. Respondents from company C and J do not mention this philosophy, perhaps because they do not have any influence over their consultant's daily work. Respondents from company A, B and D specifically referred to the 70-20-10 learning and development model, implying that 70 percent of learning occurs in daily work, 20 percent in the interaction with others and the remaining 10 percent through formal education like a course. Some examples of continuous learning include “*Opportunities to be involved in new projects, new assignments*” (Interview person 2, A), “*Rotate or follow other colleagues in the plant for a couple of days*” (Interview person 1, F) or “*Learning from each other through the mentoring programme*” (Interview person 1, H). Interview person 2 from company A think that people tend to overlook these situations as opportunities of learning but rather focus on formal training as a more valid way of learning.

“Opportunities to be involved in new projects, new assignments, every situation like that is an opportunity for learning and sometimes I think that we individuals do not always see it that way, it is much easier to say that you have taken a course.” – Interview person 2 (A)

The respondents mention a lot of similarities related to learning and development such as e-learnings and an educational budget. However, neither of the consultancy companies C and J has a set educational budget. A pattern among company A, E, H and I is that they have regular short lectures or seminars to highlight relevant subjects or events, “*We have knowledge boosts on Fridays*” (Interview person 1, H), “*We try to have some meetups and talk about technical topics*” (Interview person 1, I). These efforts can be linked to continuous learning in the everyday work.

Company D and E also have specific days with a focus on organisational or individual innovation. Company E allocates these days to stimulate innovation and creativity, where employees can work with optional projects, which do not have to be work related.

“Then we work with something that we call 'innovation days' or 'gold grain days', which means that you have an afternoon where you get to test new techniques, it does not have to be related to work. But like just to stimulate creativity and test things and such.” – Interview person 2 (E)

To stimulate instant knowledge and competence transfer, company E and I are practicing mob-programming.

“We work a lot with MOB programming (...) the competence transfer comes at the same moment you sit there and look at someone or ask, ‘why did you choose that code instead of that one?’ then you have the competence transfer directly. They also do not have to test to the same extent, because that happens when there are several eyes on it, so the quality gets higher as well. So that it is a way to quickly learn from others.” – Interview person 2 (E)

The majority of companies do not set aside time for training initiatives, it is rather up to each employee and their manager to prioritise taking time for specific training or courses. Company B is the only company that has designated time each month for learning activities.

“We have a time block every month that must be set aside for learning. Now we have done it a little differently this year. But before, we offered a course once a month at that time. And now we have said that we keep it blocked, but you can control how you want to use it. You do that during working hours, so then there is a blocked time where you should not book other meetings and such.” – Interview person 2 (B)

Interview person 2 at company H further argues how learning and knowledge sharing are important dimensions of why people stay a longer time.

“They learn a lot and develop without going on a course because they have a drive to learn more, so they have a context where they share white papers to see ‘now I have familiarised myself with this, now I am sharing with the team who work with this particular area’ so that many people, I think, see that they develop a lot and therefore stay.” – Interview person 2 (H)

A joint perception among the respondents within company A, B, C, D, F, G, I, and J is the opinion about employees’ responsibility for their own learning and career development. Respondents from company E and H do not explicitly mention employee’s responsibility to drive their own development. Respondents from the eight aforementioned companies shares the perception that the managers are supposed to facilitate development opportunities rather than to initiate them, *“The employees we have recruited are competent and capable and actually can and should drive their own development.”* (Interview person 2, A). The second interview person from company G agrees, though highlights the importance of managerial support and guidance.

“From a career path perspective, I would say that as we always emphasise to the managers, and managers play a very important role here because they are supposed to be guiding while the employees are responsible, kind of for their own career path. They have to take the initiative, but the managers are always expected to be able to guide the employees wherever you know they need guidance.” – Interview person 2 (G)

Within company F, there is also an expectation that employees develop others as well as the business.

“We have divided the concept into developing yourself, others and the business and this is not only leadership expectations for managers but for everyone. There is an actual responsibility on each individual to develop myself.” – Interview person 1 (F)

An additional layer of how the employees initiate and take responsibility for their own development is mentioned by the second interview person from company D, who highlights developers' passion about their profession and that they learn outside of work.

“They are so passionate about things they do that they learn a lot of stuff themselves simply because they enjoy it, because they love coding. So, they are like coming home and learn some stuff.” – Interview person 2 (D)

All the respondents from the companies accounted as big (A, B, F, G, and I) share the perception of development and internal career advancement as an important dimension of attractive work and a reason for why people stay for a longer period of time. Because of their size and maturity, these companies have prerequisites of having pronounced practices for handling and promoting career planning, internal job advertisements, horizontal mobility and career advancement for their employees. The second interview person from company G says that internal mobility is promoted and reflected through their culture.

“We have an acceptance and openness about kind of giving the opportunity to people to try out different skills and different roles (...) we also work on a job architecture framework which is important because we feel that employees need to understand what is important for different career options. ‘What is required for me to move to a particular role you know if I have a target role in mind then what are the possible career paths?’” – (Interview person 2, G)

Company E is the only small company that has a process for employees' development and career advancement, and who consider it to be their Unique Selling Point (USP). Succession planning is used as part of providing employees with possibilities for career growth.

Additionally, they frequently discuss how employees can proceed in their development through moving horizontally, into other areas within the company.

“One thing that is very prominent is development opportunities, both concretely the opportunity to change jobs between different parts as well as to make a more like a straight career to go from salesperson to sales manager or developer to development manager. But also, quite unusual opportunities, like changing between different roles you have worked a bit in one role and then you become curious to try a completely different area.” – Interview person 1 (E)

Company C, D, H, and J which are all small companies, do not have distinctive processes regarding employees' internal development and career advancement. This might be due to organisational maturity, as they are relatively young companies. Although, interview person 1 from company D mention that *“If you look back during the past few years, many have also been given a role that was not here before, so the role itself is so complex that you are constantly evolving in it”*, it is not said to be a main reason for employee attraction and retention. Also, the first interview person from company H expresses awareness of the company's deficiencies regarding this area *“We are not as good as we would like to give people opportunities internally, so it is something we are working on.”*

Since consulting is the primary line of business for Company C and J, the opportunities for consultants to advance in their careers are somewhat limited. Partly because of the short-term nature of the employment relationship, both with the consultancy firm and the client company. The consultants tend to fall through the cracks, and they are not always entitled to the same development as permanent employees. In addition, interview person 2 from company J expresses difficulties in acquiring assignments that leads to career development because generally the clients do not wish to have consultants in managerial positions.

“These people that we want to recruit are really highly educated engineers, we have to give them good career development, but it is a challenge to find those assignments. (...) and if we do not offer development, we run the risk of losing them. It is not always that our clients want to hire a consultant for the higher positions.” – Interview person 1 (J)

Learning and development procedures are profound within all ten companies, and all respondents consider it to be a crucial element in attracting and retaining employees. There is a difference between practices, but all companies provide training relevant to the job and an LMS is common for all big companies. Ongoing learning in the daily operation is practiced by a majority of the companies and rather than to create opportunities for development, managers play a supportive role as employees themselves are responsible for their own development. The big companies A, B, F, G and I, and the small company E have clearly defined practices for managing and promoting internal mobility and career advancement. The big companies have the prerequisites of having pronounced practices in this area, due to their size and maturity. Company E, who is considered a small company, is an old company and part of a group. The multiple management structures that exist within the group could be one reasons as to why they can offer internal career advancement. The small companies C, D, H, and J do not have processes regarding development and career advancement, and this may be due to their relative youth or the nature of their business. The career growth opportunities for consultants are somewhat limited due to the short-term nature of the employment relationship, both with the consultancy and the client.

5.2 Flexibility

Generally, flexibility was highlighted as a prominent dimension of an attractive workplace by all representatives of the companies. To apply a hybrid work model was the most significant aspect of flexibility that the respondents discussed and mentioned. The employment landscape changed as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, and the hybrid working model has since then become almost taken for granted. A joint perception among all respondents is that the pandemic forced employers to transform and digitalise their ways of working which has created a new demand among employees on the labour market, where flexibility is something that is taken for granted. All the companies in this study allow remote work to some degree, implying that there has been a shift towards a less traditional employment relationship. Below follows a review of remote work, opportunities and challenges with remote work, other elements of flexibility, and implications for WLB and the physical and psychosocial work environment.

Some of the companies has a pronounced remote work policy and some not, and they have managed the flexible ways of working in different ways. Company A, B, C, E, F, G and J has

a remote work policy that varies somewhat in degree of allowance. All companies, some more generous than others, provides employees with equipment for a home office setup.

Table 2. Remote work policy

Company	Remote work policy	Comment
A (big)	Yes	50/50
B (big)	Yes	2 days at the office/week
C (small)	Yes	Dependent on client policy
D (small)	No	Encourages 3 days at the office/week
E (small)	Yes	3 set days at the office/week
F (big)	Yes	50/50
G (big)	Yes	Majority of time at the office – rather long term than per week
H (small)	No	Each team/manager decide
I (big)	No	Each team/manager decides
J (small)	Yes	Dependent on client policy

Company D, H and I are the only companies that do not have a pronounced remote work policy, instead it is up to each team and manager to decide their own ways of working. According to the first interview person from company D, there has been a change in attitudes towards traditional ways of working, where employers that do not offer flexibility will get adversely affected.

“I believe that we need to be flexible as an employer and offer our employees the opportunity, everyone has their own life and if you were to demand people to be at the office everyday between eight and five honestly, we would have a hard time recruiting.” – Interview person 1 (D)

The first interview person from Company H agrees with the above and says that employees thinks that remote working has become a matter of principle.

“I do believe that there is no other alternative because if we were to tell employees that they have to be at the office three days per week a majority will leave because it has become a matter of principle.” – Interview person 1 (H)

Company A, E and F has a remote work policy that implies that employees have to spend at least half of their working time at the office because “*We believe that there is a value in being creative and present*” (Interview person 1, A) and “*As a manager you have less insight into how people feel when they work from home (...) we need to review how we feel now and link wellbeing to that as well*” (Interview person 1, F).

In today’s labour market, flexibility at work can be considered to be somewhat a hygiene factor, and something which current and potential employees are expecting. Interview person 1 from company E expresses that limiting the possibilities for remote work can be a decisive reason why candidates choose to decline a job offer.

“Some people will say right away to the recruiters when they call someone and say like ‘you have to be on site three days a week’ then some will say, ‘then I am not interested’ so it is definitely one of our biggest challenges.” – Interview person 1 (E)

Challenges that respondents from company A, B, D, E, F, G, H and I experience regarding remote work is a loss of team cohesion and innovation, increased contradictions, and that managers struggle to lead a scattered team and take responsibility for the work environment.

“Some people think ‘I want to be here five days a week’ and then there are some who think ‘I am here two days a week but then everyone in my team should be here because otherwise I do not want to come’ and then there are those who think ‘I never want to come to the office I am just as effective at home, why should I be in the office then?’.” – Interview person 2 (I)

Other aspects of flexibility that the respondents mentioned are flexible working hours and a reduction in working hours. Company A and G offer a reduction in working time equivalent to an extra week of holiday. Respondents from company F do not explicitly mention that they offer employees flexible hours, something that the first interview person from company G expresses facilitates a good WLB.

“You can come whenever it suits you, depending on what puzzle you have in the morning, then drop the children off at preschool or whatever, it is perfectly fine.” – Interview person 1 (G)

The second interview person from company H acknowledges cultural differences as an aspect of flexibility. The employees have an opportunity to decide for themselves when they want to utilise a holiday.

“Employees don not have to take time off on Christmas Day, which is a public holiday, but can choose for themselves when they want to take the day off to celebrate something else.” – Interview person 2 (H)

Respondents from company B and E expresses proactive actions to promote a good WLB for employees, *“You should not book meetings before 9 AM and after 4 PM, and no meetings after 1 PM on Fridays”* (Interview person 2, B) and *“Seldom late emails or a culture of conversing with each other in the evening”* (Interview person 1, E). A high level of awareness of WLB in top management creates a culture that supports balance.

“And it is super important that the entire management team acts in that way and really stands for it. So, we promote that very much and this mindset is present throughout the entire organisation and that managers embrace it through symbolic leadership.” – Interview person 2 (B)

All respondents perceive flexibility to be an important dimension of attractive work. They mention remote work and flexible hours as significant to enable and facilitate a good WLB and to attract and retain ICT workers. Company A, B, C, E, F, G and J has a remote work policy that varies somewhat in degree of allowance. Company D, H and I offer possibilities of remote work but does not regulate the degree in a company-wide policy. All companies, some more generous than others, provides employees with equipment for a home office setup. However, respondents express challenges linked to remote work. They mention loss of team cohesion and innovation, increased contradictions, and that managers struggle to lead a scattered team and take responsibility for the work environment.

5.3 Purpose

All respondents in the study recognise purpose as an important dimension of attractive work. They notice that many people are guided by a higher purpose in vision and goals, and it becomes a driving force to be able to contribute towards the betterment of society. A few examples of higher purposes that the companies are mentioning are *“Sustainability”* (Interview person 2, A), *“Critical infrastructure for society”* (Interview person 1, G) and *“Wanting to save lives”* (Interview person 2, H). Rather than purpose being something overarching, interview person 1 from company B highlights that it is something that is present

in everyday work *“We work a lot with purpose (...) Well, it is actually in everything we do that it kind of permeates everything, and we have something we call purpose workshops.”*.

Another aspect of purpose related to ICT workers highlighted by respondents from company A, C, D, E, F, H, I and J is the importance of technologically stimulating and interesting work tasks. For employees to work with “Customers from different industries and a variety of techniques” (Interview person 1, F), with “Technology that is very cool” (Interview person 1, H), “To work with the latest technology and be at the forefront.” (Interview person 1, I) and “A super modern and efficient tech-stack” (Interview person 2, D), are considered to be a significant attractive dimension of work and a motivator for ICT workers, which can be related to purposive work. The first interview person from company C mention the purposefulness of working with a new code and to develop a product that becomes widely used.

“You want to work with cool stuff, you identify yourself a lot as developer and you want to work with stuff that you know will be used, for example if you make an infotainment system in a car, you know that people will drive around in this car and use this system daily so it is much more cool than to sit with some small platform that no one will ever see. So, it is a lot, I think you want to do things that people use, new development, you do not want to work with any old code.” – Interview person 1 (C)

The first interview person from company I further recognise the importance of creating a sense of ownership in the teams to stimulate engagement.

“We have a few different values, one of them is 'owner mentality' and it means that the group gets ownership of an area or a certain product or products. It creates more responsibility and engagement in that group and then they are passionate about it and really feel that 'we are the ones who have to solve it'.” – Interview person 2 (I)

Respondents from company F, H, and I, recognise that employees experience a lack of understanding of how their individual purpose is related to the greater business strategy. Sometimes this ambiguity and uncertainty related to purpose can be a reason why employees decide to quit.

“I have tried to really work with it so that they understand the group strategies. We have brought in people from the strategic departments, but it is kind of does not really bite. They

want something more concrete which is more adapted to their team (...) We also have something we call 'manager updates' where we give them business updates, but it was a bit high level like 'how is this connected to what we do?'" – Interview person 2 (I)

All respondents in the study recognise purpose as an important dimension of attractive work and a top driver of motivation and engagement. They highlight that ICT workers are highly motivated by working with the latest and most innovative technology, and with projects that will be used by others on a daily basis. Further, the respondents mention the importance of connecting the business to a higher purpose that relates to benefits for the society. However, respondents from company F, H, and I mention that ambiguity and unclear goals can be highly demotivating and reasons for why employees choose to quit. Hence, demonstrating the importance of the dimension of purpose in relation to attractive work.

5.4 Employer Brand

Employer brand was one of the prominent dimensions that were said to influence the attraction of outside workforce. Respondents from company A, B, F and G says that one attractive dimension connected to their organisation can be related to their employer brand. They describe attributes like tradition, security, product recognition, and a strong geographic presence. The aforementioned companies are big multinational corporations, making them recognisable in the global market which could explain their experience of having a strong brand reputation that attracts people.

Company I was the only one in the range of big companies in which the respondents did not mention a strong brand as one of the reasons for choosing them as an employer. A similar pattern can be identified in the group of small companies, as company H is the only small company in which the respondents express to have a strong brand. Company H works with 'Software as a Service' (SaaS), more specifically with artificial intelligence, which is rather rare and innovative.

"A lot of people knocked on the door even before we launched as a company, we were delayed a couple of month because we had to get promotion from XX and it created a huge expectation of this cool AI company (...) We got free employer branding in a way and we grew

tremendously with one new employee each weekday during 300 days.” – Interview person 2, (H)

Respondents from company I, which is a big company, and company H, which is a small company, both answered the opposite to the rest of the companies in their size category. Hence, respondents from company I do not consider themselves to have a strong brand despite the size of their company, and respondents from company H perceive their brand to be very strong even though they are a relatively small company. Respondents from the IT consultancy firms C and J perceive that they cannot offer the same value as a product company, in terms of status and company pride. Their attractiveness is based on the fact that they can offer assignments in collaboration with other well-known clients.

“Consulting companies do not have the same value as a product company in Sweden, product companies have a much higher status.” – Interview person 2 (J)

Although respondents from company A, E, F, G and I, have different opinions about the strength of their overall employer brand, they share the opinion of difficulties to brand how their main businesses are connected to IT and what opportunities they can offer within this field. This in turn, affects the attraction and recruitment of ICT workers. Interview person 1 from company G suggests that difficulties stem from the fact that a majority of companies in the labour market regardless of industry employs ICT workers, resulting in a multitude of opportunities for this group.

”It is not necessarily the case that just because you have studied IT that you have Company G on your mind, but you can take employment at really any company that works with IT, which all companies almost do since many larger companies have some kind of IT function (...) IT immediately becomes more elusive anyway, but we do special kind of marketing campaigns aimed at IT for the reason that we try to communicate more to put ourselves on the map also from an IT perspective and that we have exciting jobs in IT and that we recruit a lot in IT.” – Interview person 1 (G)

As the demand for IT-related skills continues to grow, it becomes crucial for companies to ensure that job seekers are aware of the opportunities they can offer. One challenge concerning employer branding activities is said to be *“To reach people in the media noise”* (Interview person 2, E). Overall, respondents from the bigger companies believe that they have a strong brand, but some of them experience that it is a challenge to create brand

recognition for their IT organisation as ICT workers has a lot of employers to choose from. A means to connect the business to IT and increase the recognition within the ICT field, is the practice of offering a trainee program that offers clear opportunities connected to IT. As illustrated in table 3, all the big companies (A, B, F, G, I) offer a trainee/talent program targeted towards newly graduated ICT students. The small companies (D, E and H) do not offer any trainee program. Company C and J, which are consultancy firms, do not implement their own trainee programs but arranges them for their clients, which becomes a way for them to attract people. The programmes are ranging from one to three years, and they state that this is part of their work of branding themselves towards and attracting young talent. The fact that none of the small companies offer a trainee/talent program may be a question of resources and inability to offer enough rotating and learning opportunities, something that is a central part of these programmes.

Table 3. Trainee program

Company	Trainee/Talent program	Comment
A	Yes	Consultant for one year
B	Yes	Three years
C	Yes	Arranges program with clients
D	No	-
E	No	-
F	Yes	18 months
G	Yes	Two years
H	No	-
I	Yes	Consultant for one year
J	Yes	Arranges program with clients

Other employer branding efforts include attendance at student and industry fairs, lecturing, and marketing on LinkedIn. These activities are shared across all companies regardless of size. In addition to these activities, company C, I and J are the only companies that offer their employees a recruitment bonus if they recommend a friend or a former colleague to take an employment at the respective company. Furthermore, the respondents provide examples of initiatives pertaining to diversity and skill supply. Company B and D engage in the initiative

“Jobbsprånget”, Sweden's largest internship programme for newly arrived academics.

Another initiative within Company G is “Uniquis”, a company who employs people who fall in the neurodiversity spectrum of whom company G is hiring as IT consultants. Company H has implemented its own initiative to encourage young girls to explore opportunities in the technology industry. They organise visits for primary school students to their company, where they showcase various IT roles and potential career paths.

The respondents state that a strong employer brand is a prominent dimension that positively influence the attraction of outside workforce. The respondents who consider their companies to have a strong employer brand, of whom the majority is big, finds that characteristics of their brand is an important dimension that influences the attraction of potential workforce. However, respondents from four out of the five big companies experience that their companies struggle to brand how their main businesses are connected to IT. One reason can be reflected in the size of the business, resulting in being a well-known company but less about the specific operations related to IT. A common employer branding activity to attract young talents within IT is to offer trainee programs, evident in all big companies.

5.5 Community and Culture

According to all respondents except from company B, corporate culture and community was said to have a strong impact on employee retention. When comparing the respondents' descriptions of the dimension community and culture, two streams were identified. The most frequently mentioned aspect of culture was a flat hierarchical structure built on trust and autonomy. The second stream was a friendly culture characterised by an open, helpful, and personal atmosphere and strong team-cohesion. Respondents from company A, C, D, H, I, and J highlight that they have a flat organisational structure that enables all team members to participate in decision-making, thus visualising trust through autonomy and ownership.

Company D has purposefully opted to have one product owner in the product organisation, which includes around 80 workers. This organisational structure is considered attractive as it increases the responsibility and influence among the employees in the teams.

“We have very flexed structure in the product team, which makes it attractive. We do not have any architects or scrum masters within the product teams, just one product owner. They are all developers, so basically everyone is equal, and every decision made for a certain part of

the product will be made by the whole team responsible for that part of the product. So, there is basically no one in the product teams to tell other people what to do, we rather see a problem and give it to the team, and it is up to the team to decide what to do with it and how they are going to solve it. So, it is a lot about taking responsibility and they love it. There is a lack of additional..., I would say even absence of additional management layers and it matters a lot.” – Interview person 2 (D)

Interview person 1 from company A explains that the company has an open culture and flat hierarchical structure, different from other countries’ corporate culture that the respondent has encountered.

“What I experienced is that we have a, quite an open culture, not particularly hierarchical. And we have the ability to trust people. And I have experienced that in other countries, this thing about the boss always having to decide, the boss knows best, and you have to, it is best not to make a mistake because then you kind of get slapped on the fingers. When people come from outside, it takes a while, but then they start to realise that we do not really work like that.” – Interview person 1 (A)

All respondents except from company B, emphasised a friendly culture and team cohesion as a dimension of why employees stay for a longer time. The respondents describe a friendly culture with aspects of collaboration, diversity and inclusiveness, transparency and individual focus to be important parts of a supportive culture. Interview person 1 from company C explain that the friendliness and cohesion of team members can be the reason for why employees stay for a long period of time and reject offers from other companies.

“About a week ago I sat down and talked with one of our developers who has worked as a developer for 11 years or something like that, so he is a senior. And even though he has like zero information on LinkedIn, people write to him several times a week and want to lure him over and then he has been like ‘well, people are nagging me like this, but I think it is so nice here” – Interview person 1 (C)

According to the first interview person from company D, diversity and inclusion was prioritised from the beginning. They employed a Diversity and Inclusion manager as early as their 61st recruit to guarantee that these values were embedded into their corporate culture. This commitment has subsequently become a company hallmark, demonstrating the company's continued efforts to prioritise diversity and inclusion.

“Already when we had maybe 60 employees, this is like one and a half years ago, we hired a Diversity & Inclusion manager. (...) It is a strong feature of culture, as well as the fact that we raise the issues a lot about how to work inclusive as an employer (...) And I think it is a statement as a company that we are 60 people, but at 61 we say that this is an issue that is so important that we want to bring it in already this early. It leaves a big mark on the culture, I would say.” – Interview person 1 (D)

The establishment of strong relationships and promotion of transparency are considered essential factors in fostering a positive culture, according to the second interview person from company F. Moreover, leadership plays a critical role in cultivating a sense of satisfaction among employees.

“What I think you are very grateful for as an employee is our relationships. There are really fantastic colleagues, we really try to help each other in every way we can, it shows over and over again, so welcoming and open. It is a very, the culture is very transparent I would say, which I think a lot of people appreciate. (...) But also, good leadership, it is very important with good leadership but also other relationships.” – Interview person 2 (F)

The first respondent from company C describe the atmosphere similar to a family. The use of the term "motley bunch" suggests a culture that values diversity and individuality. Overall, interview person 1 from company C suggests that the friendly and supportive culture contributes to the positive experience of working at company C.

“It is very much a family atmosphere. But it feels like all companies these days are a bit like 'welcome to the family', but it is really like a family atmosphere. And I think that we are like a bit of a motley bunch as well, an odd bunch in some way but everyone is like so damn nice and kind and driven and very flexible and solution-oriented.” – Interview person 1 (C)

The founder of Company E introduced a concept of having a short meeting with a colleague whom you do not regularly interact with. The practice has become a key component of the company's culture, facilitating the breakdown of boundaries and the development of relationships between employees across different divisions. This practice has proven to be a useful tool in boosting collaboration and teamwork inside the business by encouraging innovation and knowledge-sharing *“You will find these appointments in everyone's calendar almost every day.”* – Interview person 1 (E)

Social activities are an integral part of building a strong corporate culture, as all the companies in the study organise some form of activities, both during and after work. While the level of prominence of these activities may vary, common features such as having ping-pong tables, games and soft drinks seem to be a trend in the corporate world, as respondents from company A, C, D, H, I and J shares examples of this kind. Interview person 1 from company C declares an example of providing opportunities for social activities and offering amenities that allow employees to borrow the office for game nights, and also offering free coke and video games.

“You can come here whenever you want, if you want to borrow the office and have a game night with your friends (...) it can be small things like, for example, coke in the fridge, we have a lot of PlayStation 5 and PlayStation 4 and board games and stuff like that.” – Interview person 1 (C)

Notably, all of the respondents' state that the majority of social activities are organised at the team level, emphasising the importance of creating camaraderie among the closest co-workers. Respondents also stress the importance of creating a fun and positive work environment through company-wide activities, whether centrally organised or through employee initiatives. Company B have a dedicated team with voluntary members who arrange company-wide social activities.

“We have something we call ‘Vitality’ which is a team, so it is not really driven by HR, but it is employees who sign up that they want to be part of that. And they organise lots of different things, wine tastings or sports stuff or a yoga session, it could be anything really.” – Interview person 2 (B)

At Company I a "Mood Manager" is employed, who plans entertaining activities and events like having a barista come in and serve coffee, filling coolers with food and drinks, and bringing out a popcorn machine every now and then. Employees likewise have access to ping pong tables and other games. The first interview person from company I mentions that these activities are important because they help to create a positive atmosphere at work, and that the company tries to organise low-cost activities, such as playing rounders in a nearby park or running a "geo-guesser" challenge. Company I may show its employees that they are appreciated and valued by offering these trivial benefits.

“But we also have a Mood Manager, who takes care of fun activities and stuff. (...) We have the barista who is here once a month or once every two weeks. Partly because it is nice, but also because people then walk between the floors, as we are spread across three floors. (...) We sometimes fill the coolers with bars and juices and such, to make people a little happy. It sounds a bit petty, but it is still very positive, people like that. We have a popcorn machine that is brought out sometimes. (...) And we will try some simple things that do not cost money either, for example ‘who wants to come and play rounders in Slottskogen?’. We also have ping pong tables and stuff like that so it should be nice and fun. (...) right now, we are running a geo-guesser challenge, so it is like google earth you could say, so you are somewhere on a map and you have to guess where you are.” – Interview person 1 (I)

Most respondents, except from company B explicitly mention the impact of corporate culture on employee retention. Two streams of culture were identified, a *flat hierarchical structure* that utilises trust and autonomy was found, along with a *friendly culture* characterised by an open, helpful, and personal atmosphere that fosters team cohesion. Respondents from company A, C, D, H, I, and J points out their flat organisational structure, which allows team members to participate in decision-making and embodies trust through autonomy and ownership. All respondents except those from company B, emphasise a friendly culture and team cohesion as a dimension of why employees stay for a longer time. Social activities are an integral part of building a strong corporate culture, as all the companies in the study organise social activities.

5.6 Well-being

Health and well-being on the individual level is something that is recognised as an attractive dimension of work among respondents within company A, B, D, E, F, G, H, and I.

Respondents mention activities like cooperation with external parties, events to raise awareness about mental health, training sessions, and surveys to monitor employees’ overall wellbeing. Respondents within company D, E, F, G, and H describe a particularly strong health focus that runs throughout the entire company. Company D has implemented a concept called "Mind Your Health," which encompasses multiple dimensions of well-being, including work-life balance, mental health, and physical health.

”We have something that we call ‘mind your health’, it is kind of our, well, I should not say that it is a strategy but a concept or what we believe in linked to health. And you can see it in

different ways, 'what is work life balance and what is well-being?'. So this concept is basically that we have different focus areas throughout the year, on mental health and physical health and building a psychologically safe work environment. There are a few different elements in this, maybe diet or something like that." – Interview person 1 (D)

The first interview person from Company F highlights the significance of well-being within the context of organisational change. As during periods of change, individuals may experience challenging reactions and emotions. However, the interview person suggests that well-being can be approached proactively as a means to address these difficulties and support individuals throughout the change process.

"We have used this approach and created a global policy on wellbeing. And we have a global engagement survey that we run quarterly to capture how people experience the workplace. But it is a tool for us to be able to calibrate, but also very much for the teams to be able to work with it and discuss in the team 'how is the workload?' 'how come?' 'what activities can we put in place?' and so on (...) we have a wellbeing activity for all managers, and we will run it for employees as well. Just an hour of inspiration to think and create dialogue in the teams about wellbeing. But it is also, when I mention that we are going through change and I mean the whole company is going through this change and we can not just live on and sell products, we also need to sell services around the products. And we have new technology, we are digitising our industry, so there is change in so many ways and then wellbeing initiatives become truly important." – Interview person 1 (F)

In addition to this, company E offer all employees a personal health coach and daily training sessions of various sorts *"Something that suits everyone, at lunchtime, and it is free to participate. It is everything from yoga, to running coaching to outdoor training, cardio training, body pump and yes zumba will start now, and body balance"* (Interview person 2, E). Company A and G has a gym at the office and company H has taken a different approach by arranging for their employees to have the opportunity to train for free at a nearby gym once a week. All these efforts are initiatives from the employer which extends beyond, or at the expense of ordinary working hours to improve employee's personal wellbeing and health.

Respondents from company C and J does not mention any health focus beyond what is required by law and the first interview person from A declares that the results from the previous employee survey shows that employees are rather dissatisfied with the efforts put in place to promote health and safety.

“But we also say, and really want it to be the most important thing for us when it comes to our own employees. We have had a lot of changes here in the IT area so there has been a lot of restructuring of the organisation and so on. Health and safety have not been something that has been communicated or in any way talked about very much recently (...) and we will put much more effort into working on that this year.” – Interview person 1 (A)

Respondents from eight of the companies emphasise well-being as an attractive dimension of work. Whereas respondents from company D, E, F, G, and H describes a strong focus on activities related to health. Among these five companies, three (D, E and H) are defined as small which is remarkably as these initiatives cost money and they have less resources compared to the bigger companies. Respondents from the consultancy firms C and J are alone in not mentioning any activities related to wellbeing, apart from what is required by law. Overall, well-being as a concept goes beyond the actual work environment and is somewhat intertwined with employee's personal life in terms of both lifestyle and mindset.

5.7 Office

Company A, B, E, F, G, H, and I share similar office setups with no individual rooms, but rather a large area of free-seating desks and small rooms available to perform a work-task in privacy. According to the respondents, the arrangement of having a large area of desks seems to be a watershed, and according to them, most people working within IT find it disturbing and ineffective.

”I know that there are some of them who (referring to ICT-workers) are not as fond of working in an open landscape, but now they do, they can have screens between their tables to be a little more shielded and they can wear headphones. Most of them have made adjustments themselves and of course it is not that they bring their own screens and setup, but it is someone like our janitor organise and make sure and fix in their work environment but ah it is such things.” – Interview person 1 (E)

The concept of a home-zone, where each team has designated seats at disposal, is adopted jointly with an active-based office at company A and H. The second interview person from company H describes that it serves as a prerequisite for safety.

”The teams should feel like ‘this is our home-zone’ and they know who is around them and they know whom to talk to and set the rules with if you are allowed to give a yellow card if

anyone violates the agreements (...) that they feel that security and dares to speak up is the thought behind the spaces.” – Interview person 2 (H)

Company C and J, which are consultancy firms, have small office spaces and even though they encourage consultants to come to the office they experience limitations in terms of available seats. Company D is the only company that has separate rooms for each team within their product organisation.

“Each team they have a separate room they do not have open space and its very nice that they in case they want to have a discussion within the team or just work in silence without being distracted by other people they can just close the door and do it and I think that it is something that they really like appreciate having that it is not an open space having separate room is nice.” – Interview person 2 (D)

5.8 Salary

A commonly held view among respondents within nine of the companies regarding the IT market is the occurrence of a high competition and a fastmoving industry which makes it difficult to recruit and assess the worth of ICT competence. Company B is the only exception as the respondents do not experience difficulties to attract ICT workers. One explanation can be that company B’s main business is not directly linked to IT, as they operate in the industry of fast-moving consumer goods (FMCG). Respondents from the other companies perceive that there is an imbalance between supply and demand of labour, causing the salary demands of ICT workers to skyrocket. All respondents mentions that they do not offer the highest salaries on the market, but rather salaries placed in the upper middle part of the spectrum.

“The main challenge is that there is not enough and there is a huge competition in the market. (...) It is actually that they do not exist to recruit, and we hope that Chalmers and many others will catch up in a couple of years. But right now, it is definitely a challenge that it is very difficult to know the market value of these people.” – Interview person 2 (A)

Interview person 2 (D) further exemplifies how ICT workers have high demands in terms of compensation and benefits.

“Some candidates are very efficient in communication and they start when they got my message and they kind of ‘okey I am interested but I want you to know that right know I get like’ for example they know that they already have a very good salary and they are like ‘I

already get 85K are you like ready to beat that?’ and we are not ready to beat that so yeah.” – Interview person 2 (D)

Interview person 2 from company H describes that due to shortage of candidates with the required skills in their local region, they have started exploring candidates from other regions. This indicates a willingness to expand their candidate pool and explore options outside their immediate area in order to find qualified individuals for their organisation.

“As some areas have been lacking candidates that have the right competences in our region, it has become natural to look into other regions and investigate if there are candidates interested to join, either remotely or that have interest in moving to Gothenburg.” – Interview person 2 (H)

Another aspect which fuels the demand for ICT workers is that digitalisation is happening simultaneously all over the world. There is not enough competence in Sweden, hence companies are forced to enter the international labour market and compete with a large number of companies.

“Well, it is a very tough industry, in Gothenburg I would say that there are more jobs than there are people with the right skills. So all companies are fighting for the same people, which means that you have to hire from abroad.” – Interview person 1 (J)

Another challenge is to keep up with the salaries for current employees as the annual pay review is not adequate due to rapid changes in the market.

“We try to look and have a market-based salary, we look a lot at salary statistics and so on, and it is absolutely crazy how these salaries have skyrocketed in recent years. You think like this, ‘but now we have increased, but then the others have this much’, but haha, so it feels like we are a bit behind the curve even though we are giving them wage increases beyond the usual ones.” – Interview person 2 (E)

To equalise the salary levels between current and new employees, company H is using additional salary pots throughout the year.

“We aim to have market salaries, which means that there have been quite large increases because those who come in may have less experience and expertise in the area than those who are employed, but they need to be offered a higher salary so we have had to work more actively to review and have a salary pot during the year instead of just sticking to the usual

salary movement but trying to be prepared if there are certain areas of expertise that stand out and need to be compensated to avoid inequalities and that we risk losing competence.” – Interview person 2 (H)

When asked why employees choose to quit their employment, the majority of the respondents mentioned insufficient pay. ICT professionals are an attractive group, and changing jobs is an opportunity for them to increase their salary.

“Then I think it can be the compensation issue sometimes, we often see that if you change company, you can outdo in terms of compensation and so on. So there is a greater incentive to switch.” – Interview person 1 (F)

According to the respondents from the consultancy firms C and J, they do not face challenges in recognising the value of IT competence. Instead, their difficulty lies in balancing the ability to offer competitive salaries while remaining financially profitable. These firms heavily rely on client fees to sustain their operations. As a result, they sometimes struggle to retain employees because competitors or even clients themselves can offer higher salaries, leading to staff attrition.

“We are usually able to meet our candidates' salary demands, so it is in line with the market and perhaps slightly above, I would say. Then it also depends on which customer you hire for, some customers have very low wages, then you have to set low wages as well to make a profit on the person. But generally it is in line with the market or slightly above, we are more flexible in that way. But in the end, we need to be profitable.” – Interview person 2 (C)

The respondents from company A, B, D, and I identify headhunting as an additional challenge in a market affected by intense competition. Headhunting refers to the process of actively seeking and recruiting highly skilled and experienced professionals from other organisations.

“There is a huge need in the market for software developers it is not a secret for anyone (...) and an average software developer gets like I do not know five exciting job opportunities on LinkedIn daily.” – Interview person 2 (D)

The second interview person from Company I states that senior profiles are more frequently targeted by head-hunters compared to junior ones. Furthermore, mentioning that hiring senior profiles can be more challenging compared to junior ones.

“The very senior ones do not look for new jobs in the same way but they are often headhunted, they are contacted like on LinkedIn or other so it is a challenge for us as well that our best senior people are also headhunted by others and then it becomes a question mark on it ‘how should we do now with this one that has received a good offer from someone else?’ to find the young talents it feels like it is going pretty well right now we have the talent programme eh (..) but to find these senior it is like architects developers whom are more senior they are more difficult.” – Interview person 2 (I)

ICT expertise is highly sought after on a global level, which creates high competition in the market. Respondents from three of the big organisations in the sample consider headhunting to be a result of the high competition on the market, especially of senior profiles. Because of rising digitalisation, the educational system has fallen behind in creating qualified candidates for the market, resulting in a labour shortage in the ICT sector. This has resulted in unpredictable and fluctuating wages, causing difficulties for companies to follow the market and offer attractive salaries. Respondents from nine companies experience an imbalance in supply and demand and agrees that salary is a cause for employee resignation.

6. Discussion/Analysis

In this chapter the empirical results are summarised and discussed in relation to previous research with connections or contradictions being drawn between the dimensions.

Subsequently, the result will be analysed in relation to new institutional theory.

After the mapping and summarising of the results, it became evident that some of the dimensions are somewhat connected to each other. However, we decided to keep them separated to enable a discussion about connections and contradictions between the eight dimensions, which consequently enabled an analysis of organisational agency when confronted with tension. The fact that all companies seek to attract ICT competence ultimately makes them to rivals in the market, and companies that compete for the same resources can be defined as an organisational field (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983). As it became evident that all companies emphasised the same eight dimensions as important for constructing an attractive workplace, this can be seen as affected by isomorphic pressures within the ICT field leading to homogeneity. The homogenous results from this study can presumably be caused by other instances, such as the methodological decision to primarily engage with respondents from the professional group of HR. If the sample would have been more diverse, the results could have indicated otherwise. However, HR professionals are the experts within the area of attractive work, which ensured insightful data. Another reflection is that respondents were prepared to be interviewed about the subject, which may have influenced our results further. As we engage in this section, we will elaborate on possible explanations with the help of concepts derived from new institutional theory. Czarniawska and Joerges (1996) concept of translation enables an understanding of how organisations adapt to institutional pressures in their setting. Organisations meet the demands and expectations in the institutional field by translating and adapting practices to match their conditions. Oliver's (1991) framework of strategic responses further highlight the ways that organisations navigate pressures in the field. Additionally, the concept of institutional work, as addressed by Lawrence and Suddaby (2006), sheds light on the ways in which organisations actively participate in to create, maintain or disrupt institutional practices and structures. As the companies relate and respond to the institutional pressures that exist in the field, the actions they take can be regarded as forms of institutional work. Below will dedicate

to exemplify how the organisations align with field expectations alongside differentiating their practices.

6.1 The key to employee retention

All respondents perceived learning and development opportunities for employees to be the most important dimension of an attractive workplace, and the main reason for why people choose to work for a company and why they stay for a prolonged period. Poor learning and development opportunities were also frequently mentioned as a cause for resignation, together with salary. Although Hall et al. (2008) and Dabirian et al. (2018) recognise learning and development as important dimensions of attractive work, they are not as prominent as the results from this study. The difference in outcomes may be because this study has investigated the dimension from an employer perspective while previous research has examined ICT workers perceptions. Respondents from three of the big companies in our study pointed out headhunting as a challenge for retaining ICT-workers, and it is conceivable that insufficient learning and development opportunities, combined with an offer of a higher salary makes it easy for competing organisations to win people over. Being headhunted and offered a new job can sometimes overrule internal development opportunities, hence making job-shifts a natural part of the career progress. One common denominator among all big companies was the practice of having an LMS. In addition to having an LMS, these companies offer both central courses that apply to all employees and specific courses targeted towards specific roles, for example ICT workers. Respondents from all the big companies in this study share the perception of development and internal career advancement as an important dimension of attractive work and a reason for why people stay for a longer period of time. Due to the size and maturity of these companies, they have prerequisites of having pronounced practices for handling and promoting career planning, internal job advertisements, horizontal mobility, and career advancement for their employees. Ongoing learning was highlighted by respondents from all small companies, but in the absence of pronounced processes and practices, which may be a result of delimited resources and organisational maturity. With the exception of company E.

The occurrence of learning and development opportunities within companies can be understood as institutionalised within this field. Offering learning and development opportunities to employees can be viewed as institutional work as it maintains the institution

through organisations aligning their operations with social norms and expectations (Lawrence and Suddaby, 2006). Normative pressure is evident as the organisations feel obligated to offer learning and development opportunities to retain key talents and meet employees' expectations (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983). Failing to provide this can result in talent attrition and losing employees through headhunting. The process of headhunting can be understood as a way for organisations to outperform competitors' internal processes for learning and development, which shed light on the strong normative pressure of employee's requirement of career development as part of attractive work. There is a possibility that the big companies have a dominant position in the market through which they influence others through mimetic pressure. These companies serve as role models for the smaller ones in the field, pushing them to adopt similar practices to retain their competitive stance. Despite facing limitations to conform, respondents from the smaller companies recognise the dimension and strive to align with these practices as best they can. Thus, the high competition for ICT workers pushes companies in the field to respond to the normative and mimetic pressure of offering learning and development opportunities as part of their practices.

However, there are some disparities on the practical level, implying organisational agency and translation of practices to fit their operational context. An example of what Czarniawska and Joerges (1996) would account as translation of institutional pressure, is how one of the big companies implemented a 'job architecture framework' to clarify career steps and to meet the expectation of employees. Delimited by the size of their business in terms of resources and a less hierarchical structure, the small companies do not have equal conditions as the big ones to have structured processes of learning and development and to offer clear career paths. Instead, they engage in alternative practices. The two consultancy companies (small companies) do not offer internal career opportunities, which is a natural effect of the temporary nature of the employment relationship in these businesses. The temporary employment relationship makes long term prospects of career development difficult to offer. One way that the consultancy firm has managed this pressure is to proactively focus in identifying new challenging consultancy assignments to retain their employees. The fact that the companies have adopted different practices in the dimension of learning and development suggest that they have translated the institutional pressure to fit their specific context (Czarniawska & Joerges, 1996).

6.2 Dimensions in conflict

The respondents unanimously recognise the importance of flexible work arrangements, such as remote work and flexible hours, in attracting and retaining skilled ICT professionals while promoting a healthy WLB. The significance of flexibility is reinforced by Marks and Huzzard (2008) and Parment et al. (2017), who argue that flexibility and work-life balance are highly appreciated values in work. Other positive outcomes of flexibility are increased job performance and satisfaction in addition to lower stress levels (Contreras et al., 2020). However, Mäkikangas et al. (2022) emphasise variation in opinion, lifting up that a fifth of the workers comprising the sample of his study experienced a decrease in work engagement transitioning into remote work during COVID-19. The decrease in engagement could partly be a result of on an abrupt change that led to an overall shift in society and social isolation in all aspects of life. One can also assume that the involuntary remote work investigated by Mäkikangas et al. (2022) and its restricted character can be a reason why some employees experienced a negative effect. The findings of our study rather demonstrate a unified opinion of flexible work arrangements as an attractive dimension of work, which may be due to the fact that remote work in the setting of this study is voluntary. However, the respondents in our study also acknowledge the challenges posed by remote work, including its negative impact on social connections and team cohesion. Contreras et al (2020) similarly point out the risk of social isolation when face-to-face interactions and spontaneous meetings do not occur in daily work.

Flexibility serves as an example of a dimension that, initially, was influenced by coercive isomorphism (DiMaggio and Powell, 1983). All Swedish companies had to adjust their operations in response to the social distancing restrictions put in place after the COVID-19 pandemic outbreak, notably with regard to the requirement to work remotely if the nature of the work allowed it. The ICT profession was one of the groups who were able to work remotely, therefore this change was especially significant for them. As society gradually re-established and the restrictions were lifted, individual companies started to review their remote work policies. This adjustment was brought about by changing societal attitudes that emphasised the advantages of allowing employees to work from home since it improves their general well-being, implying a shift from coercive to normative pressure. Overall, flexible work arrangements have brought about an abrupt shift in traditional ways of working and

these arrangements have not yet become completely established, leading to a sense of uncertainty and a period of adaption and learning as organisations navigate this changing work landscape.

To work from the office has long been taken for granted as the way work should be carried out. This institutionalised way of working is undergoing change, and remote work can be seen as a disruptive practice to the institution of working from the office. Thus, remote work can be understood as not yet fully institutionalised, rather semi-institutionalised. In uncertain situations companies consciously or unconsciously grasp for best practice and mimic other companies to reduce uncertainty. Our research's findings suggest that to varied degrees, isomorphic pressures to adopt remote work options into practices has had an impact on all participating companies. The organisations engage in translation of the pressure to fit the practices of their own organisation (Czarniawska & Joerges, 1996), visible through the various remote work policies implemented by the organisations (see Table 2. Remote work policy). This is what Oliver (1991) would account as a strategic adoption for companies to maintain their legitimacy and increase their attractiveness as employers and at the same time sustain unique operations. Notably, attraction and retention were affected at the company with the most restrictive remote work policy. This observation demonstrates that the company might not be regarded as legitimate in the eyes of possible candidates, and it is reasonable to predict that they will eventually come under pressure to conform to the standard norms of the field.

With regards to the negative effects of remote work, a contradiction is evident between the two dimensions flexibility and the second stream of the dimension community and culture, 'friendly, supporting culture and team cohesion'. As remote work limits the opportunities for social interaction it affects the ability to build strong teams. When evaluating the dimension of community and culture, team cohesion was recognised as a crucial element in retaining personnel for prolonged periods. Two studies that investigate important dimensions and motivators for ICT workers suggest that social connections and a friendly and supporting culture is important for this professional group (Dabirian et al., 2018; Hall et al., 2008). In essence, remote work and team cohesion appear to be incompatible as they contradict each other, and companies must try to balance the competing demands of the two dimensions.

Additionally, the organisations observed disadvantages in the open landscape office design. One prominent issue raised by the respondents was the high levels of noise and distractions on people's ability to concentrate. Employees may seek greater accessibility to quiet spaces as a result of these inconveniences, thus elevating their need for remote work. Since the drawbacks of an open office environment can increase the necessity for remote work, it can be assumed that the office dimension reinforces the flexibility dimension. As a result, an open landscape office design has detrimental effects on the community and cultural dimension though making remote work more necessary. It becomes a paradox that the office itself partly reinforces the need for remote work, making it more difficult to motivate employees to work on-site and strengthen team cohesion. Flexibility becomes part of the solution of a noisy office environment as ICT workers that perform complex tasks, can choose to perform these tasks when working from home.

Considering this, a three-way tension between the dimensions of office, flexibility and community and culture becomes evident. Whenever faced with tension, actors become active and engage in institutional work through the balancing act of conflicting pressures. The organisations engage in attempts to navigate and make trade-offs in relation to the dimensions of office, flexibility or community and culture (Lawrence and Suddaby, 2006). Some respondents mention that a response to high levels of remote work has been increased frequency of organising social events in the office to facilitate face-to-face interactions. This becomes a way to strengthen the sense of belonging within the teams and to the organisation. Other examples brought up by respondents as a means to attract employees to the office was by offering Swedish 'fika', fun happenings, and other amenities. According to some respondents, they have experienced struggles in finding balance, mentioning that team cohesion has been greatly affected due to remote work. To resolve the issues of a noisy office, some have engaged in arranging designating quiet areas in the office and offering noise-cancelling headphones to enhance concentration. These attempts to find a balance indicate agency in the organisations, hoping to find a middle ground between the conflicting dimensions (Lawrence and Suddaby, 2006).

6.2.1 Flat hierarchies and open offices

The second stream of the dimension community and culture 'flat hierarchical structure', was identified in six of the ten organisations, showing the presence of a flat organisational

structure that allows team members to participate in decision-making processes and develops trust through autonomy and ownership. This is consistent with the arguments made by Biswas et al. (2017) and Marks and Huzzard (2008) that an engaging workplace encourages involvement and include elements like respectful and trustworthy relationships and democratic leadership, where especially autonomy is of significance for ICT-workers. It is crucial to note that the result of our study is from a management perspective, thus might not reflect the employees' perceptions of the hierarchical structure within the companies. Flat hierarchies and inclusiveness are something that employees, especially with origin from western countries, are used to and expect as a proper way of structuring organisations decision-making processes. To have strong hierarchical levels do not align with the cultural values of the Swedish labour market, which reflects a strong institutionalised view of how work should be structured where employees are not seen as puppets (Fisher & Yuan, 1998; Randstad, 2021a). The small companies have more favourable prerequisites to fully embrace this approach and promote it as something attractive, apart from the big companies B, F and G that do not explicitly emphasise a flat management structure as a prominent dimension of attractive work. As they are big companies they employ more people, which naturally includes more levels of hierarchy to ensure structure and alignment to business goals.

An embodiment of this culture can be observed in the shared office layout adopted by company A, E, H and I, of whom emphasised a flat hierarchical structure and featured an open landscape design that disregarded hierarchical positions. By embracing a shared office space through symbolism, organisations demonstrate that they foster inclusiveness and the equal value of all employees. Prospective candidates that visit the organisations' office can therefore perceive it as a more attractive workplace compared to more traditional offices (Biswas et al. 2017; and Marks and Huzzard 2008). Consequently, the prevalence of open offices reinforces the notion of flat hierarchies within these organisations. This can be seen as institutional work performed by the organisations, in efforts to reinforce the cultural values of a flat hierarchical organisational structure (Lawrence & Suddaby, 2006). Additionally, the open office layout can be understood as a cost-effective way of arranging work. Visualising contradictions between optimisation of financial resources rather than considering attractive work.

6.3 Purpose as branding

Purpose emerges as a crucial dimension highlighted by all respondents in efforts to attract and retain talent. This dimension encompasses both a higher purpose associated with the company's business and the everyday sense of purpose and meaningfulness in work tasks. Facilitating a feeling of purpose in everyday work through technologically stimulating and interesting work tasks can be a means to enhance commitment in combination with monetary compensation as salary. Controversially, ambiguity and unclear goals are highly demotivating and can be reasons for leaving the organisation, experienced by three of the companies in this study. Hence, demonstrating the importance of the dimension purpose in relation to attractive work. This is reinforced by Hall et al. (2008) who states that software engineers enjoy work that is technically challenging and varied and that they want to identify with their task. This identification includes having clear goals and personal interest, understanding the purpose of the task and how it fits into the larger picture. Similar findings were made by Dabirian et al. (2018) demonstrating that the third most attractive value in work for ICT employees was to have interesting and fruitful tasks that promote development.

Some organisations are naturally linked to a higher purpose because of their business, for example companies working towards a green transition or within a critical infrastructure. Hence, making companies that has successfully formulated a higher purpose related to their business strong actors in the field. These organisations exert mimetic pressure on others in the field, making purpose as branding institutionalised and a means to attract potential employees (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983). In a highly competitive labour market, it becomes vital for organisations to portray themselves as attractive employers. All companies in the study engage in employer branding activities to some degree, emphasising the importance of brand recognition to attract employees. Through institutional work, the organisations are maintaining the practice of employer branding by actively convey messages that resonate with contemporary values and connecting the business to a higher purpose, thus imbuing work with a sense of meaningfulness (Lawrence and Suddaby, 2006). Research suggest that people are more drawn to businesses whose cultural values mirror their own (Biswas et al., 2017). This gives rise to normative pressures to mirror societal values and reformulate them to fit a specific business. This institutional pressure pushes companies to actively engage in employer branding practices of highlighting specific aspects of the business such as sustainability, a

critical infrastructure, or life-saving initiatives (Lawrence and Suddaby, 2006). It is worth noting that companies tend to highlight positive aspects of their business in marketing efforts, demonstrating their active agency in adapting the practice of communicating attractive topics, like for example sustainability. By drawing on purpose as an attractive dimension for current and potential candidates, the employer brand becomes a means for externally communicating the higher purpose the companies seek to promote, thereby making it a major element in the attraction and retention of employees.

6.4 Competing for talent

Of all eight dimensions, salary was noticeably the one most influenced by the labour shortage in the ICT field. ICT expertise is highly sought after on a global level, making it tremendously valuable and creating competition in the market. A commonly held view among respondents from nine of the companies is that the market is characterised by unpredictable wages, making it difficult for them to recruit and assess the worth of ICT competence. All these respondents argued for an imbalance in supply and demand in terms of labour, which is confirmed by SCB (2020) and OECD (2022), notifying that the demand for IT skills has surged due to the explosive growth of digitalisation, particularly accelerated by the COVID-19 pandemic. This has resulted in labour shortages across industries, with the information and communication sector experiencing significant shortages (SCB, 2020; OECD, 2022). As a result of the limited labour force available and the struggle to keep up with the market salaries, respondents highlight difficulties to offer competitive compensation packages. Neither one of the companies in this study tries to offer the highest salaries on the market, but rather places themselves somewhere in the upper middle part of the spectrum. Furthermore, respondents mention that it is common for employees to quit their job because they are offered a higher salary elsewhere. As a group that value salary as an important dimension in their job (Dabirian et al., 2018), ICT professionals can easily upgrade their salary as they are an attractive professional group, and they are often headhunted by external recruiters.

The respondents express that the ICT group are aware of their professional value and sometimes exploit the market imbalance to their advantage and demand ‘unreasonably’ high salaries. This places a normative pressure on the organisations, to align salary practices with expectations of this specific professional group. In effort of responding to the normative pressure of ICT workers, some companies have implemented additional pay reviews

throughout the year to keep up with the speed of the market and meet the demand of current and potential employees. This practice does not include other professional groups within the companies, thus signalling that the companies feel pressured to respond to the market demands of ICT workers to survive (Lawrence & Suddaby, 2006). Mimetic isomorphic pressure becomes evident as the companies attempt to reach a consensus on a standard known as 'market-based salaries'. The use of the term market-based indicates a conscious process of imitation, where organisations agree that it is the most rational approach to achieve salary balance and reduce competition in the market (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983; Lawrence & Suddaby, 2006). This can be understood as a collective effort within the field to establish stability through institutionalisation of an appropriate level of compensation for this professional group (Lawrence & Suddaby, 2006). There is a lack of homogeneity regarding salaries due to the challenges of keeping up with the rapid development in the industry. However, they all strive to align their salary offerings with what other companies in the field provide, aiming to survive through gaining legitimacy and acceptance (DiMaggio and Powell, 1983).

6.5 The balancing act of well-being

Physical health is an important element of overall well-being, and five organisations realise this by providing their employees with a variety of physical training possibilities as part of constructing themselves as an attractive workplace. It is regulated by the Swedish Work Environment Act (SFS 1997:1160) for companies to ensure a healthy work environment including both physical and factors pertaining to psychological components of work, and it is also shown to increase job attractiveness (Biswas et al., 2017). However, the regulation does not force organisations to offer training activities to their employees and it is not taken for granted in general. The organisational practices of well-being can be understood as being triggered by coercive isomorphic pressure that has been translated into the company context (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983; Czarniawska & Joerges, 1996). Some organisations have gone further in their interpretation of the law and even beyond what is required, implying goodwill of enhancing attractiveness of work. It can also be assumed that mimetic pressure has affected the companies in terms of imitation of others who work with well-being as an integral part of the workplace. Translation of the pressure is visible through various practices in the

organisations, such as gym facilities, daily training activities, and health competitions (Czarniawska & Joerges, 1996).

At first glimpse, this appears to be a beneficial dimension offered by the company, as it showcases thoughtfulness for employee well-being and the provision of a healthy workplace. However, Elmholdt et al. (2021) provide an alternative viewpoint on health initiatives, highlighting issues regarding the division of control and ambiguity concerning employee participation. Even though none of the respondents raises problems of promoting health initiatives it can be assumed that they are aware of this complexity, although it takes another study to explore whether they do. While these initiatives are optional, one can assume that they unintentionally put pressure on employees to participate in activities such as trainings and physical competitions, for example a pedometer challenge. A potential risk concerning companies increased focus on health could impose normative expectations to participate in these activities to be perceived as an exceptional employee. Furthermore, Elmholdt et al. (2021) consider privacy from a data perspective, but we also concern privacy that arise because some employees may experience that the employer intrudes on their private life by promoting them to stay healthy. When companies encourage active involvement in physical activities on top of performing the job, one can assume that some employees could experience ambiguity in demands expected in the workplace, ultimately leading to feelings of misfit towards the health profile promoted by the company. Even though these attempts to enlighten well-being seem harmless, it is noteworthy to reflect upon the implications of such initiatives as the intention to do good can have the opposite effect.

6.6 A paradox of being similar

According to DiMaggio and Powell (1983), organisations over time become similar and homogeneous. By adapting to isomorphic pressures organisations are trying to gain legitimacy within a field and sustain coherence. The process of homogeneity adheres to the conformity to norms and values within an organisational field through coercive, mimetic, and normative isomorphism. For an organisational field to be upheld, it is rival to gain legitimacy through coherence. The ten organisations comprising this study emphasise the same dimensions in how they construct themselves as attractive workplaces in a highly competitive labour market. Signs of coherence and homogeneity in this study derives from both coercive, mimetic and normative isomorphism (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983). However, the

organisations actively engage in institutional work in response to the pressures exerted on the field level (Lawrence & Suddaby, 2006). Visible differences in practices regarding the dimensions implies variation on practice level (Czarniawska & Joerges, 1996). Thus, on the surface, organisations can be perceived as similar, with the emphasis on the dimensions being visible to potential candidates, while practices and processes become more relevant to existing employees.

What becomes paradoxical concerning the construction of an attractive workplace is that, on the one hand, companies want to imitate each other to be recognised as legitimate. On the other hand, they want to be unique in their offer compared to their competitors. Something that adds on to this discussion is the context they operate within, a market with a scarce number of ICT workers. This is resulting in an even tenser field, where organisations are desperate to imitate each other in a fear of being perceived as less attractive than their competitors. To retain existing employees, it is rational for companies to adapt to the field norms to prevent talent attrition to competitors who offer more attractive dimensions of work. This requires a proactive approach from companies to continuously assess and adjust their strategies and policies to meet the evolving expectations and preferences of their workforce. Failure to do so may result in losing valuable employees to other organisations that offer more attractive workplaces. For companies to be recognised as unique whilst also gaining legitimacy in the field demonstrates that there is a paradox. In some circumstances, it is beneficial to be similar to others, as it increases legitimacy within a field, but trying to blend in with the crowd is not always the best strategy for grabbing attention and attract candidates.

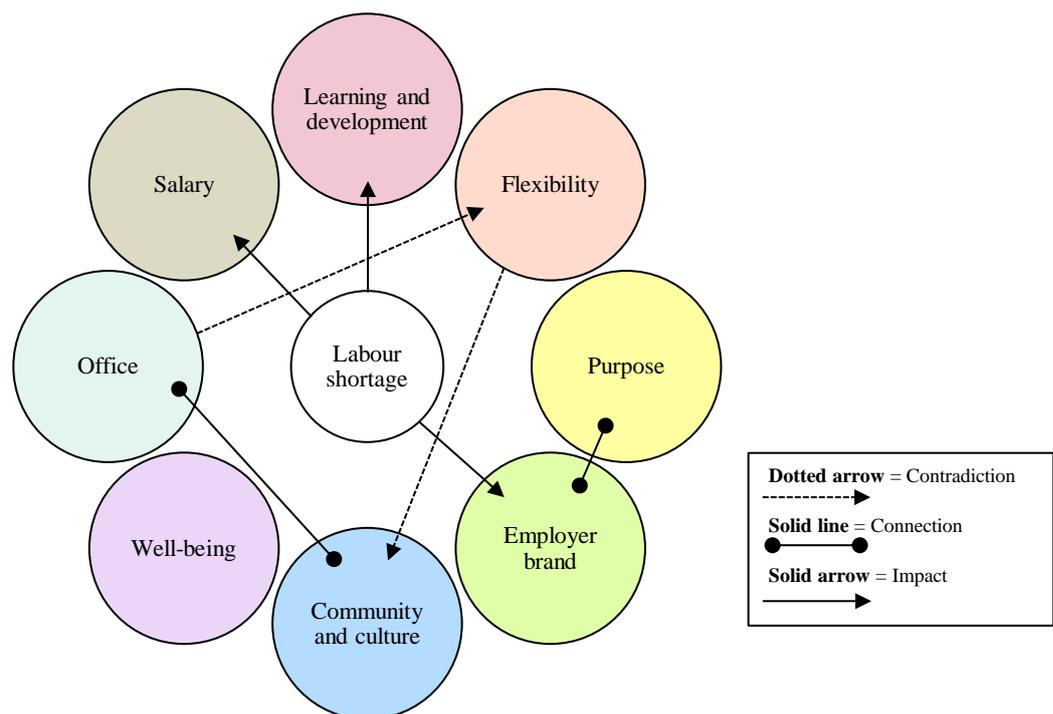
7. Conclusion

The aim of this study was to understand how ten companies within the ICT field construct themselves as attractive workplaces in a highly competitive labour market. This was done through extensive reading of previous research of perceptions of attractive work, specifically focusing on the group of ICT professionals. In addition, insights about labour shortage within the ICT industry was of high value in the conceptualisation of the context, as it showcases the competitiveness of this field. This study has investigated attractive work from an employer perspective, of which we decided to conduct interviews with two participants from each of the ten companies, all of whom worked within HR or a managerial position in the IT organisation. As nearly all the respondents belong to the HR/People and culture professional category, biases may have affected the sample and there is a risk that we have overlooked perspectives from other professional groups. Five of the companies comprising the sample are identified as small (<1000 employees), the other five companies are accounted as big (>1000 employees). We acknowledge that the findings of this study are context-specific to the ICT labour market and may not be directly applicable to other contexts. Furthermore, the results might be limited to insights of the private sector as the sample predominantly consist of private organisations. The study revealed eight dimensions that respondents from all ten companies emphasised as important when constructing an attractive workplace: learning and development, flexibility, purpose, employer brand, community and culture (comprising of two streams), well-being, office, and salary. Due to the scope of this study, we had to limit the depth and breadth of our analysis, which may have resulted in overlooking relevant dimensions that could have emerged from the empirical data. The analysis derives from concepts within institutional theory, visualising isomorphic pressure within the field with whom the organisations actively engage with and adopt to their context, and variations on the practical level.

As illustrated in figure 2, some of the dimensions are interwoven, for example the dimension office and the first stream of the dimension community and culture, 'flat hierarchical structure'. The flat hierarchical structure is embodied in the open landscape office layout, as it disregards hierarchical positions. Purpose and employer brand is two other dimensions that are connected to each other through internal and external branding of the higher business purpose, which can be seen as a strategy to attract candidates whose values are aligned with

the company. However, there is a notable tripartite contradiction between the dimensions 'office, flexibility, and the second stream of the dimension community and culture, 'friendly, supporting culture and team cohesion'. While the open office layout is believed to have a negative impact on focused work, it simultaneously drives the need for remote work to foster concentration. Additionally, a high degree of remote work hinders the organisations' ability to establish and maintain team cohesion and overall social interaction among colleagues. Our presumption was that employees appreciate the opportunities of remote work due to increased WLB, surprisingly the open office setup was also shown to pose a need for remote work. The office as an arena to promote social interaction, can instead have the opposite effect. Hence it becomes critical to understand the implications of the open office layout on employees' willingness to work on site.

Figure 2. Connections and contradictions between dimensions and impact of labour shortage



There may be alternative explanations of the designated relations between the dimensions in terms of 'impact of labour shortage', the 'connections', and 'contradictions' (figure 2). Thus, this study may not account for all possible relations. The identification of the eight dimensions sheds light on the complex dynamics at play when constructing an attractive workplace. Organisations must carefully navigate the interplay between these dimensions,

considering their individual and collective impact on employees' experiences and overall organisational effectiveness. To accentuate connections and tackle contradictions, all organisations have somewhat deviated from the institutionalised practices understood through the concepts of translation and institutional work. By doing so, they have responded to isomorphic pressures exerted by different constitutes while considering their unique organisational characteristics such as size, resources, and maturity. Ultimately, ensuring organisational efficiency and legitimacy in the field.

The fact that the companies emphasise the same dimensions as important when constructing an attractive workplace suggests coercive, normative, mimetic isomorphic pressures within the field, ultimately leading to homogeneity. This can be seen as a result of a competitive and uncertain market where companies feel threatened and naturally mimic others regardless of whether it is rational. However, the homogeneity can be explained by factors other than isomorphic forces in the field, such as the fact that we interacted with a homogenous group of respondents. All the respondents in this study, except for one, were representatives from the HR profession. The HR function serves as an extended arm of the company, aiming to emphasise the companies' good handling of human resources and reputation as an attractive workplace. This may have influenced the findings to be similar as they share professional core values.

The companies engage in translation of practices when constructing customised learning and development processes like job architect frameworks, remote work policies, and well-being as an overarching concept. The tripartite contradiction generate engagement in institutional work to balance multiple institutional pressures. As companies actively highlight different parts of their business through employer branding and higher purpose, they maintain the institution of employer branding in the labour market. Moreover, the agency of companies in this context becomes evident in the recursive relationship between them and the market, particularly in terms of salary. The agency of companies results in a variation of practice regarding the dimensions of attractive work.

What becomes paradoxical concerning the construction of an attractive workplace is that, on the one hand, companies want to imitate each other to be recognised as legitimate. This makes companies homogenous. On the other hand, they want to be unique in their offer compared to their competitors. Sometimes it is rational to be similar to others, as it increases legitimacy

within a field. However, it is not always the best strategy for attracting candidates. Hence, it becomes important to balance the imitation of others alongside achieving a competitive advantage when constructing an attractive workplace.

7.1 Further research

This study has contributed to a deeper understanding of how companies seeking to attract ICT workers construct themselves as attractive workplaces. The findings enhance our understanding of how organisations in a scarce labour market addresses challenges of attracting and retaining employees. The insights gained from this research contribute to a deeper understanding of the dynamics between external pressures and organisational responses within the realm of human resource management.

Delimited by a specific industry, further research can benefit to explore another context, such as the public sector or another highly sought-after profession. In extending the scope of an attractive workplace, it might be fruitful to conduct qualitative or quantitative research of employees' and other managerial groups perceptions of what constitutes attractive work, to broaden the understanding of the phenomena.

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Appendix A (Interview guide)

1. Why do you think people choose to work here?
 - a. What would you say sets your company apart from others in terms of culture, values and way of working?
 - b. What difficulties are there in attracting people with IT skills?
 - i. What do you do to stand out and be seen?
 - ii. Do you offer a trainee program?
 - c. Why do you think they are staying with you for a longer time, have you received any feedback?
2. Why do you think people choose to quit?
 - a. Is there a trend from exit interviews?
 - b. Age trends?
3. Dimensions of the work
 - a. In what way do you work with employee learning and development?
 - b. Do you do any specific activities connected to the work environment?
 - i. Psychosocial
 - ii. Physical
 - iii. Social activities (AW, sports activities, conferences, etc.)
 - c. How do you work to promote work-life balance for your employees?
 - i. Do you have a policy regarding flexible working hours or telecommuting?
 - d. What do your employees say they miss at work today? (maybe from employee survey)
4. Have you noticed that those who work within IT have special wishes at work, have you had to make any adjustments for them to enjoy their work? For example:
 - a. Work environment - ergonomics/office space/creative spaces?
 - b. Leadership
 - c. Flexibility
 - d. Etc?
5. Shorter questions
 - a. Do you have a bonus system? What does it look like and who is included?
 - b. What does your salary strategy look like for the IT group?
 - i. How are you positioned in terms of the market?
 - c. What is included in your general benefits package?
6. In conclusion
 - a. What do you think would make a difference for your company to get to the next level in terms of being an attractive workplace?