



Unravelling the mystery of municipal employer branding

An exploratory case study of employer branding strategies in a Swedish public organisation

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Supervisor:	Vedran Omanović
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Abstract

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Problematisation:

In today's competitive labour market, there is a reported shortage of competence in most sectors, making it essential for employers to brand themselves as a 'good employer' to attract and retain talent. This is especially important for public organisations, which must ensure that they have the necessary expertise to fulfil their public welfare obligations.

Purpose:

By focusing on employer branding in municipalities, we aim to increase the understanding of the phenomenon of employer branding in municipalities, the institutional environment they function within and the impact of norms and their unique organisational structure when shaping employer branding strategies.

Methodology:

Using a qualitative approach, a document analysis and 15 interviews were conducted in western Sweden with managers and HR professionals in a public case organisation. Institutional theory and PSM are used as the theoretical framework in the analysis process.

Findings:

The study's findings revealed several characteristics of employer branding in municipalities, including marketisation, media attention, political economy, PSM, demographic changes, gender inequalities, and public preconceptions. These factors are shaped by isomorphic forces in society, and municipalities navigate their employer branding strategies accordingly. The research also found that administrations are presenting an inclination to differentiate themselves from the parent organisation, challenging the possibility of being 'one brand'. Overall, this study contributes to a better understanding of employer branding in municipalities and sheds light on the importance of considering organisational structure and norms when developing branding strategies.

Foreword

First and foremost, we want to direct our recognition and appreciation to our key contact at the municipality. We are genuinely happy and overwhelmed by all the energy and time you dedicated to us. Additionally, we wish to express our sincere gratitude to all participants from the other case companies, whose participation was crucial for the study's outcomes. We were both genuinely inspired by your expertise and your important work. Finally, we would like to thank Vedran Omanović, our supervisor, for his feedback throughout the process.

Vocabulary

English to Swedish

Administration(s) - Förvaltning(ar)

Region Västra Götaland - Västra Götalandsregionen

The City Management Office - Stadsledningskontoret

Gothenburg City - Göteborgs stad

Gothenburg City's programme for attractive employers 2019–2023 [GCPAE 2019-2023] -

Göteborgs Stads program för attraktiv arbetsgivare 2019–2023

The Education Administration - Utbildningsförvaltningen

The Elderly Care Administration - Äldreomsorgsförvaltningen

The Environmental Administration - Miljöförvaltningen

The Functional Support Administration - Förvaltning för funktionsstöd

The Labour Market and Adult Education - Arbetsmarknad och vuxenutbildning

The Primary School Administration - Grundskoleförvaltningen

The Social Administration - Socialförvaltningen

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1. Introduction

1.1. Background

Employment levels are at an all-time high in most Western countries, resulting in intense competition for skilled workers (A. Dabirian et al., 2019). Being an attractive employer and creating an appealing workplace is crucial in open, liberal markets (Lievens & Slaughter, 2016). Employers must have the right insights about their employees' value to present competitive offers (Randstad, 2022). In Sweden, the economy is recovering from the pandemic, but certain sectors like restaurants and healthcare have faced job safety and work intensity challenges (Gustafsson, 2021). Swedish companies must meet the growing demand, find the necessary skills, and succeed with their human resources [HR] (Svenskt Näringsliv, 2022). However, there is a competence shortage in many sectors, emphasising the need for education and retention within organisations for productivity and success (Alshathry et al., 2017). The lack of skills and recruitment problems will likely dampen economic development and the labour market (Svenskt Näringsliv, 2022). Uncertainties related to the war in Ukraine, the upcoming recession, and inflation make it difficult to predict their effects on the labour market. Employer branding, which includes strategies to attract, motivate, and retain employees, is vital for organisations as 'human capital' contributes value to shareholders (Moroko & Uncles, 2008). These strategies are part of strategic human resource management [HRM] (Purcell & Boxall, 2016). Contemporary employer branding concerns internal strategies, providing and fulfilling the existing employees' needs, and communicating these strategies (Backhaus, 2016).

The need for the best competence drives a new aspect of employer branding and how organisations offer internal education but also work more long-term strategies to establish relationships with the ones with competencies (Rana et al., 2021). Employer branding is changing; from being focused on external branding to now being more focused on internal processes (Backhaus, 2016). Subsequently, as organisations are interested in attracting and retaining employees, the attention on employer branding is growing. Hence, this can only be done when employers understand the components that generate 'employer attractiveness' (Berthon et al., 2005). When existing employees feel that these components are fulfilled, they will "reciprocate the status received with favourable behaviour that will strengthen the (employer) brand" (Hoppe, 2018, p. 459-460). In some organisations, employer branding has been brought to a head due to the complexity of the organisation and the context it works within. Jobs in the private sector have increased, putting more pressure on public employers;

they now have to compete with the private sector for the top candidates, where motivation factors, such as PSM, influence these branches (Holt, 2018). Making it challenging for rigid organisations with outmoded HRM practices and institutional arrangements, fewer financial inducements, widely held negative perceptions of public service and distinct demographic challenges (Mau, 2019). Despite the economic and social importance of the public sector, attracting talent remains a challenge (Tyskbo, 2021). Moreover, the public sector was responsible for 16% of all employees in the European Union [EU] (Eurostat, 2020) due to their social responsibility of delivering well-fare and multifunctional governmental services (Leon-Moreta & Totaro, 2021). Despite its high number of employees across different establishments, the research of being an attractive employer lacks behind; notably insufficient information about municipalities compared to private organisations (Leijerholt et al., 2019, 2022; Mau, 2019).

In Sweden, the public sector employs the highest percentage of workers in the EU, 29% (Eurostat, 2020), with municipalities accounting for 62% of public sector employment (Sveriges Kommuner och Regioner, 2022). Swedish municipalities, including Gothenburg City, are multifunctional entities governed by politically composed committees; the right to tax is enshrined in the constitution (Regeringskansliet, n.d.). In Sweden, municipalities have several administrations carrying out essential well-fare activities within different branches, led by politically composed committees, in the designated geographic area. The biggest one of these multifunctional entities is Gothenburg City (Sveriges Kommuner och Regioner, 2022), with approximately 55 000 employees (Göteborg stad, n.d.-a), making Gothenburg City one of the biggest employers in Sweden. Gothenburg City is also a municipality facing significant recruitment difficulties and must deliver services to an increasing population, drive large development projects in urban development and develop business (Göteborgs stad, 2019).

As briefly mentioned, Gothenburg City is a complex organisation organised into union administrations and municipal companies. A further challenge for Swedish municipalities is that the workforce is divided and managed from a political agenda. The starting point for the management of Gothenburg City is the laws and constitutions, the political will and the City's residents, its users and customers. Through governing documents, the municipalities' politicians can describe how they want to realise the political will. The municipal council's budget is the overall and superior governing document for Gothenburg City's committees and company boards (Göteborgs stad, 2019). According to Wæraas (2008), public organisations must comply and absorb what the governing organisation opposes. The

governing organisation can often face and acquire several often contradictory values and needs in society; this leads to an inconsistent characteristic of the organisation as a whole. The attempts to create one single employer brand of these multifunctional organisations may “diminish their chances of creating positive brand images” (Wæraas, 2008, p. 217).

1.2. Research problem

Employer branding as a phenomenon arose as a response to societal norms on how to be an attractive employer and how to organise an employer that appeals to the ‘best’ candidates (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004). Previously, employer branding was mainly a unique selling point [USP] strategy and urged to create HR practices that differentiated one organisation from the rest. Instead, increased knowledge regarding these HR practices and meeting societal norms is today a necessity for organisations (Backhaus, 2016). From many different perspectives, organising a successful workplace is a required strategy in response to the search for legitimacy, which is applied and adapted to the organisation's societal norm. Private organisations have been at the forefront of this application of being an attractive workplace. Recently, public organisations and municipalities have expressed a need to ‘cope’ with the ongoing trend that private organisations established (Mau, 2019).

There has been extensive research on employer branding on private organisations (Backhaus, 2016; Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004; Moroko & Uncles, 2008), but not on public organisations (Andersson, 2019; Leijerholt et al., 2022; Mau, 2019) and complex multifunctional organisations that would not define themselves as one “corporate brand” (Wæraas, 2008). Therefore, this study intends to address the gap and ‘mystery’ of employer branding for public organisations (Mau, 2019; Whelan et al., 2010), in this case, municipalities, and how these unique organisations adapt to the social pressure from the public and private organisations to meet their multifaceted demands. Furthermore, considering the different forms and functioning between municipalities and private organisations, there is a lack of knowledge applying these ‘best practice’ strategies from private organisations to municipalities. To increase this lack of knowledge, institutional theory bridges understanding of how organising processes occur and what factors affect the behavioural outcome concerning municipalities' societal and organisational context. To be legitimated as an employer, the strategic work is important. Furthermore, institutional theory provides a deeper understanding of how organisations face social pressure and feel the urge

to follow societal norms and the progress of competitors to be legitimised (Powell & DiMaggio, 1991). It further enables an explorative approach with the intent to understand if municipalities act, or may not act, as the rational tools they are supposed to be (Powell & DiMaggio, 1991). This will create insights into how, why, and if municipalities work with employer branding in their search for legitimacy.

1.3. Aim and research questions

By focusing on employer branding in multifunctional public organisations supported by general trends about being an attractive employer, we aim to increase the understanding of the phenomenon of employer branding in municipalities, the ingrained patterns and trends in which they are embedded, and the impact of their unique organisational structure and organisational norms when shaping employer branding strategies. Thereby also exploring valuable sought-after insight into how municipalities function and behave in their strive to become more attractive employers.

- What characterises employer branding in municipalities/multifunctional public organisations?
- Based on these character traits and within this question of employer branding, what does the institutional environment look like, and how do municipalities navigate within it?

2. Previous research

In this chapter, we will review relevant literature to present an overview of how researchers have discussed employer branding before and where the research gap is. We investigate employer branding strategies to explain the phenomenon of employer branding further. In the interest of this case study, employer branding is presented first from the private sector sphere and second from the public sector sphere. At last, we will also present a section that questions whether one employer brand is possible since previous research emanates from this standpoint; however, there may be other suitable strategies for a multifunctional and public organisation. This is relevant since the aim is to explore insights and trends about employer branding.

2.1. Employer branding

The term and concept of employer branding, and the interest in the organisational image, was introduced in 1996 by Ambler and Barrow (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004) and emphasised the economic, functional and psychological benefits of the employer (Ambler & Barrow, 1996). The concept and theory have since then received increased interest and multiple re-conceptualisations. Historically, employer branding has been associated with external aspects of being an attractive employer. Contemporary, and within this study, employer branding is conceptualised as the display of internal organisational culture and practices to an organisation's human capital (Rana et al., 2021) and how HRM strategies (Purcell & Boxall, 2016) create employers that could be viewed as desirable amongst employees (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004).

Contemporary employer branding has also been established as an essential aspect of strategic HRM work (Purcell & Boxall, 2016). It aims at a holistic view, where the lines between the internal and external employer branding strategies have been indistinguishable, working inside out (Backhaus, 2016). The combined perspectives of marketing, strategy and HRM has nurtured organisations as an employer (Rana et al., 2021). Rana et al. (2021) bring forth a definition and an explanation of what employer branding can bring: “Employer branding provides identity to the unique characteristics of the organisations which helps them in attracting new employees and retention of employees.” (p.2). A way of signalling and presenting the necessary strategies, characteristics and activities of the employer as a strategy for ‘transparent’ government.

The foundation and moral ground of the strategy is the focus on employees as human capital. Employer branding emphasises investing strategically in human capital to build a productive and successful organisation (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004). Due to the adaptation to human capital and bringing competencies, practices and investments mainly follow the societal context, norms and changes that emphasise different aspects of its importance (Backhaus, 2016). To meet the requirements of the employees and the demands and search for legitimacy as an economic actor within the society. To further examine employer branding when involving human interests, researchers often use employer brand equity on how to ‘build’ and adapt the employer (Theurer et al., 2018). Employer brand equity originates from practices of performing marketing and has been used as a method of what ‘assets and liabilities’ are seen as attractive (Theurer et al., 2018). Furthermore, employer brand equity involves a standpoint of viewing the attributes, practices and activities of the whole organisation and not only a single attribute (Alshathry et al., 2017). In addition, it links the collective effect of the employer and theoretically involves an interaction between employer and employee which deepens the understanding of being an attractive employer (Alshathry et al., 2017). Slaughter et al. (2004) extended this discussion through what attributes contribute to the understanding of the employer and how individuals value these different attributes. Attributes often related to employer branding strategies are *instrumental/functional attributes*, such as the utilitarian value of pay, benefits, career advancement, et cetera. Symbolic attributes can be as well as important and describe more symbolic company information and how the organisation could be viewed as important, trendy, prestigious, et cetera. Slaughter et al. (2004) labelled these *symbolic attributes* as organisation personality traits and are highly influenced by how people perceive the employer brand.

Further, Theurer et al. (2018) explain this interaction through the concept of brand knowledge and how organisations are viewed differently through their assets and liabilities. Moreover, it builds the bridge for the theoretical foundation of understanding the employer brand as an HRM strategy, creating an attractive employer through practices that individuals value, which increase their chances of staying or being attracted to a workplace.

2.1.2. Employer branding in public organisations

Despite the high number of employees working in the public sector, over 30% of all employees in Sweden (SCB, 2022), across different establishments, the research of being an attractive public employer lacks behind private and notably municipalities (Leijerholt et al.,

2019; Mau, 2019). Purcell and Boxall (2016) reasoned that the search for constant cost-effectiveness from policymakers over the last 30 years has affected how labour is viewed, internally and externally. It emphasises that public organisations exist in a slightly different context than private organisations. Employer branding emanates from a private setting. It does, therefore, not problematise the difference in organisational structure, cultural context, political context, et cetera that differentiates public organisations, as an employer of choice, from private organisations (Mau, 2019). It has been shown that public organisations struggle with employer branding as a cause of an unsuccessful adoption of the branding strategy that originally came from the private business sector (Sataoen & Waeraas, 2015).

Mau (2019), Stariņeca and Voronchuk (2014), and Weske et al. (2020) all found evidence in their research that public organisations differentiate from private organisations in multiple ways where the public knowledge of the organisation is an overarching factor. That people, in advance, have some sort of knowledge or interpretation of the organisation in their role as a client rather than as an employer. Stariņeca and Voronchuk's (2014) research on ten public organisations in Latvia concluded that the public organisations in their context did not view themselves as an employer but rather as a client-stakeholder approach. Furthermore, it was also distinguishable that small departments of the different public organisations did not adapt to their specific context and did not individually position themselves outside the bigger public organisation (Stariņeca & Voronchuk, 2014).

Public organisations, as stated, act in a different organisational context, Weske et al. (2020) found contradicting evidence to previous research on what is seen as attractive within this context. Schott et al. (2019) literature review implies that PSM should be considered when building an attractive public employer. Instead, Weske et al. (2020) found evidence that the effect is limited, and the evidence supporting the 'usage' of PSM could be questioned from their statistical point of view. Still, maybe it is not explicitly as evident as previously, which requires more research and understanding of how this is applied in public organisations today.

Lastly, there has also been a movement from dividing the organisational brand and employer brand towards 'one brand'-strategies regarding the brands needing to be coherent, and collaboration needs to exist within multiple functions of the organisation to make the brand reliable and ethical. The increased complexity demands higher efforts and aligned activities throughout an organisation, which Wæraas (2008) problematises multifunctional organisations as a limiting aspect.

2.2. Is one brand possible?

The public sector's use of branding principles to establish a consistent and clear brand has become an intriguing area of study for diverse (multifunctional) organisations (Dholakia & Acciardo, 2014; Sataoen & Waeraas, 2015; Wæraas, 2008). Wæraas (2008) discusses the idea that organisations should have a single identity and communicate it consistently, and this may not work for public organisations due to their inherent inconsistencies and multiplicity. The author's question is whether public organisations need to change their basic function to benefit from corporate branding or if they can still become corporate brands while remaining inconsistent (Wæraas, 2008). Therefore, whether one employer brand for the public organisation is desirable or even functional becomes evident. According to Leijerholt et al. (2019), little is known about how public organisations should manage their brands. Furthermore, branding is crucial for the organisation and individual departments, both through internal practices and external impressions (Leijerholt et al., 2022). Despite this, public organisations may prioritise a positive perception and attractiveness rather than a unique brand. By enabling individual departments to manage their brand with support from organisational structures, public organisations can create a brand architecture that supports a robust organisational brand and employee commitment (Leijerholt et al., 2019).

Furthermore, Leijerholt et al. (2022) researched how internal strategies and practices affect the employees' possibility to be strengthened by the public employer brand by HR strategies that are aligned with the values employees have and assigned to the employer brand in general (Leijerholt et al., 2022). Such as building an organisational culture aligned with the brand's values due to receiving employee acceptance (Wallace et al., 2011). In the complexity of a multifunctional organisation, when the employer brand and the governing practices are incongruent with the individual values of the employee, strengthened resistance occurs (Dean et al., 2016). Furthermore, to increase the complexity of one brand, (Purcell & Boxall, 2016) emphasises how public organisations exist in multiple contexts where the connection to the employee's profession can be stronger than the one to the organisation. This increases the possibility of a discrepancy between individual and organisational values. A further aspect of extending the public employer brand is employees' underlying PSM. PSM tends to influence the subjective perception of the employee's self and the employer's brand. Leijerholt et al. (2019) found evidence that coherent perception strengthens the intention of the HR strategies. Andersson (2019) extended this reasoning to organisational practices and how the employer brand and role expectations must be coherent for positive reinforcement. It is further

emphasised that organisational practices, internal and external perception of the employer brand, and a coherent PSM can strengthen the employer brand and is an attractive and productive workplace (Dean et al., 2016; Leijerholt et al., 2019; Wallace et al., 2011).

Public organisations have been neglected in terms of research in the field of employer branding. Nonetheless, previous research indicates the importance of examining how strategic decision-makers perceive their context, how they take advantage of their possibilities and what effects values, public context, profession, organisational practices, and PSM, among others, have. The fact that employer branding is connected to one brand, as presented above, may question whether the concept works for public organisations at all. However, this is the hegemonic approach in the labour market when attracting and retaining employees; thus, this is a concept public organisations must comply with when competing for skilled workers.

3. Theoretical framework

Within this chapter, we will elaborate on the chosen theoretical frameworks of institutional theory. The theory will be presented on different levels since we aim to understand employer branding on organisational, intra-organisational and individual levels to grasp a holistic understanding of the institutional environment for municipalities. Institutional theory is further integrated into the world's knowledge and is visible throughout the thesis reasoning.

3.1. Institutional theory

The starting point of the neo-institutional theory is built on two main works (Eriksson-Zetterquist, 2009). The article Institutionalized Organizations: Formal Structure as Myth and Ceremony, written in 1977 by the two sociologists John Mayers and Brian Rowan, and the article The Iron Caged Revisited: Institutional Isomorphism and Collective Rationality in Organizational Fields, written in 1983 by the organisational theorist's Paul J. DiMaggio and Walter W. Powell's (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983; Meyer & Rowan, 1977). One ambition of this new institutionalism was to receive answers to the classical questions about “how social choices are shaped, mediated, and channelled by institutional arrangements” (Powell & DiMaggio, 1991, p. 2). Institutional theory is a doctrine formation that sheds light on why organisations do not function as the rational tools they are supposed to be (Eriksson-Zetterquist, 2009). It focuses on how organisations are governed by environmental factors, ingrained patterns and temporary fads rather than by rationality (Scott, 2014). These rules and requirements can be formal and informal (Scott, 2014). Scott (2014) categorises these as the Pillars of institutions; the Regulative, the Normative and the Cultural-Cognitive. The three elements work together; sometimes, one dominates, but more often -in robust institutional frameworks- they work in combination. *The Regulative Pillar* accentuates conformity towards laws and regulations as the base of *legitimacy* (see next paragraph for definition). *The Normative Pillar* asserts moral bases, such as norms and values, to judge legitimacy. *The Cultural-Cognitive Pillar* points out that cultural legitimacy comes from mimetic mechanisms and shared beliefs and thoughts (Scott, 2014). These Pillars shape the institutional environment within which organisations function. The institutional environment creates legal, mental and social structures that organisations must conform to be authorised as legitimate actors (Furusten, 2013). Some organisations are more institutionalised in their environment than others, and the more institutionalised they are, the more structures and procedures they are controlled by (Scott, 2014). The theory aims to contribute to

understanding how organisations and individuals are resilient towards normative, coercive, and mimetic isomorphic forces (Lewis et al., 2019). Institutional rules function as traditions, and when organisations gain legitimacy, resources, stability and “enhanced survival prospects” the traditions assimilate into institutional rules (Meyer & Rowan, 1977).

Legitimacy is described by Dowling and Pfeffer as “Organizations seek to establish congruence between the social values associated with or implied by their activities and the norms of acceptable behaviour in the larger social system of which they are a part. Insofar as these two value systems are congruent, we can speak of organizational legitimacy”(Dowling & Pfeffer, 1975, s. 122). Dowling and Pfeffer (1975) argue that legitimacy is important to understand the relationship between organisations and their surroundings. If differences arise between the two value systems, organisational legitimacy will be threatened. Threats can take the form of legal, economic or other conditions of social pressure (Eriksson-Zetterquist, 2009). Organisations will be exposed to attacks and comments when there is no legitimacy. Legitimacy has similarities with status and reputation because all concepts focus on the cultural factors of organisations. Unlike status and reputation, legitimacy primarily needs to be satisfied, that is, earned (Eriksson-Zetterquist, 2009). A lack of legitimacy will subsequently lead to an inability of the organisation to pursue its goals and acquire the needed resources (Tang, 2017). On the contrary, when an organisation is legitimate, there is no problem with its goals, processes and resources; and the control and management systems are necessary, coherent, outright and irreplaceable (Meyer & Scott, 1992).

The concept of the *organisational field* puts light on the fact that the surrounding is created by and creates organisations. *Isomorphism* explains how, for example, organisations tend to be more and more alike in their forms. The organisational interactions in the field will generate organisations looking more and more alike in shape (Eriksson-Zetterquist, 2009). One organisational field can contain industries within one branch or industries connected through a supply chain. The concept of field explains that organisations affect each other through cultural and normative processes; hence, they do not have direct contact with each other (Eriksson-Zetterquist, 2009). When a field is established, the inevitable situation of homogenisation happens (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983). The isomorphic forces shape internal operations and are developed and reproduced from local laws, norms, values, cultures and regulations (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983). Organisations, particularly subsidiaries, can still be formed and influenced by a *parent company* (Kostova, 1999). Subsidiaries are not independent entities; they must adapt to the parent companies’ direction. In other words, an organisation has a domain that defines a set of pressures to which all subunits must

accommodate (Kostova, 1999). Kostova (1999) built the theory on multinational corporations (MNC) and not municipalities, as this thesis will focus on. However, the paper focuses on transfers that take place within the organisation and not internationally. The theory in the paper is *cross-disciplinary* and has a *multilevel approach* (Kostova, 1999), which is considered equivalent between MNCs and big municipalities. According to institutional theory, three mechanisms are forming and defining an organisational field. These are (1) *coercive isomorphism*; (2) *mimetic isomorphism*; and (3) *normative isomorphism*. Coercive isomorphism comes from political forces and governmental regulations, and mimetic isomorphism includes habitual answers taken for granted in insecure situations. Normative isomorphism is influenced by education and professions, which influence what the right practice is (Eriksson-Zetterquist, 2009).

The concept of *decoupling* describes how a formal structure is decoupled, partly separated from what is happening in practice. The result of a decoupled organisation is that the organisation will be built with two organisational structures (Meyer & Rowan, 1977). The formal structure will be the one that can easily be changed with changes in society, such as norms, laws and customs. The other organisational structure, called informal organisational structure, is used when coordinating what people do in an organisation. A possible result of decoupling is loosely coupled; in other words, the two structures are not fully separated, but there is a certain connection between them (Eriksson-Zetterquist, 2009).

In addition, *institutional theory for HRM*, according to Lewis et al. (2019, p. 330), focuses on “the role of agency and the dynamic nature of the relationship between organizational actors and their institutional environments” instead of only emphasising constraint and isomorphism. This relationship is presented as an institutional logic. It should also include how HR professionals are seen in the organisation and how they “are socialised into the professional logic of the field” (Lewis et al., 2019). Moreover, institutional work is an important concept within institutional theory when analysing HRM and institutional logic. The concept concerns organisational actors taking greater responsibilities than they are assigned to; this can come into expression in different forms (Lewis et al., 2019). This view on institutional theory will help us analyse the role and influence of the HR professionals in the organisation we interviewed on an intra-organisational level. The concept of PSM that we elaborate on in the following section emphasises, on the individual level, how to attract and the motivation to start working for a public organisation.

3.1.1. Public Service Motivation

PSM is an attribute of public organisation employment and is reasoning in line with institutional theory that explains why individuals desire to serve the public. The theory explains why individuals are motivated to a career in the public sector, despite being financially lucrative (J. L. Perry & Wise, 1990). Perry and Wise defined PSM as "an individual's predisposition to respond to motives grounded primarily or uniquely in public institutions and organizations" (Perry & Wise, 1990, p. 368). Under this definition, public organisations have a duty and a responsibility to create an environment that fosters employees to feel like they are contributing to the welfare and the public good (Moynihan & Pandey, 2007). If the job demands for motivated public servants are consistently high and job resources are consistently low, PSM will decrease (Bakker, 2015). Employers should subsequently use this information for public services to optimise the job demand (Bakker, 2015), and PSM is therefore highly important when studying employer branding for public organisations. PSM is a subcategory of institutional theory because organisations have an essential role in PMS; since organisations face future and current employees regularly, they are, therefore, a part of creating or hindering the motivation for public organisations (Moynihan & Pandey, 2007).

Since Perry and Wise published their article on PSM, the research on the subject and theory has flourished. Several authors have discussed the theory's development, critique and challenges, such as altruism and prosocial motivation, are both coherent and still differentiate from PSM (Schott et al., 2019). Prosocial motivation is the desire to make an interpersonal impact on people nearby you and where you appreciate feedback on your performance; investing in helping individuals. Altruism is instead established as a behaviour, not a motivation, and is therefore not related to some underpinning reasoning for engaging but rather a characteristic (Schott et al., 2019). However, PSM is important for more than motivation; it is vital for productivity, improved management practices, accountability, and trust in public organisations and their governments (Brewer et al., 2000). Therefore it is an important subject for research within HRM and employer branding in public organisations.

4. Method

In this chapter, we present the research methodology and include the research design; description of the case company; data collection; approach of action when collecting the material; analysis methods; reliability and validity concepts; and ethical considerations and limitations arising during the study.

4.1. Research design

To grasp and answer the research question and the philosophical questions it arouses, it is of essence to discuss the ontological and epistemological underpinnings of the research question coercively with the theoretical framework (Bryman, 2018). Meyer and Rowan (1977, p. 340) contextualise neo-institutionalist theory: "Institutional rules function as myths which organisations incorporate, gaining legitimacy, resources, stability, and enhanced survival prospects" and an understanding of how knowledge exists in society. The reasoning, supported by isomorphic structures, also enables a methodological stance on how behaviour is adapted within this social sphere and follows a social ontology based on the beliefs and understanding of the world. The social world is a shared, mind-dependent reality (Ritchie et al., 2014). Lewis et al. (2019) reason that institutional theory, as a shared social world, is a multilevel theory on organisational, intra-organisational and individual levels. This thesis uses institutional HRM theory to understand the intra-organisational level and PSM at the individual level. Subjective reasoning is that external reality, unaffected by reasoning and interpretations, does not exist, and instead, the social world is constructed within our language (Flick, 2014). Subsequently, the concepts and vocabulary in institutional theory allowed us to analyse the research problem from both "the top-down and bottom-up flows of influence between an organization's social environment and the individual within the organization, a direction of increasing importance to HRM scholars" (Lewis et al., 2019, p. 317). Institutional theory and PSM, as well as reason and building their foundation on an interpretative tradition, require a more qualitative stance on how knowledge about the research question will be collected and in line with the researchers' beliefs.

Throughout the research, the underlying foundations of methodological reasoning apply to the research; to ensure quality (Ritchie et al., 2014). The ontological stance of this research, coercive with the theoretical framework, steers the research design to fulfil its purpose. The study, therefore, emphasises the interpretative approach and aims to take account of the participants and their subjective experiences. The qualitative approach seeks to

understand the individual perception, views, beliefs and attitudes. It gives us, as researchers, the possibility to collect data from different styles and sources where a holistic view of the concept of employer branding in public organisations is created through the output of qualitative research, where the hypothesis and conclusion excel from the analysis (Ritchie et al., 2014).

As researchers, we are affected by previous understanding and philosophical reasoning; and the strive within the interpretative approach presented is not aiming for unreasonable ‘facts’ but instead a search for ‘values’ (Ritchie et al., 2014). The proposed research design and the detailed proceedings involve the researcher as a part of the value creation process, nevertheless, enforce neutrality and be reflective about the possible influence one might have (Kvale, 2009). A pilot interview was performed to ensure philosophical reasoning and reflexivity and meet the delimitation of the research question when collecting data (Bryman, 2018). The pilot interviewee described the struggles and challenges the municipality as an organisation and employer faces, and researchers need to be aware of them to increase reflexivity. The thesis, subsequently, has an inductive logic and reasoning where the knowledge of barriers for a municipality is used to gain an understanding of where the possibility of ‘rich’ data exists (Ritchie et al., 2014). To emphasise this, the thesis aims to interpret qualitative data, such as words and language, to discover and describe issues or structures and processes in routines and practices (Flick, 2014).

4.2. The case

When choosing and designing the thesis, the research problem guided us in selecting a qualitative case study. The Swedish context is chosen because of the welfare's big impact and societal position. Gothenburg City is a municipality facing major recruitment difficulties. It must deliver services to an increasing population, drive large development projects in the area of urban development and develop business (Göteborgs stad, 2019). Gothenburg is an urban City and the second biggest city, in consideration of inhabitants, in Sweden and one of the biggest employers in Sweden, with approximately 55 000 employees (Göteborg stad, n.d.-a), around 100 professions (Göteborg stad, n.d.-b) in over 40 administrations (Göteborgs stad, n.d.).

Gothenburg is a segregated city with significant differences in living conditions in different parts. Socioeconomic variables, such as education level, income and employment rate, vary between other groups and other parts of the city (Göteborgs stad, 2018). In 2017

the municipal board decided that a programme would be drawn up to meet the current and future shortage of employees with the best skills in the city's various activities. The programme started in 2019 and will end in 2023 (Göteborgs stad, 2019). In 2021, a follow-up report based on dialogue meetings was made. The dialogue meetings occurred between Mars and September 2021. One of the main targets of this programme was to “attract, develop, and retain employees” (Göteborgs stad, 2021). According to the programme GCPAE 2019–2023, the City must also continue creating more equal living conditions and equal employment opportunities (Göteborgs stad, 2019).

4.3. Data collection

In the thesis, primary data was used and collected through interviews. Consequently, secondary data, such as documents, reports and steering documents, was used to contextualise and analyse the research topic and the different views and strategies of employer branding. Secondary data was collected from reliable sources like the municipality's web page, annual reports and other printed and digital material published by the case organisation. We find relevance in this material since the municipality's employer branding phenomenon exists not only in the employees' understanding of employer branding but also in the written documents and reports they are functioning and working within. The connection between the interviewees and the documents will be further discussed in Section 4.4.2. Documents and Reports.

Moreover, reports by Randstad (2022) and Universum (2022) have been used in the document analysis to better understand the general trends and views of employer branding nationally and internationally. The relevance of this material is that we wanted to examine the theory and previous research about employer branding with up-to-date reports and a general understanding of the subject. Subsequently, a part of the coding frame was built on the headings and subjects in the two reports. We found these reports in the search engine by using the keywords: “employer branding report,”; “attractive employer report,”; and “attraktiv arbetsgivare rapport”.

The interviewees were selected from the administrations and not the municipality-owned companies. This selection was made since the administrations and the municipality-owned companies have different purposes and organisational structures. Moreover, municipality-owned companies have a similar structure to private organisations, and since the research aims to create a pure municipal setting, the focus is on the

administrations. The study aimed not to interview all administrations, but out of the eight administrations (see table *Interview data* in 4.3.1.) the interviewees represented, all of them involved more than 250 employees. Furthermore, the individual interviewees required that all should be managers or HR representatives in similar positions to receive a more detailed and coherent set of data. Some of the collected materials are referred to more than others, yet, the analysis is built on all the collected material.

The interviewees for the public organisation were selected and given by the key contact from the municipality. Some of the chosen interviewees were selected through a snowball sampling where we asked the participating interviewee to identify a coworker that fits and might be willing to participate. Since we wanted participants from the same geographical area within the same organisation, this method is effective. This method may have other limitations, such as the sampling having similar socioeconomic or ethical backgrounds, which may impact the result (Emerson, 2015). Furthermore, the chosen strategy also led to some administrations being more represented than others. This created the possibility of getting representatives with different positions but in the same administration and getting more perspectives on the subject in one administration. However, the study aims to deepen the understanding of the employer branding phenomenon in municipalities; therefore, the employees working with employer branding will be of similar socioeconomic backgrounds since they are working with the same matter.

Interviews in themselves are often perceived as bringing more value or bringing other perspectives than, for example, document analysis due to the possibility of understanding people's interpretation and creating more in-depth insights into the research question (Ritchie et al., 2014); the possible strength of using an interview as a method for collecting data as well the weaknesses. Silverman (2011) argues that the general approach of the interview could be deluded, that researchers learn about the subjective society and not the social phenomenon they intend to study. A too-narrow approach, which as well, is highly influenced by the performance of the research itself. It is necessary to be aware of the risk to be able to limit them and bring the potential value that collecting methods could bring. The research quality depends on the researcher's interviewing technique and how to interpret what was collected carefully (Ritchie et al., 2014).

4.3.1. Interview data

<i>INTERVIEW</i>	<i>ADMINISTRATION</i>	<i>POSITION</i>	<i>TIME IN THE MUNICIPALITY</i>	<i>DATE OF INTERVIEW</i>	<i>LENGTH OF INTERVIEW</i>	<i>LENGTH OF TRANSCRIPTION</i>
PILOT	City Management Office	HR Professional	>10 years	24/10-2022 30/11-2022	Ca 30:00 x 2	6 pages
A	The Elderly Care Administration	HR Professional	5-10 years	27/2-2023	54:24	19 pages
B	Intraservice	HR Professional	5-10 years	1/3-2023	57:01	24 pages
C	Intraservice	HR Professional	5-10 years	1/3-2023	57:01	24 pages
D	The Functional Support Administration	HR Professional	>10 years	8/3-2023	47:21	12 pages
E	The Labour Market and Adult Education	HR Professional	5-10 years	8/3-2023	47:47	16 pages
F	The Environmental Administration	HR Professional	<5 years	10/3-2023	52:42	20 pages
G	The Elderly Care Administration	Manager	>10 years	13/3-2023	57:56	19 pages
H	The Primary School Administration	Manager	>10 years	17/3-2023	46:32	16 pages
I	The Functional Support Administration	Manager	>10 years	30/3-2023	50:14	15 pages
J	The Functional Support Administration	HR Professional	<5 years	6/4-2023	53:17	21 pages
K	The Management of Cycle and Water	HR Professional	5-10 years	6/4-2023	49:49	16 pages
L	The Social Administration	Manager	>10 years	13/4-2023	43:42	14 pages
M	The Functional Support Administration	HR Professional	<5 years	18/4-2023	37:51	17 pages
N	The Education Administration	HR Professional	>10 years	24/4-2023	40:18	13 pages

4.3.2. Amount of collected material

<i>EXTERNAL REPORTS</i>	<i>STEERING DOCUMENTS</i>	<i>INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPTION</i>	<i>TOTAL</i>
77 pages	55 pages	228 pages	360 pages

4.4. Approach of action

Interviews and texts were used to gain a diverse qualitative data sample, non-numerical, related to a municipality's contemporary strategies and challenges for being an attractive employer. The aim of choosing interviews, various texts, and qualitative data is to enable new insights and findings to constantly redefine the relationship between theory and findings (Bryman, 2018). Inductive reasoning applies to this possibility of gaining new insights supported by theory rather than purely confirming theory. Collecting material in this specific way is to shine a light on a new aspect of a spectrum and gain an understanding of different approaches of the established scientific field. The interviews emphasise the understanding and interpretation of the interviewees' experiences on how being an attractive employer is manifested through a municipality and the context they are experiencing. The text and documents we used in the document analysis are reports and governing documents; that either declare contemporary employer branding trends or involve policy and programme documents for a broader contextualisation of municipalities and the processes that steer their work. Lastly, all conducted data, documents and interviews were analysed with qualitative content analysis to meet the concerns of the study's philosophical reasoning and overall aim.

4.4.1. Interviews

In-depth interviews are a powerful method for generating descriptions and interpretations of people's social worlds and, as such, are a core qualitative research method. The interview has taken a more 'travelling' form in line with the research design and the conceptual knowledge of neo-institutionalist theory (Kvale, 2009). It indicates an interactional relationship between the interviewees and the researcher, where knowledge is created in the subjective context of the interview (Ritchie et al., 2014). A postmodern view strengthens the reasoning throughout this research thesis and meets the research question through the pragmatic view that knowledge about the social world could be obtained through an interactive stance (Kvale, 2009). The research question explores the characteristics of employer branding in

municipalities; this characteristic structure of the research question is of postmodern nature. Semi-structured interviews are preferable since more than one person will carry out the interviews; to ensure consistency in the interviews (Clark, 2021). Furthermore, it is essential in interviews to reflect on the relationship between the interviewees and the researcher and what role the researcher finds suitable during the interview. The participants of this research are experienced and well-prepared on the subject, which decreases the possible confronting situation, and the researcher should instead foster interaction and subjective communication (Ritchie et al., 2014).

During the fieldwork, we continually updated the interview guide; to assess the potential of the data to respond to our aim (Flick, 2014, p. 306). For instance, after the first interviews, we re-formulated a few questions to avoid the need for further clarifications, and we also cancelled two questions which we considered not applicable. After the interpretation of the majority of data, new insights and new thematic codes were detected during the progress. Once again, we slightly altered the interview guide, intentionally and unintentionally, with questions that were more specifically targeted towards the detected thematic codes of the research questions more eligible; moreover, as interviewers, we need to consider that the idea of interview data in its nature is co-constructed rather than collected. Hence, there is a danger of “forcing data” to fit the preconceived hypothesis (Flick, 2014, p. 309). We have countered this limitation by identifying our preconceptions frequently (Flick, 2014, p. 306).

To further foster an interactive interview, the participants themselves decided on the environment they required to be able to concentrate on the interview. Meaning what they think suits the situation, and their life, regarding the sensitivity of the topic. In this research, interviews were performed digitally and physically in different environmental settings. Whether the interview was held online or physically, the online interviews were recorded with both video and sound. Zoom can only record with sound and video, and physical ones only through sound. The transcription of the interviews was still conducted in the same way to ensure an equal interpretation of the collected data. Hence, the Pilot interview was neither recorded nor transcribed since this interview occurred as an informal meeting aiming at conceptualising the research problem rather than collecting data for the results. A complete transcription was not made, but six pages of notes were taken. The thesis is based on 15 semi-structured interviews, including the Pilot interview, with managers and HR professionals working with HRM and employer branding in Gothenburg City (see table *Interview data* in 4.3.1.).

4.4.2. Documents and reports

As mentioned in the case section (see 4.2. The case) about the public organisation, the municipalities are controlled by governing documents, which lead to policy documents and programme documents such as GCPAE 2019–2023 (Göteborgs stad, 2019). We performed a document analysis of policy documents and steering documents from Gothenburg City to obtain information about the intrinsic structure, setting and occupational culture that the managers are working within and controlled by (Flick, 2014, p. 368).

Document analysis is an accessible method since documents are generally easy to obtain. It is a non-invasive method that does not require direct contact with individuals, making it an ethical choice in certain situations. As researchers, document analysis is relatively free of ethical complications (Bryman, 2018). Further ethical limitations will be discussed in Section 4.6. To avoid ‘cognitive overload,’ data coding was applied to filter the information (Flick, 2014). We will discuss and explain more about our coding in the next section, 4.5. Furthermore, documents may be written with a specific agenda or perspective, leading to bias in the data (Bryman, 2018). However, the specific agenda and perspective on employer branding for the specific organisation are what we are looking for in the analysis.

Documents do not refer transparently to the social context they function within; “Their referential value is often in their intertextuality – their relation to other documents or texts” (Flick, 2014, p. 378), or in our case, their relation to the interviews. It is, therefore, appropriate to ask how the documents function and how the employees work with and around the policy documents to understand the everyday realities of their usage (Flick, 2014, p. 372). The document analysis was therefore complementing the interviews for us to understand how different organisations work with employer branding in this specific societal context.

4.5. *Qualitative content analysis*

“Qualitative content analysis is a method for systematically describing the meaning of qualitative data” (Flick, 2014, p. 170). It is, therefore, a suitable analysis method for this thesis which will collect empirical data from interviews and documents. The analysis method is also highly interlinked with qualitative methods in general, especially concerning subjective meaning and interpretation (Flick, 2014). The interviews and the documents were coded through qualitative content analysis. Three features characterise qualitative content analysis: “Qualitative content analysis reduces data, it is systematic, and it is flexible” (Flick,

2014, p. 170). Qualitative research often involves large amounts of material, and to avoid ‘cognitive overload’, the method helped us reduce the amount of material and support, guiding us to focus on the material connected to the research's aim (Flick, 2014).

4.5.1. Analytical approach of action

Qualitative content analysis is often used to capture the essence of the data, examine the values according to the research question, and fit overlapping inductive reasoning (Flick, 2014). The interpretative process, and understanding of the material, started in the interview process between the interviewee and interviewer, described above. Still, the pure analytical process in this research begins with the interview transcription. A broad, surfaced understanding of the interpretation of the subject is created. Furthermore, to make the transcription useful, a coding frame was conducted from the document analysis of the contemporary reports of Randstad (2022) and Universum (2022) alongside intuitive codes. The coding frame was produced to highlight the labour market's ongoing trends and ensure that the researchers stay connected with trends and theories. This initial coding, including intuitive and theoretical, coding was done simultaneously when creating the coding frame and adapting it to the collected data. The coding frame can be found in Appendix A (page 67) and explains our analytical approach of action. The coding process was done twice on each separated material to be put in categories jointly. These can be found on the first line, *Main Categories*, in Appendix A, where the first one, “employer branding/employer offer”, includes the *Sub Categories* found in the reports by Randstad (2022) and Universum (2022). This process is often called thematic coding, where citations and codes create clusters of the initial coding. Lastly, a final focused coding was done to decrease the amount of data further to present the research's result and discussion nuancedly. The analysis was based on the thematic codes, and the different parts were constructed considering the detected themes. Under the listed *Sub Categories*, our *Themes* evolved; these are the basis of our analysis and the characteristics we have found for employer branding in municipalities.

4.6. Reliability, validity, limitations and ethical considerations

Errors in the analysis and sources of error in the interviews and our study will need to be handled clearly, critically and honestly for the thesis to responsibly contribute to research in our society (Vetenskapsrådet, 2017, p. 2; 28). The participants’ interests have been respected throughout the study in consonance with the fundamental ethical principles of the Swedish

Research Council for Research in Social Sciences presented in Vetenskapsrådet (2017). To secure anonymity, the interviewees' titles and the time of employment have been simplified and generalised. Because the consent form agreed to confidentiality the name and personal details of the interviewees. Municipalities have to share public documents, and the documents from the municipality are therefore not ethically vulnerable, in agreement with Public Access to Information and Secrecy Act, 2 chap 3 § (2009/400).

This study has potential limitations due to constraints on research design, methodology, material, sample size and sample errors. In-depth interviews have been questioned in terms of validity and reliability by some writers, according to Ritchie et al. (2014), since the knowledge is created in a unique situation between the interviewer and the interviewee. The interaction between the interviewer and interviewee will shape and form the generated data, which is an issue for reliability since replicating data will be problematic. However, this interaction increases the study's validity since the measurement accuracy increases the understanding and interpretations of events (Ritchie et al., 2014), which is aligned with the aim of the study. Validity issues of the internal generalisability could, hence, further be questioned. The sampling is particularly relevant to deal with validity errors (Flick, 2014). Sampling errors, in terms of selection bias, exist due to time and accessibility limitations. One limitation in the sampling is that some administrations have more representatives than others, and some administrations are not included at all; due to accessibility. The interviewees all have different backgrounds in terms of education, previous work experience, which administration they work in and prior knowledge of employer branding. Their diverse backgrounds and position will affect their understanding of the employer branding characteristics and strategies that the municipality has.

When interpreting data, we as researchers have a vital responsibility, and “To interpret another person’s experience means claiming access to (some of) its underlying meaning. During the act of interpretation, the interpreter moves beyond the surface meaning of a description or representation and asks” (Flick, 2014, p.141). Alongside this statement, there is also a limitation in our study regarding language. The thesis is written in English, but since the interviewees and the interviewers all have Swedish as their first language, it is chosen to execute the interviews in Swedish. The study, therefore, has limitations in terms of translations. The researchers have translated to the best of their ability, with the help of Google Translate, and problems such as lexical-semantic problems; grammar; syntax; rhetoric; practical problems; and cultural issues (Barnett, 1986; Shaydullaeva, 2021) may

appear and lead to the citations presented in a “Swenglish” version to fully deliver what the interviewees want to mediate.

Moreover, the case municipality is situated in an urban city, the second biggest city in Sweden, where the welfare system has a vital position. The context is particular, and the result will be problematic to apply to another municipality, context, and country. The research question aims towards municipalities in general; however, this thesis and case organisation is positioned in a specific context and issues of reliability and application to more significant contexts are defective.

5. Results and Analysis

In this chapter, we will present our empirical data and analysis collectively and simultaneously. We have decided to present these chapters together since qualitative research beneficially and conventionally is presented together (Anderson, 2010, p. 201). The different headings in this chapter were developed from the themes in the coding data. In the first two sections, we analyse and explore the trends and definitions of employer branding in municipalities. In the next sections, we analyse the navigation of employer branding based on public opinion, PSM and the size of the organisation.

5.1. Navigating in a changing landscape: trends and challenges of employer branding

Institutions are conceptualised by the existing traditions and norms organisations rely on to gain legitimacy and stability (Meyer & Rowan, 1977). In the analysed documents, we have found statements which, through the explorative reasoning of institutional theory, hint at how municipalities, specifically Gothenburg City, strategically do not act as a rational organisation, considering employer branding. We will elaborate on and shed light on a municipality's strategic navigation for employer branding and what aspects of this reasoning are. Organisational interactions, such as being in the same field or geographical area, tend to generate more similar organisations (Eriksson-Zetterquist, 2009). DiMaggio and Powell (1983) called this process *inevitable homogenisation*, but how does this take form in an organisation that is structurally and culture-wise utterly different from the ones that are leading the trend of employer branding?

Both theoretically, since the phenomenon of employer branding has historically emanated from a private sphere (Leijerholt et al., 2019), and the collected material expresses that Gothenburg City is reacting to the trend of employer branding. It should be noted that the inspiration and pressure to be a more attractive employer also emanate from the demographic crisis of the number of workers in the requested geographic area and professional sectors. Interview J reflected on how, and if there has been any historical influence that pushed their administration on viewing the necessity of being an attractive employer.

“Yes, but I think that there has always been a topic of being an attractive employer. Now it has been possible to look at more private businesses and how they work. For example Ikea? How are other private actors doing if you look at other municipalities as well? Why are they successful? So I think it always has

been, but I think that it has become a lot more now that the competition is high on all fronts, you can see staff shortages, so I think that you have to step up and join the train to attract the right people” (Interview J).

Furthermore, the institutional theory emphasises why and how organisations are arranged through social choices in their search for public legitimacy (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983). The increased competition for workers explains why municipalities need to bring terms such as employer branding into their organisation more explicitly; however, Gothenburg City is a well-known brand, and the private sector highly influences the upcoming process of attracting and retaining employees. Several interviewees argued that historically Gothenburg City had no problems recruiting due to the number of potential professionals in the geographical area and the employer's attractiveness level. Today that is not the experienced case and one of the reasons is the changed market that the municipality is a part of. Interviewee L elaborates on the historical processes of employer branding.

“/.../ I think it has something to do with the social development we have today, which is more market-defined, as well as the fact that we are more in a market today. It wasn't like 20 years ago, and society looked completely different. Then, it was with this that the state was safe. /.../ And that the lack of labour that is expected in this sector also, of course, that we have to fight as in a market today to get the labour. So it's more of a bigger change, a social change as well as... That we should market. We market schools, and we market employers, we market everything today in some way, so it's more of a bigger change" (Interview L).

The change in the market, which Randstad (2022) and Universum (2022) confirm, generates new trends and social values that the employees experience as attractive. It means that historically, the social values that have made the employer, Gothenburg City, no longer perceived as equally attractive. The behaviour of other actors has changed the dynamics. Therefore, following and responding to a trend based on the private sector has opened the possibility of different understandings and structures for becoming an attractive employer. Previous research, for example, Mau (2019) and Sataoen and Waeraas (2015) presents that public organisations struggle with adapting the branding strategy since it originally comes from the private sector. So even if the primary motivation of securing and offering competent employees to serve the public needs is the same, the understandings and strategies presented by the interviewees differ.

Eriksson-Zetterquist (2009) demonstrates that institutional reasoning and interactions will shape organisations more similarly; simultaneously, Sataoen and Waeraas (2015) argue that public organisations will often be misled if copying private principles. Theoretically, these two aspects define the potential risk of applying strategies that are not embraced within

the institutional environment in which the municipality exists. In practice, the municipalities and our interviewees experience a need and pressure to assimilate, which has led to being pressured when trying to adopt strategies, such as the transbounded employer offer, that have not become as successful. Opposed to the required need for assimilation, Lewis et al. (2019) argue that it is necessary to analyse the current employees assigned responsibilities to understand the institutional work they are doing to recognise the potential limits and benefits. Being perceived and legitimised as an attractive employer must be done from the outside, however, internal attractiveness retains competent employees. Still, the legitimising process often occurs to be homogenising; municipalities need to understand their organisational structures that nurture different understandings, especially when following a time-pressured trend (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983) to be an attractive employer in a new market. In accordance with all respondents, below, Interviewee F expresses the necessity of navigating more broadly; when asked about the more competitive market.

“The city [Municipality] can't wake up too late. And sometimes I am wondering. It is not about some happy people that work at [an organisation] or the environmental administrations, it regards the governing and management functions that need to understand that a plan for competence development is a necessity. Otherwise, we cannot do business; it is impossible.” (Interview F).

On multiple levels, the realised need to align with the employer trend is considered coercive isomorphism. A Swedish municipality is built on political decisions (Göteborgs stad, 2019) and therefore needs to obey different directions in society. These decisions are not universal to other private organisations but are a response to public pressure that something is not working as it should. It further means that a municipality must follow the political agenda, which can be changed due to political trends and shifts, to serve the inhabitants within their municipality. The Pilot interviewee illustrated this affection on how coercive isomorphism is constructed for municipalities when expressing that GCPAE 2019-2023 probably would not be on the agenda or have the same name if another political party would rule the city during the time of the decision, emphasising the realisation that employer branding in Gothenburg City results from a political pressure serving its inhabitants, and that it defines the institutional environment (Lewis et al., 2019).

“So, I actually think maybe it's a trend that comes from outside. So this is not something that the municipality in general has thought of. This is something that comes a bit from the private sector, that we have to match. We need to start using different words. The personnel department is not called the personnel department, it is HR and thus the way it has become, I sort of think that we need to match. If we can't match the salaries with the private sector, we have to match something else.” (Interview I)

Interviewee I (see table *Interview data* in 4.3.1.), who has been working as a manager in Gothenburg City for more than ten years, also indicates the mimetic isomorphism and the tendency of an organisation to mate strategies from other organisations, when asked about when ‘attractive employer’ first was on the agenda. The interviewee thinks employer branding is a trend coming from the “outside” and from the private sector. Hence there is also normative isomorphism that characterises the employer branding of the municipality. Interviewee N (see table *Interview data* in 4.3.1.), who has been working with HR in the organisation for more than ten years, expresses:

“Well, it was the HR departments that started to pay attention to this [employer branding] first. It doesn't come from the organisation, I can't say. That's my picture anyway, but I also think that there are a few trends in different industries, so within the HR sector, there will be different trends, more prominent, different time periods. You come up with it as if to develop new concepts and so on.” (Interview N).

As elaborated, many aspects and internal and external forces have shaped the institutional environment the municipality navigates in. Normative, coercive and mimetic isomorphic forces have changed the market's characteristics, which have put pressure on the municipality to act. The values that historically have been associated with public organisations are not as attractive for current and potential employees. The marketisation of the labour market urges the municipality to navigate, with a risk, in a reformed institutional environment, formed by the Cultural-Cognitive Pillar (Scott, 2014), despite formalisation based on political decisions.

5.2. *Definition(s) of employer branding*

Employer branding is the organisation's reputation as an employer among its workforce and potential employees. Therefore, employer branding in the organisation is being practised and carried out by the employees. Institutional theory for HRM stresses the dynamics between “organizational actors and their institutional environments” (Lewis et al., 2019, p. 330). The organisational actors and the employees will define the general view and the institutional environment of employer branding since they carry out the employer branding strategies. Despite the coherence of the overarching symbolism of employer branding, nearly every participant describes their definition, understanding and procedure of working with the employer brand differently. In the sense of understanding the employer brand and how to create an attractive employer, it is organised differently in the various documents and administrations. At first glance, it appeared frantic and slightly miscommunicated from a private employer branding perspective, where the aim often is unified brands (Sataoen & Waeraas, 2015). Still, it could be a symbolic challenge of how municipalities understand

themselves as a whole and as parts. This point of view is being accepted by institutional theory and normative isomorphism, which says that organisational fields, in this case, employer branding, are being defined by the three mechanisms, where normative isomorphism is one of them. Normative isomorphism influences education, and professions influence the right practices (Eriksson-Zetterquist, 2009). Therefore, the professions and professionals define the municipality's organisational field of employer branding. All interviewees were in some way involved in processes of how to be a more attractive employer and how their attractiveness should be embodied in the employer brand; they had different backgrounds, both educationally and vision-wise. In accordance with Lewis et al. (2019), institutional theory for HRM is prevalent through the personal dynamic and the institutional environments. This institutional logic explains how experiences and beliefs affect behaviour and establish norms in different administrations. The general view of employer branding in the organisation, among the managers and HR professionals interviewed and according to the analysed documents, is widespread. It was mainly due to their different institutional logics, such as contexts, background and education, and it was evident when asked about their understanding of being an attractive employer. The interviewees mention instrumental/functional attributes such as benefits, pay and career development, and more personal traits and symbolic attributes, such as doing something good for the public (Slaughter et al., 2004).

“Is it pretty much about the communication around us as employers, how we communicate, how we are seen and how we work with messages and images and social media and events and introductions. There are a lot of those interactions and websites. That's a lot.” (Interview C)

“Of course, it's about a branding issue, but employer branding is much, much more than that. I usually say that to the committee as well, the way we talk about us and what you talk about us, and where we are seen and in what contexts is an employer brand. So for me, employer branding is really everything, collective agreements. /.../ But how do I appear and how professional am I? And work environment issues are also things that we like to put aside, but for me it is also employer branding, what work environment we offer and then it is also about planning, steering towards a good work environment.” (Interview F).

All interviewees agreed to the importance of being an attractive employer, but in different ways, as the quotes above symbolise. Employer branding is indeed a broad term, and depending on the institutional logic of the perception of employer branding, the interviewees view the case somewhat differently. Some interviewees express more external features of employer branding, such as branding, image and surface, and some interviewees interpret

employer branding with more internal components, such as collective agreements and work environment and that it includes “everything”. According to Randstad (2022), the five most important factors when choosing an employer for potential employees are a nice work environment, interesting work tasks, work-life balance, attractive compensation and benefits, and employment security. As discussed in the introduction and previous research and by some interviewees, employer branding is both external and internal. Internal employer branding creates internal ambassadors, and as one interviewee expressed when asked about how the longstanding work on being an attractive employer has been carried out:

“I think it's important to take care of the employees you have. And ensure that they become good ambassadors for our brand and for our workplace because I think then we have 320 employees who can all recommend their workplace based on their different professions. And then I think it's the best channel.” (Interview E).

Municipal employer branding is, thus, not only branding but more about having attractive features that are valued by existing employees (imaginable ambassadors) and potential employees. The origin of the employer brand strategy of the municipality urges a legitimising process of performing qualitative competence to the public. As found in the literature review, their position as an organisation serving the public becomes evident in the necessity of being an attractive employer in order to meet the competence supply. Employer branding within Gothenburg City is legitimised and understood as an aspect of competence supply and how the organisation can attract competent employees to meet the growing challenges to serve their purpose. The purpose of serving the community is a major driving force within the municipality and implies and affects the employer brand. The public sector motivation will be further discussed in section 5.5.

5.3. Shaping the story: media pressure and the loss of legitimacy

The legitimising processes, and the loss of legitimacy are linked, and are multiplied, to the pressure of constantly being reviewed by local and national media. Following the examining reasoning of institutional theory, the employer is only one of many sources that build the organisation's story (Lewis et al., 2019). Gothenburg City does not only have to provide, for example, a nice work environment, interesting work tasks, work-life balance, attractive compensation and benefits and employment security, as presented by Randstad (2022), but they also struggle with erroneous preconceived notions about how they are as employers. Erroneous preconceived notions have been set in history and public opinion but are also nurtured today by the media. In differentiation from the private sphere, a Swedish public

organisation must hand out all documents that are not secreted, in agreement with Public Access to Information and Secrecy Act, 2 chap 3 § (2009/400), which is a big majority of the documentation (Göteborg stad, n.d.c). Interviewee N expressed that one of the major differences between private and public employers in crisis and restructuring processes is the media coverage:

“There is a difference, however, in that we are in the public sector. Everything we do is completely open to the public. All documents can be requested. Everything we do we have to give out. When you work at an independent business, you do not have the same situation at all, where you work internally in the organisation. No one can get any information really. But we're used to it. /.../ There is a steady stream of requests to hand over documents and we live in a democracy and we want it that way, so it's not strange at all. That's the way it should be. But it affects the general public.” (Interview N).

The employees at Gothenburg City experience that their review differs from private organisations and generates multiple pictures for the employees and the inhabitants. Without being explicitly spoken or documented, it is evident that there are two separate emotions that the interviewees are experiencing. The natural response of being examined by the media due to their public responsibility, expressed by Interview N as something natural, and the negative emotion of being unable to influence the perception the media creates. Interview A confirmed this reasoning when answering the challenge of being a public employer.

“Yes, but you always have a reputation or headlines in the newspapers. Because the newspapers don't write about the positive things. No, and now it sounds as if I'm being victimised and that's not what I mean, but it's something that we have a very hard time influencing what a newspaper writes. It is absolutely right that you should report if something has gone wrong, which it does. There is nothing strange about it, or rather, it shouldn't, but it happens. /.../ And at the same time, it must stand up to review. But sometimes it happens that they pick up the wrong details or have a slightly wrong focus and start by creating sensation or headlines.” (Interview A)

All interviewees that discuss the media coverage express the fact that the media, in their democratic role, reports on their work as something that is both desirable and a sensemaking factor for the municipality. It can be considered a natural democratic process. Nevertheless, it changes the dynamics between public and private employers, emphasised in the Cultural-Cognitive Pillar (Scott, 2014). The mimetic isomorphic processes that have shaped the employer branding strategy have not considered that private organisations do not, to the same extent, have this medial pressure that leads to parallel story building. The media attention is mainly a question of organisational legitimacy, where the interviewees experience differences in the relationship between the organisation and their surroundings (Eriksson-Zetterquist, 2009). The quotes above depict the opposite emotion, and the negative aspect is that the media dominates the organisation's picture which influences the institutional

environment the municipality navigates within. The interviewees experience that the narrative media most commonly are using is not an equal representation of the organisation and that this narrative is outside the interviewees' power. Eriksson-Zetterquist (2009) explains that organisations will be exposed to negative comments when there is a lack of legitimacy, which is the case for Gothenburg City. There is a discrepancy between the common media coverage and the representatives' emotions towards their employer. The distinction has been transferred into a navigation action to form a centralised external responsive message to nuance the organisation's picture. In some senses, the organisation and the employer branding are decoupled and separated. Meyer and Rowan (1977) suggest that the result of decoupled organisation mainly comes from two organisational structures: formal and informal. The abovementioned distinction can be analysed contrastingly; our collected data can not define the "correct" way.

On the one hand, (1) the society, norms and laws change the formal structure; in this case, the media and this one is easily changed. The informal organisational structure is the project that comes within the organisation, trying to organise the different administrations to nuance the "picture" of the municipality. On the other hand, (2) the formal structure can easily be changed, and the laws and costumes of employer branding have made Gothenburg City act this way, creating a joint project and employer branding strategy. The informal structure is the media trying to organise the society and people in and outside the organisation to think about Gothenburg City in a certain way. The collected data and theory can not define the formal or informal structure of the discrepancy. However, there is a condition of loosely coupled structures where the result is that they are not fully separated but that there is a connection between the structures. Interviewee B, an HR professional working with employer branding, describes this connection as a way of "nuancing the picture" as a response to increasing legitimacy, which (Tang, 2017) emphasises as inevitable for survival.

"Nuances the picture, because you can read a lot about public service and what you can do, and we want to be there and maybe give a nuanced picture, another picture of what it is like to work within a municipality or within Gothenburg City, then specifically. For us" (Interview B).

Nuancing the picture is a way of fighting back the media and navigating in the institutional environment the municipality is bound to. The Cultural-Cognitive Pillar (Scott, 2014) is both the media, the municipality's fighting back (nuancing the picture) and pre-conceived notions about the municipality; that together stress a socially mediated construction of a common framework of meanings of how attractive the municipality is as an employer. The

municipality has to navigate between preconceived notions and newspaper articles about them when building its employer branding strategy to gain legitimacy.

5.4. Decoupling administrations and their implications for employer branding

The institutional environment affects how Gothenburg City can and needs to navigate to be an attractive employer that could and should be problematised. Some aspects in previous sections have been highlighted as characteristics, such as medial pressure and nuancing the picture, that create an institutional environment that the municipality needs to navigate to gain legitimacy in the labour market. It is sometimes inevitable to distinguish where the isomorphic forces challenge and the characteristics influence strategic decision-making. It has become evident that these processes are in symbiosis and nurture each other to gain public trust. Once detached, which, elaborated previously, sometimes has been the case historically, leads to a loss of legitimacy and lack of attractiveness. In the strive to navigate the institutional environment and the symbiosis, the municipality is bound to have been disclosed to lead to decoupling strategies. Interview A expressed common confusion when we ask on how the interviewees experienced their attractiveness:

“Ours [the administration], or the City’s?”

In contrast to private employer branding literature, one employer brand does not seem to benefit municipalities like private organisations (Wæraas, 2008). More individualised employer branding strategies are multifaceted in how they could be problematised since it enables adaption to each institutional environment; however, differentiation can lead to less affiliation to the employer, both for the overarching employer, Gothenburg City, but even more evident for the different administrations where strategies are bound to the institutional environment and characteristics that influence the specific profession the most.

The steering document of GCPAE 2019–2023 presents a more centralised and unified action toward being an attractive employer. It is also written that all administrations need to adopt the overarching employer branding strategies and apply them to their context and administration, which reveals an indication of distinguishing from the one employer branding strategy. The delegated responsibility, emanating from the direction of the parent company, can create a situation of ‘decoupling’, which indicates a separation from the formal structure to what is happening in practice (Eriksson-Zetterquist, 2009). The parent company is shaping and defining pressures for the subunits to follow (Kostova, 1999); the administrations need

to adapt to the parent company's direction. A more 'decoupled' strategy, more individualised administrations, is accurate, to a greater extent, adapted to the elaborated symbiosis, where the administrations conform to their differences instead of potentially more detachment from the legitimising aspects by sticking to one structure. This symbiosis results from the formal and informal Pillars that create a sphere where the municipality is both navigating and is affected into a decoupling strategy to be authorised as legitimate actors (Furusten, 2013; Scott, 2014). As is often the case of contemporary forces, it is hard to distinguish which Pillar dominates their interrelation. The steering document could be considered a regulative factor in setting the condition for upcoming employer branding strategies. The steering factors are simultaneously empowered and enabled by Normative and Cultural-Cognitive Pillars that foster a social behaviour that establishes a delegated responsibility. The navigating process, and the symbiosis, happen within the interrelation of these Pillars, of what is decided and confirmed within the structures for being an attractive employer.

It is further possible to problematise, and contextualise, the aspects that have led to this navigating process. One form of the prevalence of decoupled employer branding strategies comes from the different amounts of recognition the administrations' experiences. Some administrations, such as the Functional Support Administration, the Labour Market and Adult Education, and the Environmental Administration, have struggled because they are not the "obvious choice" for the professionals in their fields. Whereas other, such as The Education Administration, still has an obvious position for upper secondary school teachers. Different administrations, employing different professionals, experience dissimilar challenges meeting a solid competence supply. It is noticeable that the recognition and awareness of the different administrations as an employer is the driving force for their recruitment process since the administrations that employ the same professions experience 'internal' competition. For example, the Functional Support Administration competes for assistant nurses regionally, with Region Västra Götaland, and in the municipality with the Elderly Care Administration. This administration is thus not the "obvious choice" for all nurses.

Moreover, The Labour Market and Adult Education is not always the obvious choice for guidance counsellors. According to interviewee E from this administration, potential employees do not see this administration as their obvious choice, but rather upper secondary schools as the most common choice of employer. Whereas some administrations, for example, the Primary School Administration, are the "obvious choice" for the professionals in the field (Interview H), in this case, teachers and pedagogues. A majority of the primary schools are still public, 21,8% of the elementary school students are in independent school

units (Skolverket, 2021), and the competition with the private sphere is not too strong, according to interviewee H. This is a standpoint that interviewee N confirms but for the upper secondary school. In this case, the employer branding of the professional teachers instead needs to focus on attracting people to the profession to ensure a future competence supply.

According to Interview K, a further aspect that needs to be taken into consideration of decoupled subsidiaries is the distributed authority of GCPAE 2019-2023. Distributed authority in this large organisation has created a diffusion of responsibility, and the slightly different institutional environments nurtured various understandings of what the programme asked for. Interview K's reasoning elaborates on how separated, structured, or unified actions could be limiting or synergistic.

“Because it is clear that if you work in HR, we usually work so that we begin to clarify, make clear, who is actually responsible. How does it work? And it is obvious that in such a huge organisation, where everyone works together and the concept of “diffusion of responsibility” appears when things do not go so well for example who takes in and decides in this matter? Who actually decides then?” (Interview K)

Applying the *parent company's* direction for the subunit enables different understandings and priorities, which can foster an unequal foundation between the administrations. Despite that, the City Management Office has realised this potential problem and navigates for a unified toolbox for the different administrations; it contextualises how information can quickly become confined in large organisations. On account of the above reasoning, confirmingly in Gothenburg City, it is evident that a more precise focus on employer branding has not reached all the managers and employees. Out of the 15 interviews, five employees are not actively using GCPAE 2019-2023 nor its strategies. However, these interviewees mentioned that they worked on this topic anyway. Accordingly, it is further possible to detect another decoupling aspect since this programme, in this case, could be seen as the formal structure and direction, and the informal structure and coordination are the difference between the administrations, in accordance with Meyer and Rowan (1977). The potential effect of this decoupling between direction and coordination can create a distinction in how employees perceive their employer. Individualised structures can also lead to actions on their service to the public that indicate a differentiation in service and an equal contribution to society. Therefore, the perceived internal organisational legitimacy could be questioned and extend the experienced separation between the administrations and their employees too much. They lead to more detached administrations, with less understanding of each other's needs. Additionally, all employees represent the same employer, Gothenburg City; they still exist

purely in their overall context and where the employees' understanding of the municipality's attractiveness also affects the strategies' potential success and public recognition.

The different professions among the administrations also influence their employer branding strategy. The employee's connection to the profession is more robust than to the organisation (Purcell & Boxall, 2016) in that employees perceive their own profession as more valuable than others. In Gothenburg City, this was depicted on an administrative level rather than a profession in the administration we studied. Respondents presented their administration's purpose as a highly valuable service for the public well-being without diminishing other administrations. Our empirical material differentiates from Purcell and Boxall's (2016) argument that this separation could lead to a disparity between the individual and the organisational values. Instead, our data revealed a common foundation of supporting the organisational values, which is doing good for the inhabitants and not only the individual aspiration. Administrations that employ the same professionals, such as Functional Support and Elderly Care Administration, instead propose differences in the administrations rather than the professional role. Moreover, this internal competition from administration to administration where, among other things, leadership style, working conditions, and team spirit becomes essential in how to be as attractive. Depending on their characteristics and institutional environment, the administrations face different challenges that have led to strategic decisions that have generated decoupled administrations that benefit and limit Gothenburg City's perception of being a legitimate and attractive employer.

5.5. *"We are proud of the benefit we do for those we are there for"*

PSM is defined as "an individual's predisposition to respond to motives grounded primarily or uniquely in public institutions and organizations" (J. L. Perry & Wise, 1990, p. 368). The employer branding strategies touching upon PSM may sometimes be hard to reach since they have to capture the individuals who are "primarily or uniquely" motivated in public organisations. Therefore, these workers may not have their eyes on other jobs. The wording and the definition have been criticised and questioned by James Perry himself as too narrow (J. Perry, 2021). Thus, as Bakker et al. (2014) discussed, PSM will decrease if the job demands motivated by public servants are consistently high and job resources are consistently low. In consonance with institutional work, some organisational actors take on greater responsibilities than they are assigned to, which can be a cause of their great PSM. The story of PSM in employer branding is consequently more in terms of keeping the motivated

employees that the organisation already have and enabling them to contribute to the welfare and the public good.

In the case we examined, Gothenburg City, it is evident that PSM has influenced the general and strategic employer branding work. Without emphasising whether this has been positive or negative, there has been tremendous institutional work to maintain that PSM is part of the employer brand. Almost all interviewees argue that one of the most attractive aspects of working for their employer is to be able to do something good and build a better world/place/life for the people in the city. The tendencies of PSM become evident when the interviewees explain why they should be perceived as an attractive employer and workplace:

“That is what makes a difference. YOU are Gothenburg. /.../ the beauty of being part of this giant machinery for welfare and making a difference in people's lives and our administration.” (Interview D).

“In order for you to want to work in public organisations, I think you have to have some sort of understanding or desire or will to be involved and change society a little maybe. And then it is important for us as an organisation to show how we are involved and contribute” (Interview E).

These interviewees all highlight that will and desire to do something good for society and that it is honourable, is an aspect of being an attractive employer. Interview D further reflects on doing good for others as a competitive advantage. Thus, it is also important to deliver the vision to potential and current employees, as expressed by interviewee E. According to Moynihan and Pandey (2007), public organisations do have a responsibility to enable the employees to do and to feel like they are contributing to the welfare, a subject and duty that the interviewees are also touching upon. According to Interviewee L, the most important message and strength about why the municipality is an attractive employer was subsequently:

“/ ... / I still think that the basis is this thing to be able to make a difference in the everyday life of the citizens of Gothenburg, like no matter what and working with Gothenburg City, that's what we all want and it should also be very clear that what you get the opportunity to do and influence the development of the society and influence the everyday life of the citizens of Gothenburg. I still think that it is actually a basic message that should be included” (Interview L).

This maintenance of PSM being a part of the public brand is widely accepted but still expressed differently depending on one's professional role. In our set of data, the HR professionals view “the willingness to do good” as a competitive advantage (for example, Interview B; C; D;), but unit managers (for example, Interview I; L) (see table *Interview data* in 4.3.1.) that are closer to the core of the operation relate “the willingness to do good” to an important personal characteristic. HR professionals have not been seen as unconditionally legitimate actors, which nurtured an institutional logic, in delivering the operational core

(Lewis et al., 2019). The HR professionals' institutional work instead has been disruptive or adding to the existing foundation and not as an essential actor in complex issues (Lewis et al., 2019), and therefore overlooked. Going forward, PSM's historical and somewhat current identity-building could be problematised when, as mentioned, the social values of what is considered attractive change. Slaughter et al. (2004) presented in their research how symbolic attributes, such as PSM in this case, contribute to understanding the employer brand. These personality traits likely influence current and potential employees' understanding of the employer brand. In this case, what happens when this inner motivation is decreasing or is not enough to fill the competence supply needed, when for example, the older population is growing, and the municipality and the welfare system must increase their services? The fact that people want to work for the municipality "no matter what" and that they are motivated to develop the society, as the PSM theory explains, can be a reason why Gothenburg City is lagging behind in their employer branding work, as some of the interviewees have reflected on. According to some interviewees, the municipality might have seen itself as obvious to many employees. Hence, society has changed, and employer branding strategies might have started late. Interviewee M explains that the municipality has seen itself as obvious and was a bit late introducing employer branding strategies when asked about historical influences on being attractive:

"If we go even further back, the municipality may have seen themselves as a bit obvious because the municipality is, after all, society's largest employer and it may not have been that difficult to get people, so I think there has been a small satisfaction [en liten nöjdhet] that can be dangerous now, if they have not marketed themselves enough since they have always had it easy to get people" (Interview M).

A further conceptualisation of PSM as an ingrained personality trait concerns the sensemaking of the work situation for current employees. A situation not unique to our case organisation; their employer branding is constituted from personality traits since it is easier to relate to (Slaughter et al., 2004). The outset of GCPAE 2019-2023 is explained below.

"The city's employees are given the right conditions to be able to take responsibility for both the day-to-day operations and the development of the business. That everyone is involved in the workplace, in planning both the daily work and the development of the business, is a key to success. Everyone's combined power can contribute to us solving our mission, regardless of whether it's about finding new working methods to make more good for those we exist for, or about adapting the business to reduced resources" (Göteborgs stad, 2019).

It is stated that the employees have been given the right conditions "to make more good to those we exist for". To contextualise this reasoning, which is a part of the formal communication to interviewees, interviewee K explains that the municipality is lagging in the

organisation's different areas, for example, compensation and benefits, not due to their PSM work, but instead, the lack of market analysis. This is the opposite of mimetic and coercive isomorphism and explains the universal feeling that the municipality has not been resilient towards these forces (Lewis et al., 2019). Instead, the municipality has missed out on essential aspects, such as HR analytics, exemplified by Interviewee K, due to a lack of external input. Interviewee K further expresses, "They are not, it is not about one or two years behind, but we are soon talking a two-digit number of years back. There is or has been, a lack of tendency to imitate or learn from other organisations, potentially leading to less resilience in the market.

Evidentially, there is a distinction between the steering documents and the perceived reality, especially in some aspects. Further, another hindrance factor of performing the job your primary motivation relies on is re-organisations explained in interview N. Over the years, Gothenburg City has gone through numerous re-organisations. At the turn of the year 2020/2021, the district administration and social resource administration will be replaced by departmental administrations (Moberg, 2020). According to the interviews, the reorganisation is an aftereffect of a political decision to create equal welfare for the City's residents. This is just a contemporary example of a recurrent situation. As presented in the case description, Gothenburg is a segregated city with geographical differences in socioeconomic variables, such as education level, income and employment rate. Changing to departmental administrations instead of district geographical administrations aims to prevent the unequal welfare that district administrations might bring out. When asked to interview L on the biggest challenge with the perception of your employer branding, the respondent focused on reorganisations.

"Right now, I think it is a big challenge to have very frequent reorganisations in Gothenburg City and it has affected many people's view of the employer, because you don't get peace of mind at work. You change, and you can change managers. Many of my employees, including myself, have changed managers, perhaps the last one I have... During 2.5 years, I had 4 managers. /.../" (Interview L)

Almost all the interviewees have brought up this reorganisation, and both positive and negative factors of employer branding have been presented as a consequence of the reorganisation. Mainly, once this centralised re-organisation was finalised, the respondent expressed gratitude that the new structure would enable a more holistic work, but in the meantime, the same respondents expressed how demanding this period has been. For themselves but mainly for the employees operating in an unstructured environment. The employees do not have the time or resources to deliver the PSM that they are motivated and

aim to do; this affects the organisation's view internally. Not being able to perform and enjoy the biggest USP for being an attractive employer increases the risk of not being an attractive employer and the future services to the inhabitants. This is a negative cycle where the employer does not conform to the mimetic mechanisms that created the institutional environment (Scott, 2014). The employer branding strategy is built on the fact that people have an inner motivation that drives them towards positions in public service. Consequently, not being able to offer the potential and current employees their current USP altogether increases the risk of damaging the employer brand rather than strengthening it. The question of PSM and offering the potential to do good for society is, as mentioned, shaped by the shared beliefs of the employees and is an example of how these characteristics and the employer's navigation strategies exist in symbiosis with each other. The institutional environment and the active action of conforming to the environment are crucial for being authorised as legitimate actors (Furusten, 2013).

Furthermore, the employer branding built on PSM and “doing good for the inhabitants” has been detected, without being spoken of, as a self-fulfilling reality where other aspects historically have not been seen as equally important. The municipality's employer offer is not comparable in, for example, salary since it responds to the inner motivation of the employee. It may emanate from the municipality, historically being the obvious choice in the professions that are a majority in the organisation and is more likely to steer the agenda. Some interviewees explained that working in the municipality is not financially lucrative; hence, people want to work there. This view, emanating from a perspective where PSM has dominated the agenda of the historical brand, has now indicated a change in the municipality. A realisation that employees require more, especially when they cannot perform and help the inhabitants in their expected ways.

Lastly, according to Perry and Wise (1990), it is also essential to highlight the differences between PSM, altruism and pro-social motivation. Altruism is a part of PSM, but not all, and pro-social motivation is broader than PSM. Pro-social motivation is a desire to have a positive impact on other people and organisations in general. However, thinking about other people may not necessarily object to one's motivation to work for the greater public organisations. For Gothenburg City, this means that the employer branding strategy, which in many cases is altruistic, also must highlight the fact that the employees are given the possibility to do the best; for the employees to attract them, in the case of PSM. However, there is a limit to how much an organisation can push the PSM in their favour, and it can become an act of caring too much instead of doing the greater good:

“So, we actually include that [meaningful work] in our ads, it says ‘if you want to make a difference in the lives of children and families, or something like that. So yes, I write it in the introduction to our ads. However, it's a balancing act. We're not going back to some sort of Florence Nightingale spirit. That's not where we want to end up, it's in a professional way.” (Interview L)

5.6. One brand to rule them all? Navigating the complexities of employer branding in a multifunctional organisation

The different administrations have various difficulties and challenges; for example, the Elderly Care Administration was significantly affected by the pandemic and observed by the media. Resources (financial, organisational and labour) for employer branding could not be prioritised, according to the interviewees in this administration and the document analysis (Interview A & H; Göteborgs stad, 2021). Succeeding with one employer brand is consequently difficult since the conditions are divergent for the different administrations; the strategies of the different administrations in the question of employer branding are accordingly divergent. The peculiar subsidiaries can, however, be influenced by the parent company (Kostova, 1999); in some cases and senses, the interviewees refer to the parent company as Intraservice and, in some, Gothenburg City. The interviewees have clarified that the subsidiaries are not independent entities; they are just like Kostova (1999) explains, under pressure from the parent. Hence, the subsidiaries are also affecting each other both negatively and positively. According to some interviewees, they perceived the media attention, foremost the Elderly Care, during the pandemic affecting the whole organisation. Inquiries about if one common employer brand is helping or overthrowing, in this case, are subsequently of high interest to analyse and discuss. When differences arise between the organisation and its surroundings, organisational legitimacy can be threatened. In this media attention of the Elderly Care, threats regarding employer brand were primarily social pressure from society, which put pressure on how the elders were cared for and secured during the pandemic.

Media attention defines the employer brand for the separate administrations, and the organisation establishes the employer brand for the whole organisation. As discussed above, the parent company is putting pressure on the subsidiaries. For example, some interviewees who previously worked in the private sphere have experienced slow processes in the municipality due to the organisational structure and the organisation being politically steered. This is also commonly known as a prejudice about municipalities and their decision-making. These prejudices about the organisation are putting pressure on the legitimacy of the organisation and as an employer. Unlike status and reputation, legitimacy primarily needs to

be satisfied and earned. Above all, it is more important that there are no adverse problems to attribute to an organisation and that it can demonstrate good results (Eriksson-Zetterquist, 2009). Accordingly, one interviewee explained one side of the situation, “People don't give a shit about who and what administration it is, one says: ‘In Gothenburg City, everything takes a long time’” (Interview A). The adverse problems and prejudices about the organisation being slow may lead to losing legitimacy for them as an employer, generating a situation of collective punishment for some administrations. The formal structure of the organisation that wants to change with what happens in society, faster-moving decisions and a creative employer branding strategy are not always connected to the informal organisational structure, which is built on how the employees in the organisation are acting, and in this case, has been operating for a long time. On the other side of fast adaptation for legitimacy, interviewee N, who has been working in the municipality for over ten years (see table *Interview data* in 4.3.1.), argued that Gothenburg City works best when they are stable since people know what is expected of them and they can perform well.

Furthermore, interviewee E, who has been working in the private sector before, confirms the slow movement; but further argues that one reason for the slow process is due to being tax-funded. In this reasoning, being legitimate also ensures that the ‘right’ decision has been made, which requires reflective rationale to defend the decision. The result is a decoupled organisation with two structures that are not fully separated but have a certain connection between them (Eriksson-Zetterquist, 2009). The first structure is the affiliation between the employees' will to have a fast-moving creative employer branding strategy and the labour market. The second structure is the fact that municipalities have an organisational structure with forces and slow decision-making, leading the organisation to a situation where they are unconnected to the labour market and the private spheres' employer branding strategies.

Some administrations do and must work closely to develop and succeed with their employer branding. For example, the Labour Market and Adult Education Administration can fill in some gaps in the labour shortage or excess for other administrations. This is expressed in the half-time report (Göteborgs stad, 2021):

"Among other things, the administration [The Functional Support Administration] needs to do its own recruitment analysis, and they also work closely with the Labour Market and Adult Education Administration to meet the needs" (Göteborgs stad, 2021).

The different administrations can accordingly take advantage of each other and the organisation's size to develop their employer branding strategy. Most interviewees have

expressed how the organisation's size is both an advantage and a disadvantage for the organisation's work with employer branding. Hence, a lack of confidence in competence supply can make managers afraid to use the size the municipality can offer. It is a large organisation with development potential. The positive factors that the municipality can use as (internal) employer branding is hampered by external factors, as well as personal factors of managers, see citation below from interview I. The institutional environment the administrations navigate in pushes the contemporary crisis of competence shortage, making it difficult to follow the long-term strategy, for example, on internal movement. The institutional environment, and the current competence shortage, limit the municipality's possibilities to act as a rational tool. In addition, there is internal competition for labour. Interview J expresses that there is a common strategy among administrations regarding staffing on how separated/combined the recruitment activities are between the administrations. Still, this function occurs on a higher level in the organisation among HR managers. For interviewee J, the most critical component is to fill the staffing gap; therefore, they have to be fast and compete with, for example, the Elderly Care Administration. Interviewee I elaborates on another aspect of the question concerning the possibilities of being an attractive employer.

"But from my perspective, I don't have any major contact with, for example, HR specialists in the Elderly Care Administration. No, but because we work in the same system, and Gothenburg City's system is like Personec. And intraservice is our engine where like these programmes are installed if I do say so. So then we can see that yes, okay? This candidate previously had a job in Elderly Care, /.../ and so based on that, we can make an assessment that okay, why did the person exit, was it because the person did not work or the person chose to quit because of studies or whatever it may be? So from my perspective, I have no contact around like that [working together with different administrations] part, for us is a bit more like a competition because we need to recruit people, and then you sit there and just start chasing people. So it's sort of like that, but of course, there is collaboration within the City, but then it's sort of more strategic." (Interview J).

"That you can quite easily get to try another job since the City is so huge. But I can think this way... It pretty much depends on the manager. Yes, that you [as a manager] really take this on. /.../ A lot of people [managers and recruiters] become like 'I'm so afraid of my staffing so I can't raise my hat [sv: lyfta hatten]'. And then not much happens for those employees." (Interview I).

An advantage is that the municipalities can also, with their specific position in society, offer a stable position and long-term contracts. In comparison to firms working within the same field as some of the administration, for example, the Elderly Care, and the Functional Support, the municipality can, in most cases, offer a full-time job, and not only part-time or temporary

posts as in many alternative private institutions (Interview A; G; D). It has been expressed by several interviewees that giving notice to employees is very rare in the municipality because of several reasons; for example, there is always a lack of employees, and since the organisation is so big, there is almost always a possibility to change position or administration. This is subsequently also an advantage for the employees if they want to change work tasks or positions; one of the interviewees expresses it this way on the strengths of the municipality:

“I actually think that with myself as an example, that is to work in such a large municipality. It's a huge opportunity. I have really done a lot of different things in the municipality. As an employer we can offer a lot of opportunities within the same employer. You don't have to change employer, you're not boring if you're at the same one, but you can actually have very different types of assignments in a variety of different businesses“ (Interview L).

The interviewees describe the advantage of being a big organisation as the many different career paths and competence development steps. In unison, Randstad (2022) presents that 61% of the respondents in their report think that it is crucial that the possibility for competence development and retraining by their employer. However, only 44% of the Swedish employees felt their employers could offer them enough competence development. Moreover, 58% say they would stay at their employer if competence development were offered (Randstad, 2022). In this case, Gothenburg City would subsequently have a competitive advantage since the opportunity for career development is extensive. This aspect of being a big organisation is helping Gothenburg City regarding employer branding. However, how competence development is presented towards the potential or current employee, who is a possible brand ambassador, must also be considered.

Further disadvantages of being such a big organisation are that striving for one employer brand might be overthrown in some senses and for some administrations. The different administrations are in the same institutional environment, in some sense, the same organisational field; hence, all administrations are not in the same branch. Therefore the administrations affect each other through cultural and normative processes, and the inevitable situation of homogenisation happens. The isomorphic forces in this organisational field shape internal operations and are developed and reproduced from local laws, norms, values, cultures and regulations. The isomorphic forces in the organisation have shaped a system that strives for a common salary and benefits. However, the different branches and the organisational field that each administration or profession is connected to also shape how, for example, the wages and benefits should look like. In some administrations, it becomes a clash

between the different organisational fields since they still, in some cases, have to compete with the private business. Keeping one common employer brand subsequently becomes difficult, as interview K elaborates on the questions of challenges with the employer branding.

“After all, we are a small part of a large group and it is clear when the group has an idea of what branding is and how it should be done and what conditions you are allowed to have... I absolutely buy it /.../ If we go into what are attractive employers, we should keep this up from time to time, we can discuss what is called working conditions in the branding. And if I go even further into, then it starts to be about salaries and benefits and such, for example. Then it is clear that when we compare ourselves with private business, it can differentiate an awful lot of money. And we always have that ‘why do we [in this administration] have certain salary figures when health and social care earns a certain level’. With all respect, that's how it is. And it is clear that the challenge now is that we are also part of the group, which means that they standardise on certain things”. (Interview K).

The interviewee above, representing a generally higher-paid and educated administration (see 4.3.1. *Interview Data*), also discusses the challenges and gender inequalities in the labour market. The strive for one employer brand and a joint employer offer becomes difficult in a not gender-neutral labour market, following Interview Ks reasoning; where most male-dominated professions are paid more than female-dominated occupations (Sherif-Trask, 2014). One of the interviewees that have been working in the Elderly Care Administration for more than ten years (see 4.3.1. *Interview Data*) discusses the wage formation among assistant nurses in the following way when asked about the preconceptions that low wages are dominating the understanding:

“Yes, it is female dominated. There's a lot of history still left in it, it's not a high-paying work in that way. But you haven't either... Now I'm talking a little against myself, but the educational level is still high school competence on the degree of difficulty and then that's where the salaries are now. On the other hand, we need to raise it so that it becomes comparable. I don't know if you know the basic assessment [bas värdering] is the degree of difficulty of different professions, and then we are still a little behind compared to the male professions.” (Interview G).

The organisation is not a rational entity and the wage formation follows society and its ingrained patterns regarding the wage gap between occupations, where male-dominated occupations tend to pay more than female-dominated occupations (Sherif-Trask, 2014). Thus, they have similar skill levels according to interview G. The different administrations are in the same organisational field, not because they are in the same branch but in the same organisation. Therefore the administrations affect each other through different forms of isomorphism; coercive, mimetic and normative. However, other organisational fields from outside the organisations, created from for example being in the same branch, normative

isomorphism, affect the administrations differently regarding wages, as presented by Interview G. To clarify, even though the administration exists in the same organisational field, they still could perceive different aspects of their institutional environment depending on their professional differentiations, such as level of education, the municipality as an obvious choice, demographics, inequalities, et cetera. The different administrations experience internal and external forces embedded in their characteristics that are conformed and bound to their institutional environment, which affect their navigation to become attractive employers.

6. Discussion and conclusions

In this chapter, we present our interlinked final discussions, conclusions from the above-detected themes, and our primary reflections on the contemporary phenomenon of employer branding in municipalities. The three Pillars (Scott, 2014) will connect the characteristics to each other to understand how the municipality navigates in their institutional environment. The institutional environment includes plenty of normative, coercive and mimetic pressures on organisations; hence, we will not be able to cover the whole institutional environment. Our thesis explores a limited part of the employer branding phenomena in municipalities; therefore, we will also explore and provide some of these limitations and insights for future research.

6.1. Discussion

In relevance to our aim and how the municipality navigates, we found the following forces that pressure the employer branding strategy; marketisation, media attention, political economy, PSM, demographic changes, gender inequalities, and public pre-conceptions. These characteristics are a mix of the three Pillars of Scott (2014). In the Regulative Pillar, we detect the political economy, demographic changes and gender inequalities; in the Normative Pillar, we witness the marketisation; in the Cultural-Cognitive Pillar, we detect media attention, PSM and public pre-conceptions. The three elements work together in this robust institutional environment, and the municipalities are navigating their employer branding strategies in agreement with them. Characteristics such as the political economy, the Regulative Pillar, have nurtured an urgent need for re-organisation, aiming for a more equal welfare state. Furthermore, transparency not only to the media but to its employees and future employees is a characteristic of the employer branding strategy of the municipality, the Cultural-Cognitive Pillar. Historically, the municipalities have relied on being the obvious choice in many sectors, the Cultural-Cognitive Pillar and their PSM being able to offer jobs that serve the community, the cultural-cognitive Pillar, together with the status of the professions, the Cultural-Cognitive Pillar. However, some interviewees have expressed that the work with employer branding and being an attractive employer is lagging behind. This could result from the municipality relying too much on the characteristics detected in the Cultural-Cognitive Pillar. The aforementioned aspects of the Cultural-Cognitive Pillar have operated together with the demographic changes, the Regulative Pillar, that challenge society today, delivering services to an increasing population. All these characteristics, and Pillars,

have changed the dynamics for municipalities' employer branding, forcing the municipality to navigate towards strategies of competence supply, a subject many interviewees have communicated as vital for the municipality today and in the future.

According to our analysis based on the empirical material, institutional theory and previous research, a municipality is not a private organisation and should not strive to be one. This is a requirement to be considered when composing employer branding strategies for municipalities. Early in the process, it was undeniable that the detected characteristics were attributes of the institutional environment the municipality is navigating within and not challenges they are facing right now. Municipalities exist in an institutional environment, and their characteristics are based on this environment and its isomorphic forces and Pillars. For example, they are politically steered, and democratic decision-making and media attention are part of who they are, a public organisation. The Regulative Pillar (the welfare state) and the Culture-Cognitive Pillar (the media) influence the municipalities' behaviour. Subsequently, the institutional environment enforces norms and behaviour that affect the municipalities' conform to be authorised as legitimate actors. Despite this, the adaptation and navigation of employer branding strategies are still not considered rational for the organisation. Instead, the employer branding strategies have materialised by isomorphic forces, pressured by the institutional environment, which has a few distinctive differences for the examined administrations.

The employer branding strategies are not fully understood nor embedded by the whole organisation and all its administrations. Thus, isomorphic forces predominantly copy existing employer branding strategies in the strive for legitimacy; in this case, from the private market, which is not directly applicable to the institutional environment the municipality operates within. This results in an organisation that does not act as the rational entity it “should be” but is shaped by isomorphic forces and the Pillars. We have argued that the municipality is affected by isomorphic forces; they adapt to the employer branding trend. Interviewee F, who is relatively new in the organisation (see table *Interview data* in 4.3.1.), thinks they might be waking up too late. There have been normative rules in the organisation of how to be and handle being an attractive employer; hence, new normative systems and codes of conduct from the outside have led to the municipality having to, through mimetic isomorphism, address these employer branding strategies. But since these employer branding strategies are adapted from private organisations, they will struggle to become normative for the municipality with separate values, goals and objectives.

One strategy that has dominated private employer branding is to attach organisational values that unify the organisation, and the employer brand (Dean et al., 2016; Wallace et al., 2011). The identity of the municipality, serving the community, has subsequently also been a highly ingrained USP of their employer branding strategy as a mimetic isomorphism, ingrained from characteristics detected in the Cultural-Cognitive Pillar. It is a natural aspect of being responsible for serving the community; nevertheless, it further nurtures a position that influences the strategic work of an attractive employer. In Gothenburg City, where it is generally accepted, that the employer offers, still, in the sense of salary and benefits is below the private sector. This increases the significance of the organisation's purpose, and where the municipality relies too much on the Cultural-Cognitive Pillar, especially with progressively more challenging society. Especially when outer, pandemic, and inner, restructurings, circumstances have aggravated the employees' possibilities to perform high quality to the inhabitants. Instead of PSM being a synergetic factor, it is potentially an antagonistic factor which decreases the employees motivation and defiles the recognition of a legitimate employer. An indication that Weske et al. (2020) experienced. An emotion which potentially is enforced by media's coverage and the public understanding of the service, when it is not performing as is "supposed to".

To ease the emotional and motivational factor, the municipality has additionally begun to put other strategies to practice and take advantage of its size, for example, offering training and internal movement. Still, it requires unity and insinuates transfers, of employees, between departments and administrations to an even greater extent to find work conditions for employees to nurture their satisfaction. The normative rules that were applied to ensure an overall attractiveness through internal mimetic isomorphism inevitably created internal competition over the same professionals to meet the general crisis of competence supply. The internal competition, and lack of resources, have subsequently limited the managers' willingness to transfer employees since it exerts an already tough working conditions. To further attract and retain employees, the administration has needed to differentiate their working conditions to potential employees instead of being similar. All the characteristics urged for reconceptualisation in the employer branding strategy have further nurtured more individualised strategies in terms of leadership, salary, and work-life balance, among others. It opposes the normative rules that contempts employer offer and purpose. The municipality, therefore, navigates and embraces different types of Normative, and Regulative Pillars, which generate different isomorphic forces for the administrations depending on their internal or external competition.

Nonetheless, there exists a decoupling of the administrations since they serve different purposes and therefore demand different structures and strategies when attracting employees. These purposes are used to be an attractive employer and as a mechanism that individualises the various administrations. In addition, the different administrations exist in different organisational fields, putting them in various institutional environments. The various administrations have different contemporary strategies and structures since some might have. They should have a stronger employer brand connected towards PSM than others, making it challenging to be one brand. Organically, the administration has benefited from a differentiating strategy concerning structures for being an attractive employer, but it does not mean producing several unique brands. This is likely the case in private umbrella organisations. Preferably, confirming (Leijerholt et al., 2019) findings, continue to nurture positive perception and attractiveness for separated administrations rather than a unique brand to create attractiveness internally and externally. It emphasises building structures, such as using PSM as an add-on instead of something to rely on, to adapt and take advantage of the slightly individualised isomorphic forces. To emanate from which development goals that are essential for one specific administration and its individuals to enable the best service for all inhabitants.

To conclude, the characteristics of the municipality's employer branding strategy that we have found are; marketisation, media attention, political economy, PSM, demographic changes, gender inequalities, and public pre-conceptions, which have been discussed above. These character traits shape the institutional environment the municipalities are bound to. It becomes clear that the institutional environment is firmly institutionalised due to the presence of all three Pillars and the isomorphic forces. By reason of the character traits and the strong institutional environment, municipalities react more than act when navigating their institutional environment, striving and needing more legitimacy to become more attractive employers. Consequently, the administrations are presenting an inclination to differentiate themselves from the parent organisation, challenging the possibility of being 'one brand'. Overall, this study contributes to a better understanding of municipal employer branding and sheds light on the importance of considering organisational structure and norms when developing branding strategies. The mystery of municipal employer branding is that it is more connected towards being legitimised as an attractive employer, not mere branding.

6.2. Future research and limitations

This thesis examines employer branding from an employer and managerial perspective, utilising institutional theory. However, the collected data and research aim do not address how potential or current employees perceive the organisation. To benefit the municipality and society as a whole, it is important to explore and analyse external perspectives on being an attractive employer. Leijerholt et al. (2022) discuss the need for HR strategies to align with employee values and contribute to the overall employer brand. This thesis focuses solely on analysing the HR strategies governing the organisation and its administration, revealing how they navigate their institutional environment. Future research should explore how current and prospective employees perceive these values in their day-to-day work, offering valuable insights.

Based on previous research and analysis, employer branding is a private sector trend that has influenced municipal practices. However, there is a lack of data on this marketisation process in the thesis. Interviews have revealed that the municipality has been impacted by external trends. Different perspectives on this trend have been observed among interviewees, depending on their administration, position, and tenure within the municipality. Future research can draw on institutional theory and explore isomorphic forces when examining employer branding marketisation in municipalities. Some interviewees have mentioned that time pressure affects their perception of their profession, particularly in administrations like Elderly Care. It is the responsibility of employers to facilitate employees' ability to serve the public effectively, as emphasised by PSM. The municipality's functioning has been influenced by political and societal pressures, such as New Public Management (NPM). Further studies that bridge HRM and political science concepts, including NPM, would be valuable for understanding how municipalities navigate their institutional environment.

The interviewees have presented organisational changes and re-organisations that have occurred repeatedly in the last 20 years. The constant changes have been proposed as positive and negative in Gothenburg City. We have explored some of these effects on employer branding in terms of PSM and not having the resources to do good for the public; hence, it would be of high interest to explore further how these organisational changes affect the municipality in terms of having legitimacy and, subsequently, being an attractive employer. It would additionally be interesting to draw on institutional theory to explore and understand through pressures and forces the emotions the employee's experience during these discontinuities. To understand how this influences the potential to be an attractive employer.

As discussed in 5.4. the formal and informal organisational structures (Meyer & Rowan, 1977) can be analysed differently since our collected data has limitations and cannot be defined "more" correctly. Therefore, a suggestion for future research is to collect more material to understand the discrepancy between the standard media coverage and the representatives' emotions towards their employer. More data regarding the media's role for municipalities in their work to become more attractive employers is needed to understand the loosely coupled structures present in Gothenburg City and probably in more municipalities.

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Appendix A

