IT ALL STARTS FROM WITHIN

A multi-case study on internal branding
Abstract

Branding is a widely researched and discussed area, but the focus tends to be aimed towards business-to-consumer (B2C) companies rather than business-to-business settings (B2B). Brands per se used to be seen as the visuals belonging to an organization, but there has been a shift in meanings and it now includes perceptions and recognition of a brand - both internally and externally. Internal branding refers to company efforts to influence their employees to live the brand, which is explained as the organizational and managerial efforts to infuse enthusiasm into the employees in order for them to perform their best and to feel connected to the brand and the corporate values. This study focuses on internal branding, more specifically the managerial efforts taken to influence employees. In order to fulfill the purpose, we conducted a multi-case study with eight in-depth semi-structured interviews with two companies. The results show that if an organization and managers have the possibility to connect corporate brand identity and brand values with internal activities, the employees are more likely to show brand commitment, which in turn leads them into living the brand. However, incorporating such activities can be difficult due to various reasons, such as financial limitations, but it was found that managers who are involved and continuously engaging with their employees have a higher probability of making employees live the brand, than the managers who do not have an ongoing dialogue with staff members. Furthermore, it was apparent that internal communication should be a cornerstone of every business’ daily operations as it is a useful internal branding tool, seeing that it can have an impact on the way employees are understanding the brand.

Keywords

Internal Branding, Internal Communication, Living the Brand, Brand Commitment
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Table of Contents

1 INTRODUCTION .......................................................................................................................... 8
  1.1 BACKGROUND....................................................................................................................... 8
  1.2 PROBLEM DISCUSSION ......................................................................................................... 9
  1.3 PURPOSE ............................................................................................................................... 12
  1.4 RESEARCH QUESTIONS ....................................................................................................... 12
  1.5 OUTLINE OF THESIS .......................................................................................................... 12

2 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK ................................................................................................. 13
  2.1 AN OVERVIEW OF THE CORPORATE BRAND .............................................................. 13
    2.1.1 An Internal Perspective of Corporate Brand Identity ...................................................... 14
    2.1.2 Organizational Culture .................................................................................................. 15
  2.2 AN OVERVIEW OF BRANDING ......................................................................................... 16
    2.2.1 Branding in a B2B Setting ............................................................................................. 17
    2.2.2 Branding and the Organizational Challenge .................................................................. 17
  2.3 INTERNAL BRANDING ....................................................................................................... 18
    2.3.1 The Brand Promise ....................................................................................................... 19
    2.3.2 Brand-supporting Behavior & Brand Citizenship Behavior ........................................ 20
    2.3.3 Brand Commitment ....................................................................................................... 22
    2.3.4 Living the Brand ........................................................................................................... 23
    2.3.5 Internal Brand Equity .................................................................................................. 24
    2.3.6 Internal Communication ............................................................................................... 24
  2.4 CONNECTING THE CONCEPTS ....................................................................................... 25

3 METHODOLOGY ......................................................................................................................... 26
  3.1 RESEARCH APPROACH ....................................................................................................... 26
    3.1.1 Deductive, Inductive or Abductive Research ................................................................ 26
    3.1.2 Quantitative vs. Qualitative Research Approach .......................................................... 27
  3.2 RESEARCH DESIGN ............................................................................................................ 28
    3.2.1 Multiple Case Studies .................................................................................................. 28
    3.2.2 Exploratory Research ................................................................................................... 29
  3.3 DATA SOURCES ................................................................................................................... 29
  3.4 DATA COLLECTION METHOD .............................................................................................. 30
    3.4.1 In-depth Interviews ....................................................................................................... 30
  3.5 SAMPLING ............................................................................................................................. 31
    3.5.1 Sample Selection .......................................................................................................... 31
    3.5.2 Respondent Validation .................................................................................................. 32
  3.6 ETHICAL PRINCIPLES ......................................................................................................... 33
    3.6.1 Invasion of Privacy ........................................................................................................ 33
    3.6.2 Deception ...................................................................................................................... 34
    3.6.3 Harm to Participants ..................................................................................................... 34
    3.6.4 Lack of Informed Consent ............................................................................................ 35
List of Tables
Table 1. Overview of Interviews 33

List of Figures
Figure 1: The Corporate Branding Toolkit 14
Figure 2: Giving Customers what they want 23
Figure 3: Connecting the Concepts 25
Figure 4: How to influence employees to live the brand 62
1 Introduction

This chapter introduces the research area, followed by a discussion where gaps and contradictions within the existing research literature are presented. Furthermore, the purpose and the research questions of the thesis are presented at the end of the chapter.

1.1 Background

Internal branding in a business-to-business (B2B) context is a research area that has received limited attention by scholars. However, during the last decades, the field has gotten additional attention (Glynn, 2012; Veloutsou & Taylor, 2012; Baumgarth, 2010). Historically, a brand has been seen as solely the corporate logo, colors, and slogans (Kotler & Pfoertsch, 2007; Aaker & Joachimsthaler, 2000; de Chernatony & Cottam, 2006), but the definition has evolved and is nowadays defined as the combination of visuals with a collection of thoughts, opinions, perceptions, and recognitions (Kotler & Armstrong, 2012; Kapferer, 2012). Mahnert and Torres (2007) stated that a brand consists of characteristics, personalities, and attitudes and it therefore becomes prominent that it needs to bring value not only for external stakeholders but also for staff members considering that they deal with the brand on a daily basis.

A brand might be confused with the offerings of a company, although they should be differentiated as a brand consists of a lot more than just the offerings to the market; it includes dimensions that can differentiate an organization from its competitors, such as superior customer support and delivery arrangements (Keller, 2013). A brand is considered to be a ‘box’ in the mind of consumers (Aaker, 1996), and the brand should be a holistic experience and provide natural synergy between the business and its stakeholders (de Chernatony & Cottam, 2006).

The measures taken by a company to add meaningful value to its products and/or services is defined as branding (Mudambi et al., 1997; Leek & Christodoulides, 2011a) and it has been a central tenet within business-to-consumer (B2C) contexts. The lack of research within the B2B field has been stressed by scholars (Lynch & de Chernatony, 2007), and Kotler and Pfoertsch (2007) believed that one of the main reasons is because of the belief of it being irrelevant for other products than commodities, which are more common in B2C industries.
Although the research is limited within branding in B2B industries, it has proven its relevance for B2B companies (Seyedghorban et al., 2016). The aspect of efficiency is included amongst the most prominent benefits, where it has been argued that B2B corporations with a strong brand positioning tend to operate more efficiently which consequently leads to greater competitive advantage (Kotler & Pfoertsch, 2007). It could also act as a foundation for increased customer satisfaction (Low & Blois, 2002), and advanced financial margins (Michell et al., 2001). Furthermore, successful branding efforts may add to the overall reputation along with attracting more stakeholders (Fombrun et al., 2000). The branding relevance in B2B organizations becomes apparent when looking into B2B brands such as Oracle, IBM, Google, and Cisco systems (Interbrand, 2018), which are all among the world’s absolute top brands (Glynn, 2012; Backhaus et al., 2011).

Branding calls for extensive efforts of the marketing department where it has become an essential function, with the aim of achieving a competitive edge in B2B markets (Viardot, 2017; Kotler & Pfoertsch, 2007). The distinctive characteristics amongst industrial products in the B2B sector, such as high price and high complexity, often requires face-to-face interactions (Baumgarth & Schmidt, 2010). Therefore, a strong brand image and identity are highly important in order to build a successful B2B brand; this calls for company efforts that influence employees’ behavior to be aligned with the corporate brand identity and brand values (ibid). Within the current study, influence is in a wide sense understood as the efforts and measures taken by managers to influence employees.

1.2 Problem Discussion

Previously, branding has been viewed as purely external where the most emphasis has been put on conveying the company's brand values to various stakeholders such as customers and shareholders. This is particularly evident in the B2B area where the results of branding were believed to be strictly external (Morrison, 2001), in today’s business environment, however, the employees play a crucial role in the creation of successful external brand communication (Lynch & de Chernatony, 2004). They are the main representatives of the company (Mahnert & Torres, 2007) which consequently leads to employees being one of the cornerstones of a corporate brand (Aaker, 2004). Brand-building efforts are not solely duties that belong to marketing department, but rather a shared responsibility among all employees throughout the entire organizational structure (Baumgarth & Schmidt, 2010; Dechawatanapaisal, 2018). The
shared responsibility regarding branding includes employees who often take part in face-to-face interactions, such as the salesforce (Baumgarth & Schmidt, 2010), and industrial buyers (Low & Blois, 2002). This was agreed upon by Aaker and Joachimsthaler (2000) where it was stated that it is a misconception to believe that branding is the responsibility of solely the marketing department. It is rather a co-creation of experiences with the brand, over all touchpoints and interactions with internal stakeholders (Iglesias & Bonet, 2012).

The process of influencing and motivating employees to connect and relate to the brand values is referred to as internal branding (Punjaisri et al., 2009a; Vallaster & de Chernatony, 2006). Brand values are considered to be highly important due to their influential impact on employees’ behavior and attitudes (Riezebos et al., 2003). It has been suggested that internal branding should be integrated into the corporate marketing orientation, in order to assure that the internal communications correlate with the external marketing communications; this will lead to increased customer satisfaction as employees are able to deliver on a higher level (Garas et al., 2018).

When it comes to turning the brand promise into reality, a strong leadership is needed as a driving force for building the brand internally and to achieve conformity within an organization (Vallaster & de Chernatony, 2006; Kotler & Pfoertsch, 2007; Bedbury & Fenichell, 2014). Furthermore, the brand is often recognized as the most important asset for a company and its worth should therefore be valued highly throughout the entire organization (Bedbury & Fenichell, 2014). Aaker and Joachimsthaler (2000) agreed with the previous statement, where they stated that branding should start at the top of the hierarchy with the CEO and the top management and that they should provide all employees with a clear view of the brand and its objectives.

As previously mentioned, Baumgarth and Schmidt (2010) argued that a company’s salesforce takes on a major part of the responsibility when it comes to meeting customers’ expectations. The sales department has the main responsibility of communicating with customers, and it is of huge importance that they act as a channel for building the image of the company brand, and consequently, the successfulness of the business (ibid). Hence, if the salesforce is well-aware and has a thorough understanding of the brand values, it strengthens the performance of the brand promise (Keller, 2013). Furthermore, Human Resource Management (HRM) and the recruitment process take on an active role in internal branding, where Aurand et al. (2005)
stated that the probability of having brand-positive employees along with them incorporating the brand image into their daily operations increases when there is a certain level of HR involvement in internal branding efforts. The hitherto research within internal branding clearly shows its importance, however, a study revealed that “(...) there is often a gap between what is decided by top management as regards corporate culture, design, behaviour and what is internalised by staff.” (Vallaster & de Chernatony, 2006, p.771).

Within the internal branding concept, it has been argued that a company’s workforce is the first market any company faces, and should therefore be prioritized accordingly (Berthon et al., 2005). Burmann and Zeplin (2005) stated that the behaviors of employees are an often-underestimated success factor when it comes to building a brand, since all sources of brand identity are derived from the actions and decisions of staff members. Thomson et al. (1999) researched how employees understanding (intellectual buy-in) and commitment (emotional buy-in) affect the overall brand and business performance, and it was discovered that intellectual- and emotional buy-in leads to greater brand-supporting behavior. It further showed that internal communication may be used as a tool to increase buy-in in order to create solid emotional ties between staff members and the organization (ibid). Furthermore, de Chernatony and Cottam (2006) stated that successful brands take on a holistic and integrated approach to branding and that less successful brands should incorporate a more cross-functional approach to branding efforts. These efforts include embracing employees at all levels of the organizational hierarchy in order to ensure that everyone fully comprehend the brand along with how their roles may have an impact on the brand (ibid).

The role of internal communication has also been stressed by Chong (2007), who argued for its strategic importance in regard to infusing corporate values into employees in order for them to successfully deliver the brand promise. In addition, Ind (2003, p.395) claimed that “(...) employees need to identify with and be committed to the organisation and its ideology.”. Employees who are committed to the brand are more likely to perform on a higher level (King & Grace, 2008), however, it is necessary for senior management to provide the staff members with clear information concerning core values and to continuously encourage and engage them to live the brand (Chong, 2007). Although the aforementioned statements clearly indicate the importance of employees connecting to the brand values, it has been shown that only 23 percent of U.S. employees feel as they can apply their company’s
values into their work on a daily basis, and only 27 percent strongly agree that they fully believe in the company values (Dvorak & Nelson, 2016).

Dechawatanapaisal (2018) researched internal branding and brand attitudes within sales organizations and suggested that future research should focus on a more diversified sample than solely on salespeople. This could provide management with powerful insights in how to understand employees and how to make them live the brand (ibid). The concept of ‘living the brand’ is according to Schultz (2003) about creating a brand-supportive corporate culture, where employees are encouraged to truly believe in the brand. Piehler et al. (2018, p.2) proposed the necessity for more in-depth research within the area of internal brand management (IBM), in order to gain “more insights into employee-related IBM outcomes [and] managerial instruments to affect these outcomes”. Combining the aforementioned research gaps with Baumgarth’s (2010) view on internal branding in B2B companies, where he argued that it is difficult to succeed without managers and employees who are truly ‘living the brand’, this study aims at exploring internal branding in a B2B context.

1.3 Purpose
The purpose of this study is to investigate internal branding in a business-to-business context, with a specific interest in which efforts are taken from managers to influence the employees.

1.4 Research Questions
RQ1: How do managers influence the attitudes and behaviors of their employees to connect with brand values?
RQ2: In which processes do managers influence the attitudes and behaviors of their employees to connect with brand values?
RQ3: Which internal activities are implemented to make employees live the brand?

1.5 Outline of Thesis
This study is divided into five main chapters, starting with the theories that lay the foundation of the thesis. The second chapter focuses on the methodology, and then continues into the presentation of the empirical data. The following section is the analysis, where the data is analyzed with the theories and concepts. The last section is the conclusion, including managerial implications, suggestions for future research and limitations.
2 Theoretical Framework

This chapter presents and discusses the theories and concepts from the hitherto academic research which will lay the foundation of this research. The purpose of this chapter is to provide the reader with an understanding of the research problem. The outline starts with an overview of corporate brands, followed by branding and the more specific area of B2B branding, and lastly moving into the main body - internal branding and related concepts.

2.1 An Overview of the Corporate Brand

The corporate brand has been explained as the foundation for internal branding (Garas et al., 2018), and according to Balmer (2013), a corporate brand engages the use of the unique characteristics of a company’s identity by its senior management along with making a thoroughly defined branding proposition to its various stakeholders including employees. In short, a corporate brand is a distinct promise between a company and its key stakeholders (ibid) where the corporate brand identity is integrated in the organization’s values and attributes in order to provide a sense of uniqueness that can create a competitive advantage (McDonald et al., 2001; Balmer, 1998). Corporate brands have over the past years developed into becoming highly valuable assets, where companies with strong corporate brands can have market values doubled their book values and can therefore be used as a differentiating tool (Schultz & Hatch, 2001).

Corporate brand management ensures that all brand messages directed to various stakeholders are consistent and aligned with the corporate brand values (Foster et al., 2010; Schultz & Hatch, 2001), and additionally, it needs to focus on a complete corporate communication rather than solely marketing communications (Balmer, 2001). It provides the strategic aim for a brand’s positioning and enables consistency of messages and decisions throughout the organization by ensuring that the corporate brand promises stems from the corporate culture and identity (McDonald et al., 2001).

In order to build a strong corporate brand, Schultz and Hatch (2001) argued that a company needs to align three crucial and mutually beneficial elements:

- **Vision**: top management’s vision and ambitions for the organization.
- **Culture**: the organization's values, behaviors, and attitudes - the way employees throughout the organizational structure feel about the company.
• Image: External stakeholders’ overall impression of the company.

It was further proposed a corporate branding toolkit, where the underlying idea is to provide management with various diagnostic questions in order to uncover misalignments in corporate vision, culture, and image. The first set of questions explore the relationship between vision and culture, e.g. the alignment between managers and employees. The second bundle of questions look at the culture and image, revealing possible gaps between the attitudes of employees and the perception of external stakeholders. The final set of questions address possible misalignment between vision and image (Schultz & Hatch, 2001). All questions can be found in Figure 1.

![Figure 1: The Corporate Branding Toolkit (Schultz & Hatch, 2001, p.131)](image)

2.1.1 An Internal Perspective of Corporate Brand Identity

The concept of corporate brand identity relates to the impressions and images an organization is presenting to its customers, employees, and other stakeholders (Simões et al., 2005). The corporate brand identity is created by the company itself, where they create an ideal self-image of the business and the operations (ibid). Törmälä and Gyrd-Jones (2017) argued that a
continuous and ongoing dialogue is highly crucial when it comes to corporate brand identity, and that the company has to be actively engaged with all of its stakeholders.

It is fundamental to take the internal perception into account when it comes to the corporate brand identity. The ideal self-image of a company has to be communicated often in the organization (Simões et al., 2005), as it is a continuous learning and social process (Törmälä & Gyrd-Jones, 2017). Buil et al. (2016) researched the importance of corporate brand identity, and argued that it is an effective tool to reach competitive advantage. It has also been discovered that it contributes to the level of commitment amongst employees and that it has an indirect effect on the brand performance (ibid). Further strengthening this statement, Melewar and Alwi (2015) argued that employees are a crucial component within corporate brand identity and that they have an influence on how customers and other external stakeholders perceive the brand.

2.1.2 Organizational Culture

Organizational culture refers to “(...) the organizational values communicated through norms, artifacts, and observed in behavioral patterns” (Homburg & Pflesser, 2000; Schein, 1992; cited in Hogan & Coote, 2014, p.1610). Schein (2010) further explains it as the values and beliefs which creates a foundation of norms that employees are expected to follow. It has been viewed as a strong internal force, resulting in it being strongly influential on staff members behaviors and attitudes, far more than formal procedures and rules (Schein, 2010; O'Reilly et al., 1991). In addition, Cameron and Quinn (2013) argued for organizational culture as the main distinguishing variable within successful organizations such as Toyota and General Electric.

Hogg et al. (1998) studied the role of internal marketing and its influence on organizational culture, where it was shown that internal marketing efforts play a crucial role in both how employees comprehend their role and place within the company along with how these roles is connected to the wider operation of the company.

Schein (2004) distinguishes three levels of culture within his organizational culture model:

- Artifacts: the visible organizational structures and processes including the official value base, corporate style including dress code and emotional display, and the organizational architecture.
• Adopted beliefs and values: strategic aim, goals, and philosophies employed within the organization.
• Underlying assumptions: subliminal and presumed beliefs, perceptions, thoughts, and feelings, which are explained as the primary source of values.

2.2 An Overview of Branding

Branding has been described as the measures taken to create an image of the company in the eyes of the public, and the efforts of providing that intangible value that makes an organization stand out from its competitors (Herbst & Merz, 2011). According to Kotler and Pfoertsch (2006) branding is not about convincing customers that a company’s products and/or services are the best, but rather a way of communicating the value and benefits connected to the offerings. Kotler and Armstrong (2012) argued that the brand is mainly the responsibility of marketers and that it is important that it is managed properly. Companies and marketers are constantly working towards new customer groups and segments where they are trying to make the brand and its offerings as appealing as possible (Riezebos et al., 2003).

Historically, a brand was not the reason behind a purchase from the customers’ point of view, but it was complementary to the product and/or service offered. However, the focus has shifted and a brand is now considered to be a concept, not solely a product-plus (ibid). Kapferer (2012, p.8) believed that “a brand is a name with the power to influence”, as consumers are easily influenced when it comes to their purchases and recognizable brands. As of today, almost nothing goes unbranded and consumers are constantly being reminded of the companies behind products and services (Kotler & Armstrong, 2012; Kapferer, 2012). Organizations are investing large amounts of money into brand-building activities (Heding et al., 2009; Aaker & Joachimsthaler, 2000), and Riezebos et al. (2003) argued that companies often have to spend a lot of money in the short-term in order to establish a long-term brand strategy and earn from the efforts implemented. Building and managing a brand is not easy, especially considering the fact that there are many players on the market to compete with (Aaker, 1996). However, branding can aid buyers in many different ways, where consumers can more easily identify certain products based on visual elements such as logos and slogans (Kotler & Armstrong, 2012). Moreover, Kapferer (2012) argued that branding is not enough to build a brand and to reach business success.
2.2.1 Branding in a B2B Setting

When it comes to B2B companies, building and maintaining the brand is one of the major operational activities (Seyedghorban et al., 2016; Leek & Christodoulides, 2011b). Glynn (2012) stated that it requires more effort from employees to convince the top management that branding is relevant and necessary within B2B, but that it is worth the resources needed to establish a proper branding strategy. A well-established and clear branding strategy is necessary for a high level of business performance (Viardot, 2017), although some are arguing that branding does not contribute to the success of the company but rather is a cause of confusion (Kuhn et al., 2008). Keller (2013) stated that:

"Business-to-business branding creates a positive image and reputation for the company as a whole. Creating such goodwill with business customers is thought to lead to greater selling opportunities and more profitable relationships. A strong brand can provide valuable reassurance and clarity to business customers who may be putting their company’s fate—and perhaps their own careers!—on the line. A strong business-to-business brand can thus provide a strong competitive advantage." (p.38)

The aforementioned statement was supported by Kapferer (2012), who argued that research has proven that branding influences the corporate reputation and brand image. In addition, it has been discovered that branding is powerful for B2B companies, and therefore very much necessary (Kotler & Pfoertsch, 2006). It has become increasingly more common to build strategies and policies focused on branding and brand management (Seyedghorban et al., 2016).

The importance of branding then becomes even more prominent as a well-known brand is more likely to acquire new clients where there already are positive perceptions of the brand and its operations (Keller, 2013). Kotler and Pfoertsch (2006) continue to explain that the real value of a brand is often in the intangible assets, such as strong stakeholder relationships.

2.2.2 Branding and the Organizational Challenge

Aaker and Joachimsthaler (2000) believed that the organizational structure could contribute to the creation and management of a strong brand, where it is highly crucial that someone is in charge and leads the team. Further supporting this is Kapferer (2012), who argued that organizations should be brand-driven and work towards mutual goals and ideals. The
challenge within the organizational structure and branding is to find the people who are able to lead the brand towards becoming stronger (Aaker & Joachimsthaler, 2000). Businesses and the management have to encourage employees to have an ongoing dialogue, where they feel included in the branding strategy (Keller, 2013). It has been argued that internal interviews and conversations could improve branding as employees are then sharing their belief of how customers are perceiving the brand, which could be information that could be used to reach a competitive advantage (ibid).

In addition, Aaker (2000) argued that well-conceived brands have a strong brand-building culture and that the top management has to support the efforts in order to achieve the desired outcomes. The organizational culture is what drives businesses forward with their branding efforts, and should therefore be taken seriously (ibid).

2.3 Internal branding

Internal branding can be defined as the process of aligning the attitudes of employees to the company’s visions and the corporate brand identity (Vallaster & de Chernatony, 2006) where the core objective is to positively influence staff members behaviors, in order for them to support the performance of the brand promise and through that create competitive advantage (Drake et al., 2005). Miles and Mangold (2004) claimed that employees can assist in brand-building efforts with the help of their behaviors and attitudes, and not only with their actual work efforts.

According to Bergstrom et al. (2002), the concept is characterized by three core dimensions:

- Communicating the brand in an effective way to the body of staff
- Convincing employees that the brand is relevant and has value
- Linking every employee within the organization to the performance of the brand

It forms a part of operationalizing a brand, which includes integrating all aspects of a business, and when effectively implemented, internal branding reinforces employees in comprehending their place in wider sense, and to be more productive in participating in building the brand (ibid).

Drake et al. (2005) advised internal branding to act as an enabler for the successiveness of a business where customers’ expectations of the brand get exceeded with the help of internal
communication activities. Additionally, it has been suggested that companies should treat employees as the target audience in order to assure that all branding efforts are fully appreciated and supported by staff members (Ind, 2007).

The aspect of role-clarity forms a part of internal branding, and can be defined as the level of clarity staff members have of their roles and functions which is derived from having knowledge of the brand (King & Grace, 2010). In order to build a successful corporate brand, it is essential for employees to understand what is expected of them and how they should execute their roles as brand representatives (Mukherjee & Malhotra, 2006).

Additionally, Garas et al. (2018) researched the internal corporate branding impact on employees’ brand supporting behavior, where it was discovered that internal branding has a major impact on staff members role-clarity.

One of the main challenges of internal branding is according to Piehler et al. (2015) the fact that managers often have a short-term focus. Internal branding efforts require a long-term focus, seeing as it involves a change of employee understanding, attitude, and behavior as well as a change of structures and processes. Therefore, in some cases, internal branding is not applied as a managerial tool because it does not enhance the short-term performance of an organization (ibid).

2.3.1 The Brand Promise

Nowadays consumers are demanding more from companies than mere advertising, which has lead to an increase in companies defining and delivering a promise of the brand to its stakeholders (Kotler & Pfoertsch, 2006). It is important that the reality is closely connected with the brand promise, as it otherwise can create negative perceptions and a bad reputation (Hardaker & Fill, 2005). A brand promise includes everything from delivery times to customer service (Chong, 2007), and it is therefore crucial as it can affect trust and loyalty between stakeholders and the brand (Punjaisri et al., 2009b). Aurand et al. (2005), as cited in King and Grace (2008, p.360) mentioned that “There is an inherent power in having an informed workforce that is both able and committed to delivering the brand promise.”, and Hardaker and Fill (2005) argued that the people behind the brand have to deliver the brand promise and live up to stakeholders’ expectations.
Employees and senior management have to be able to properly deliver and stick to the promise, and a thorough understanding of it is therefore highly crucial (King & Grace, 2008). Chong (2007) believed that the core values and brand promise should be communicated by exemplifying with actual cases and to have ongoing conversations and trainings internally. It has been discovered that the delivery of the brand promise and internal communication is closely connected (ibid). In order for employees to deliver the brand promise properly, managers have to incorporate the values into daily internal activities (Punjaisri & Wilson, 2007), and the top management have to realize that it can affect the delivery of the brand promise (Punjaisri et al., 2009b). Urde (2009, p.631) stated that “Carefully chosen and true core values support the promise of the corporate brand. (...) The strength of a brand is determined by the promise made and the promises kept. Management must align the core values with the promises and vice versa.”.

King and Grace (2008) argued that it is important to keep the employees motivated in order for them to deliver the brand promise and that it results in long-term benefits for the organization if the managers can provide a holistic view for their employees. However, Boukis et al. (2017) claimed that employees do not necessarily need to ‘buy into’ the brand promise to be able to deliver it properly. Furthermore, employees’ ability to deliver the brand promise is highly dependent on internal branding efforts and how appreciated the staff feel by the organization and managers (ibid).

2.3.2 Brand-supporting Behavior & Brand Citizenship Behavior

Wallace and de Chernatony (2009) uses terms such as ‘living the brand’, ‘brand champions’, and ‘brand ambassadors’ when defining staff members who make the brand come alive for customers through their so-called brand-supporting behavior. Two variations of brand-supporting behavior can be distinguished: in-role- and extra-role behavior, where in-role behavior is explained as the minimum that is expected and required from you as an employee (Erkmen & Hancer, 2015; King & Grace, 2008). Extra-role behavior, on the other hand, is about adapting brand-supporting behaviors that go beyond what is required (Burmann et al., 2008). Former studies suggest that successful internal branding efforts can turn employees into brand champions and perform at a higher level if adapting extra-role brand-supporting behavior (Garas et al., 2018; Löhndorf & Diamantopoulos, 2014).
Employees extra-role behavior deals with the alignment of their behaviors with the brand promise, also known as brand citizenship behavior (BCB) (Burmann & Zeplin, 2005). It refers to all employee behaviors that are aligned with the brand identity and brand promise in such way that they combined empower the brand (Burmann & Zeplin, 2005; Piehler et al., 2016). According to Burmann et al. (2008, p.266) BCB comprises “(...) the intention of each employee to voluntarily exhibit certain generic behavioral characteristics outside of the formally defined role expectation system, which strengthen the identity of the brand.”.

Further, Burmann and Zeplin (2005) applied Podsakoff et al.’s (2000) organizational citizenship behavior in a BCB context, where seven dimensions could be distinguished:

1. Helping behavior: a kind, helpful, and empathetic attitude towards internal and external stakeholders along with taking on assignments beyond your own.
2. Brand consideration: taking the brand into consideration and thinking of its best which reflects everything employees do.
3. Brand enthusiasm: employing brand-oriented attitudes and taking initiatives with an enthusiastic spirit.
4. Sportsmanship: willingly engaging in the brand, and keeping complaining minimal.
5. Brand endorsement: living the brand in terms of recommending the brand to people around you as well as passing on the brand identity for newly hired employees.
7. Brand advancement: contributing to the adaptation of the brand identity when it comes to changing market needs and organizational changes.

Furthermore, Henkel et al. (2007) argued that employees have to know what the company is aiming towards in terms of short-term and long-term goals, and the brand values. It is also of importance to be aware of how their behavior towards work tasks and how their execution can affect the external perception of the brand. It has been suggested that certain incentives and challenges can be implemented as a step towards more involved and brand-oriented employees (ibid). Some of the advantages of having employees supporting the brand through their behavior are that it positively influences their work performance (Henkel et al., 2007), it improves their interactions with customers, and it therefore leads to better financial results (Erkmen & Hancer, 2015).
2.3.3 Brand Commitment

The term ‘commitment’ is frequently mentioned within the internal branding literature (Ind, 2007; Allen & Meyer, 1996; Burmann & Zeplin, 2005), and the concept of brand commitment can be defined as “(...) the extent of psychological attachment of employees to the brand, which influences their willingness to exert extra effort towards reaching the brand goals” (Burmann & Zeplin, 2005, p.285). Employees’ level of brand commitment is strongly related to what extent they understand the brand, due to that a solid understanding enables them to reflect on their synergy and connection to the brand (Piehler et al., 2016). Additionally, Jones et al. (2003) argued that when employees are provided with knowledge relevant to successful job performance it increases the employee’s commitment to the company. Punjaisri et al. (2009b) stated that internal branding, internal communication, and training should be used as educational tools to strengthen employees brand commitment. It was further suggested that implementing such tools will have a positive impact on employee attitudes and behavior (ibid).

A clear aim of internal branding is to enhance the brand commitment of employees, as it has been shown to induce functional extra-role behavior (Mahnert & Torres, 2007; Allen & Meyer, 1996). Yang et al. (2015) further argued that managers should incorporate brand training along with strengthening internal communication channels in order to motivate employees to commit to the brand.

Previous research has identified organizational commitment as highly influential for staff members attitudes and behaviors (Allen & Meyer, 1996); and internal brand commitment is thus seen as equally as strong of a factor concerning employees’ brand-related attitudes and behaviors (Burmann & Zeplin, 2005). Three drivers of brand commitment have been identified:

- Compliance: relates to the alignment of employees’ behaviors to the desired brand identity.
- Identification: relates to employees’ perception of being interlocked and connected to the brand and a sense of belonging to the brand’s performance whether it being successful or not.
- Internalization: refers to the way employees’ personal values correlate to brand values, and the perfect state is complete conformity between personal and brand values (ibid).
2.3.4 Living the Brand

The term ‘living the brand’ deals with the way companies empower and infuse enthusiasm into employees (Ind, 2007). The empowerment of employees brings forward a multitude of benefits, such as improved financial performance and an overall strong brand, which motivates the importance for staff members to truly live the brand (ibid). Hulberg (2006) further stated that employees are often viewed as ambassadors of the brand and that their involvement and behavior in a company is crucial, where employers have to motivate and encourage employees to live and enact the brand and its message. Although companies are striving towards getting their staff members to live the brand, it is a difficult task (Gotsi & Wilson, 2001). In order to align the employees’ attitudes and behaviors with the company values, it is important that the internal activities and other practices are well aligned with the organizational values (ibid).

Harkness (1999, p.88) expressed that “It is vital to get people living and breathing the brand because their behaviour will make or break the effort to build a distinct and lasting image in the hearts and minds of customers. The most effective way to do this is through good internal communication.”. In addition, there is a belief that a company that has a large number of employees is a stronger brand, as it can actively transform the employees into brand champions (Kaplan, 2017). Ind (2007) shows in his “Giving the customers what they want”-model (see Figure 2) the central and highly important role of brand committed employees, where an organization with an empowered body of staff induce benefits such as performance improvements and an overall stronger brand.

![Figure 2: Giving customers what they want (Ind, 2007, p.45)](image)
2.3.5 Internal Brand Equity

Research within brand equity generally constitutes of two branches, one being customers’ emotional responses to the brand, and the other is measures such as the brand-owners’ financial performance. The emotional-focused aspect of brand equity can also be turned inwards, to research the employees’ emotional responses to the brand (Baumgarth & Schmidt, 2010). Employees are prone to internalize brand values in the form of internal brand equity (IBE) (Vatankhah & Darvishi, 2018), explained by Baumgarth and Schmidt (2010, p.1250) as the “(...) strength of workforce internalization of brands identity, in support of branding at the customer interface”. It deals with how employees personally identify themselves with the brand, their emotional attachment to it, along with how motivated they are to participate and become involved with the branding strategy. An organization's IBE is thus strong and solid when attitudes and behaviors of the workforce are aligned with the company’s brand identity, and they willingly and consistently communicate the brand to internal as well as external stakeholders (ibid).

2.3.6 Internal Communication

Internal communication has two main roles: spanning the information supply throughout the organization along with creating a sense of community and belonging amongst employees (Elving, 2005; Friedl & Verčič, 2011). Welch and Jackson (2007, p.186) proposed four dimensions within the realm of internal communication, one being internal corporate communication (ICC) which is defined as “(...) communication between an organization’s strategic managers and its internal stakeholders, designed to promote commitment to the organization, a sense of belonging to it, awareness of its changing environment and understanding of its evolving aims”.

Internal branding has been explained as an outcome of ICC, where companies that prioritize internal communication tend to have higher levels of employee engagement (Sharma & Kamalanabhan, 2012). Further, internal branding is argued to be a result of staff members internal communication efforts to develop a workforce that is committed, loyal, and personally identifies with the organizational values and visions (ibid). Internal communication includes aspects such as communication initiatives, open forums of communication, and feedback (Verčič & Vokić, 2017).
Verčič and Vokić (2017) argued that the level of employee engagement depends highly on the level of internal communication. The positive results of strong internal communication are that it increases the internal understanding of corporate goals and brand values (Welch, 2012), it improves the overall business performance (Ruck & Welch, 2012), as well as improved financial returns (Karanges et al., 2015). On the other side, weak internal communication decreases efficiency, lowers employee engagement, and negatively affects the well-being amongst employees (Verčič & Vokić, 2017).

2.4 Connecting the Concepts

The theories and concepts presented in this chapter clarify the research field and background of the study, in order to fulfill the research purpose and to answer the research questions. This chapter provides a collection of theories used in the study and will be connected and compared to the empirical data presented in Chapter 4. The theories in this chapter are connected in Figure 3.

The theoretical chapter suggests that in order for employees to live the brand, they have to be committed and have an understanding of the corporate brand identity and values. For employees to be brand committed, they should show brand citizenship behavior and a sense of emotional connectedness to the company. As suggested by theories, the corporate brand identity, the brand promise, and the internal communication should align, and as a result employees are brand committed.

Figure 3: Connecting the concepts.
3 Methodology

This chapter presents the methodology of the research, focused on the reasons behind the choices of methods and approaches. Following is explanations on how the empirical data has been collected.

3.1 Research Approach

According to Bryman and Bell (2015), a research approach is the chosen method to approach a certain research problem. It relates to what methods are applied, such as deductive, inductive, or abductive, and quantitative or qualitative research (ibid).

3.1.1 Deductive, Inductive or Abductive Research

Deductive research is based on the connection between theory and research, where the researcher creates a hypothesis within a specific area of interest (Bryman & Bell, 2015). This method is used where you as a researcher have a general theory or concept, and then narrow it down to a hypothesis that can be tested, and either confirmed or rejected (Sekaran & Bougie, 2016). The deductive approach is most commonly found in quantitative research, as the researcher often tries to verify previous studies and confirm or reject their hypothesis for the original theory (Creswell, 2003).

Within qualitative research, inductive methods are initially used, where the researcher are basing their findings on either observations or other methods of their own data collection. In contrast from the deductive approach, the findings within inductive methods are often more general and the purpose is most often not to verify any previous research but to contribute with theories to a specific field (Bryman & Bell, 2015). The inductive approach does usually not include any hypothesis, and the deductive method is more commonly seen as ‘proper’ science (Sekaran & Bougie, 2016).

A third research approach is the abductive method which is a combination of the former two. When it comes to this type of reasoning, there is a hypothesis which is most likely to be confirmed (Lipscomb, 2012), and where the outcome often has a logical explanation (Sappleton, 2013). Alvesson and Sköldberg (2009) stated that the abductive approach is more similar to the inductive method, where the findings are based on empirical data collection. Roughly explained, the abductive method is where the researcher is combining previous
theory and research with their own empirical data (ibid).

Within this study, the chosen approach was the abductive method. Firstly, theories and previous academic work has been examined and investigated to get a holistic view of the hitherto research within the field. Prior to the start of the study, research gaps and contradictions were found to lay the foundation. The data collection and empirical findings were compared and interpreted together with previous theories and concepts, as a way to find contradictions and to fill in the discovered research gap within the literature. Furthermore, the theories within this paper were used as a medium to understand the research area, to fulfill the purpose of the thesis, and to answer the research questions.

3.1.2 Quantitative vs. Qualitative Research Approach
As previously mentioned, a quantitative method is often related to the deductive approach to research where a hypothesis is included and should be either confirmed or rejected. In terms of data collection, it is usually quantified numbers or data rather than the greater detail research method of the qualitative design (Bryman & Bell, 2015). Creswell (2003) stated that quantitative research is often started with the test of a theory or concept with the purpose of finding connections between variables. The purpose of a qualitative method, on the other hand, is to gather as much and as rich data as possible often through an inductive approach (ibid). Within qualitative research, it is common to gather the data through in-depth interviews, observations, or by examining documents that are related to the research problem (Bryman & Bell, 2015).

This research implemented a qualitative research approach, mostly because of the nature of collecting in-depth and rich data (Bryman & Bell, 2015; Creswell, 2003) which was necessary in order to fulfill the purpose of the research. Further, a qualitative method was most suitable due to the fact that it gives the possibility to ask further questions to the interviewees. Rather than limiting the data collection to a survey or similar quantitative approach, open and semi-structured questions was used, which allowed the authors to collect a solid base of data. Yin (2009) stated that a qualitative method was about the “what’s”, “why’s”, “how’s”, “who’s”, and “where’s”, which strengthens the motivation to why this research method is the most suitable option for this thesis.
3.2 Research Design

The research design is the framework provided for the collection and analyzation of data (Bryman & Bell, 2015), and it is the overall plan for how the research question(s) shall be answered (Saunders et al., 2009). Furthermore, Yin (2009) explained that a research design is a ‘blueprint’ of a research but that it is a lot more than solely a work plan. It should act as a guide on how to avoid situations where the researchers do not address the research questions in an accurate manner (ibid).

According to Bryman and Bell (2015), five types of research designs can be distinguished: cross-sectional, longitudinal, experimental, case study, and comparative design. The chosen research design within this study is a case study, however, it consists of several cases and is therefore defined as a “multiple case study” research design. A further explanation can be found in section 3.2.1. Yin (2009) argued that deciding and developing a plan in a case study is more difficult than other research methods since there are no strict guidelines or recommendations on how it should be executed.

3.2.1 Multiple Case Studies

Applying the views of Bryman and Bell (2015), a case study can be defined as the intensive and in-depth analysis of one single case, and the case in question can include four various aspects:

- A single event
- A single person
- A single organization
- A single location

A case study can be an appropriate and relevant research design if the purpose is to gain an intense and detailed understanding of a specific context (Saunders et al., 2012). As previously mentioned, the chosen research design in the current study is multiple case studies, which is exactly as the name suggests (Yin, 2009). Multiple case studies are often seen as being more compelling compared to single case studies, but it requires more effort and time from the researchers (ibid). Creswell (2003) further added that this research approach is used when researchers are trying to unveil themes, and then analyze them.
Regarding this particular study, it includes several companies and the chosen research design is therefore the aforementioned. All of the organizations within this research are based in Sweden, and applications of the results to other geographical locations might be at risk. Although there are certain disadvantages with this chosen research design, it can be argued to be the most suitable since the data gathered is rich and will provide valuable insights.

3.2.2 Exploratory Research
According to Sarstedt and Mooi (2014), exploratory research is where researchers are trying to explore a problem or a situation, and the most common approaches are focus groups, ethnographic research, observations, or in-depth interviews. Creswell (2003) further strengthens this as he explained that exploratory research is related to a qualitative research approach. Exploratory research is most useful when researchers are interested in clarifying a problem, and to seek new insights into a particular research area (Saunders et al., 2009). Yin (2009) stated that many academicians are believing that an exploratory approach is mostly relevant for case studies. This research design tends to be flexible and it can easily be adapted if there would have been any changes (Saunders et al., 2009).

Within the current study, an exploratory approach has been applied by conducting several in-depth interviews with the aim of gathering as rich and detailed data as possible. As the purpose of the research was to investigate internal branding, it relates to Saunders et al. (2009) and their explanation of this research design, where clarifying the research problem and getting new insights was of high interest.

3.3 Data Sources
According to Saunders et al. (2009), there are two types of data available to employ for research - primary and secondary data. Secondary data can include both quantitative and qualitative data and can be utilized in a descriptive research as well as for exploratory reasons (Saunders et al., 2009). It refers to published summaries, raw data, and previous research originally conducted for a different purpose, which then is utilized and reanalyzed in order to build a new research (ibid). The advantages of collecting secondary data includes the aspect of cost and time, where researchers get the opportunity to gather and have access to data of high quality (Bryman & Bell, 2015). The high-quality aspect is another benefit of a secondary
analysis, where an extensive sampling procedure often has been implemented in order to verify the reliability of the research (ibid).

Collecting primary data, on the other hand, is an approach where researchers gather new data that is tailor-made for the purpose. This enables the collected data to become more specific for the actual research, and the information is therefore suitable for the study and up-to-date (Bryman & Bell, 2015). Disadvantages that could come with primary data concerns the fact that respondents might not answer, which will be highly time-consuming (ibid). In this study, primary data sources in the form of in-depth interviews (see section 3.4.1) were used since gathering primary data allowed and contributed to fulfilling the research purpose.

### 3.4 Data Collection Method

The data collection method refers to the systematic approach of gathering empirical data to a research problem, and Saunders et al. (2009) stated that the most commonly utilized data collection methods are interviews, questionnaires, focus groups, and content analysis. Sekaran and Bougie (2016) described the data collection method as being the main part of the research design and that it is highly important for the outcome of the research. It is crucial to evaluate the various data collection methods before deciding on a specific approach (ibid).

This thesis is based on in-depth interviews, as it was decided to be the most suitable approach in order to acquire the information needed to fulfill the purpose of the research.

By implementing this type of data collection method, it was possible to get a deep understanding of the research area and to gather rich data from the interviewees. The in-depth interviews allowed follow-up questions that arose as the interviews progressed. In-depth interviews are further presented in section 3.4.1.

#### 3.4.1 In-depth Interviews

Interviews are most commonly a discussion or conversation between two or more people, where the goal is to acquire information related to the research problem (Saunders et al., 2009). Sekaran and Bougie (2016) mentioned that this method is widely used within research and that there are different ways to conduct such interviews, for example, face-to-face, over the telephone, or through other mediums of communication. In-depth interviews usually last somewhere between 30-90 minutes, depending on whether its structured or unstructured
The interviews in the current study were first recorded and then transcribed as a way to reduce the risk of misunderstandings and misinterpretations when presenting the findings.

As previously mentioned, the chosen data collection method within this research is in-depth semi-structured interviews. The semi-structured approach was chosen as it focuses mainly on the interviewee and their point of view and allows them to express their thoughts freely without feeling restricted (ibid). According to Bryman and Bell (2015), semi-structured interviews are where the researchers have prepared a set of questions related to the research problem, but they do not have to be asked in a certain order but it will occur simultaneously as the interview is progressing. During the interviews, follow-up questions were asked when it was necessary to gain additional information, in a natural and conversational manner without the impression of it being a formal interview. An overview of the questions asked can be found in the appendices.

### 3.5 Sampling

Sampling is needed within all types of research, and it is not dependent on the research question or research problem (Saunders et al., 2009). There is often a larger population suitable for a research than time or resources, and therefore sampling is an important aspect to consider (Bryman & Bell, 2015). Some research designs require a larger sample size than others, for example, quantitative methods where generalizations of the research can be made based on the sample size (Saunders et al., 2009). When it comes to case studies, the sample can be the organization itself and also employees within specific departments or positions (ibid). Both Saunders et al. (2009) and Bryman and Bell (2015) differentiated between two sampling techniques:

- Probability sampling
- Non-probability sampling

The aforementioned will be explained further in the following section.

### 3.5.1 Sample Selection

The probability sample selection is where there is an equal probability of cases being chosen, and they are not actively deciding upon a specific sample but it is statistically selected (Saunders et al., 2009). The non-probability sample is where the probability of the sample is
unknown and there is a bigger probability of some cases to be chosen than others, and therefore the results of the research are more difficult to generalize as the sample was not based on a statistical grounds (ibid).

This study was based on a combination of both, but mainly through non-probability sample selection. The companies involved were within different industries and no former contact had been made until the first contact. Although the companies were chosen partly on their geographical location, which was Sweden, but also based on them being known-of beforehand. Therefore, the non-probability selection was applicable. These companies had a larger chance of being included in the research as they were the ones chosen for the initial contact through email. The probability sample selection is also applicable as there was no beforehand established contact or relationship with the interviewees, and the choices were not based on convenience nor prior contact.

In regard to non-probability sample selection, a snowball sampling has been implemented. Bryman and Bell (2015, p.192) explained that this type of sample is where “(...) the researcher makes initial contact with a small group of people who are relevant to the research topic and then uses these to establish contacts with others.”. The initial email was sent to a single person within the organization, where they were asked to provide further contact information to potential interviewees in the company. These people were not chosen based on any specific demographics, but the only request was that they should come from various positions and departments within the organization in order to get a broader perspective of the internal branding efforts.

In addition, the cases within this study are not related to any specific number of employees or industries, the only requirement was that it should be big enough to have a variety of positions and departments internally and that it was operating in industrial markets. Further presentations of the cases are provided in the Empirical Data (see section 4).

3.5.2 Respondent Validation

The process of where the researchers present the participants of the research is known as ‘respondent validation’ (Bryman & Bell, 2015). This is particularly crucial in qualitative research, where there is a bigger interest in getting insights into whom has been included in the study. Furthermore, respondent validation allows the interviewee to confirm their
statements (ibid). The respondents did not validate their statements before the submission of the thesis, as it was not intended for the interviewees to be able to tweak their previous words, especially considering the slightly sensitive area of research. Table 1 presents additional information about the interviewees, which were conducted between 10/4 2018 - 8/5 2018. Six (6) of the interviews were held at the company’s office, therefore being face-to-face. The remaining interviews were conducted through Skype and over the telephone due to time limitations.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Organization</th>
<th>Respondent</th>
<th>Position</th>
<th>Years of employment</th>
<th>Duration (minutes)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>HR Manager</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Strategic Planning Manager</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Business Area Manager</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Terminal-worker</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Digital Customer Experience Manager</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>HR Business Partner</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Customer Journey Manager</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Customer Administration</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1. Overview of Interviews

3.6 Ethical Principles

In the current study, the research problem might be seen as sensitive as it includes the interviewees own perception of the brand and their perception of the internal branding. Therefore, it is highly crucial to be cautious when asking questions, in order for the interviewees to feel that they will not take harm with their profession. Bryman and Bell (2015) presented four areas that have to be taken into consideration when doing business research:

1. Invasion of privacy
2. Deception
3. Harm to participants
4. Lack of informed consent

The aforementioned areas are further presented in the upcoming sections of the study.

3.6.1 Invasion of Privacy

According to Bryman and Bell (2015), this aspect relates to the researchers’ ability to not invade the respondents’ privacy and their values. The current study was not intending to ask
too personal questions to the respondents, as it is not necessary for the purpose of the research. However, certain questions were constructed to get insights into the respondents’ perception of the brand, which might have been seen as invading their privacy due to large amount of personal opinions and values involved. Moreover, Bryman and Bell (2015) stated that it is nearly impossible to know how the questions will be received beforehand. When constructing the questions that were to be asked during the interviews in this study, they were carefully considered in order to limit the risk of the interviewee feeling uncomfortable in their answers.

3.6.2 Deception

Bryman and Bell (2015, p.136) described deception as “(...) when researchers present their research as something other than what it is.”. As this is something that is not wanted within this study, the purpose has been explained several times for the interviewees. The initial contact email, that was sent to a single person within the company, presented the purpose of the research, and that email has then been explained further through emails directly to the respondents, over the phone, and during the first minutes of the interviews. This was in order to prevent deception.

3.6.3 Harm to Participants

When conducting research, it is also important to take this aspect into consideration. Harm to participants relates to the responsibility of the researcher to assess the risk of harming the respondents in a research (Bryman & Bell, 2015). As a researcher, it is necessary to reduce the risk of emotional and physical harm (ibid). Within this study, all of the interviewees were given the option of being anonymous as the thesis would be published online. At the beginning of each interview, the interviewee was informed of this and decided whether they wanted to be anonymous or not. Company A decided to be anonymous, as only the CEO has the possibility to officially comment to the ‘media’. This also meant that the employees are anonymous, and their names have therefore been substituted with a number following the company letter. For company B, they wanted to read the findings before deciding whether they want to be anonymous or not. They were sent all of the data and decided that anonymity was not needed. However, as company A wanted to be anonymous it was decided that company B will also be anonymous in the study, as a measure of consistency. Because of both companies being anonymous, there will be limited information provided regarding the companies and their operations, and certain information and terms related to the company
have been changed to protect the identity of the companies. See section 4.1 and 4.2 for a short description of the participating companies.

### 3.6.4 Lack of Informed Consent

Bryman and Bell (2015) explained that lack of informed consent is connected to whether the respondent has been given an accurate and truthful statement of what techniques that will be used during the interview, such as recordings or observations. This study has recorded all of the interviews, with the sole purpose of being able to transcribe and translate all of the information and then present it as findings within the thesis. All of the respondents were asked at the beginning of the interview if they accept to be recorded, which all of them accepted. Moreover, the interviewees from company A were sent all of the questions beforehand, due to their request as they wanted to be able to prepare. Company B was not given the questions before the interviews, mostly because they did not ask for it and there was no purpose of handing it to them beforehand if it was not requested.

### 3.7 Data Analysis

In-depth interviews are often a source of large amounts of data, which is the main issue with qualitative research methods (Bryman & Bell, 2015). Saunders et al. (2009) believed that this complicates the data analysis and that all of the gathered data would have to be both summarized and categorized to relieve the analysis process. In addition, the data has to be structured and clear in order to make it easier for the reader to follow the comprehensive amount of data (ibid).

As the current study had a qualitative approach, it was highly important that the in-depth interviews would provide as much data as possible. Beforehand, a fraction of the existing literature on internal branding was read thoroughly to get an understanding of potential areas that could be subject of research within this study. The questions asked during the interviews were partly based on findings from previous research, as the existing theories and concepts lay the theoretical foundation of this study. Moreover, most of the questions were asked in order to fulfill the current research purpose. Saunders et al. (2009) claimed that there are three main processes of grouping qualitative data and that these can be used either by themselves or combined:

- Summarizing of data
3.7.1 Summarizing of Data
As in-depth interviews consist of a large amount of data, it is often necessary to summarize the information gathered and to reduce the data and to eliminate irrelevant findings (Saunders et al., 2009). It was further stated that “Through summarising you will become conversant with the principal themes that have emerged from the interview or observation and how you would like to explore these further in forthcoming data collection sessions.” (ibid, pp.491-492). Due to the rather substantial amount of empirical data within this study, it was crucial to summarize and eliminate irrelevant findings in order to analyze the data properly and focused on the purpose. As the approach was semi-structured interviews, and follow-up questions were asked as part of the conversation, some of the findings were not relevant and were therefore excluded.

3.7.2 Categorization of Data
The categorization of data includes two variables:
1. The development of categories, in order to;
2. Connect these categories to significant and relevant units of data.
Through this process, relationships of the collected data will begin to arise which further develops the categories. This then leads to a state where conclusions can be drawn (Saunders et al., 2009). The categories may originate from either collected data or the theoretical framework and are virtually codes or labels which will be utilized in order to group data. When forming categories, it is important to keep the purpose along with the research questions of the research in mind, and the formulated categories should form a part of a cohesive and logical set in order to build a well-structured analysis (ibid). The gathered data in this study was transcribed and then thoroughly read in order to detect themes which resulted in distinct categories. This was done to both facilitate for the reader but also to ease the construction of the analysis.
3.7.3 Drawing Conclusion

Drawing conclusions in a research involves the process of defining what the findings actually mean in the context of the chosen research area. The aim of a conclusion is also to explain how the study may contribute to the research field (Miles & Huberman, 1994). The conclusions of this study can be found in section 6, where the contribution to the research field is presented.

3.8 Quality Criteria

The quality of a research with a qualitative approach can be evaluated through the trustworthiness and authenticity of the findings, and the trustworthiness constitutes of four touchstones; credibility, transferability, confirmability, and dependability (Bryman & Bell, 2015). Each variable will be explained further in the sections below, as well as if and how they have affected this study.

3.8.1 Credibility

According to Bryman and Bell (2015), the credibility aspect of a research refers to how believable the data is, and a step within this process is presenting the findings to the interviewees in order for them to confirm the accuracy of the data, also known as respondent validation (see section 3.5.2).

3.8.2 Transferability

If the data collection of a study can be utilized and applied in another context than the original research, or the same context but at another point in time, it contains a high level of transferability (Bryman & Bell, 2015). The data in this particular study includes in-depth interviews with employees on different positions within the organizational structure, as well as in two companies with highly different characteristics. Applying the findings of this study into another context or geographical location can therefore be challenging and is not recommended.

3.8.3 Confirmability

Confirmability refers to the objectiveness in a research along with the researchers’ ability to not let personal values characterize or influence the findings, and it has been suggested that ensuring confirmability should be a priority for the external auditors (Bryman & Bell, 2015).
The external auditors’ input and guidance along with an overall objective and unbiased view contributed to the confirmability of this study.

### 3.8.4 Dependability

The dependability variable in guaranteeing trustworthiness “(...) entails ensuring that complete records are kept of all phases of the research process, problem formulation, selection of research participants, fieldwork notes, interview transcripts, data analysis, decisions, and so on - in an accessible manner.” (Bryman & Bell, 2015, p.389). Additionally, having an external auditor can ensure that the research process is being properly implemented, something which will consequently increase the dependability of a research (ibid). For this study, two external auditors - the tutor and the examiner, contributed to the dependability with their guidance and expertise. In addition, the research process has undertaken a systematic approach, with an aspiration to be transparent in all decisions regarding the study. Further, all transcripts have been kept in order to establish dependability of the data.

### 3.9 Reliability

The reliability of a research depends on how consistent the findings are and can be evaluated through three questions:

1. Will the results be the same on another point in time?
2. Could others reach the same measures and observations?
3. Has the research process shown transparency? (Saunders et al., 2009)

LeCompte and Goetz (1982) distinguish between internal and external reliability where external reliability refers to the extent a study can be replicated, whereas internal reliability refers to (if there is more than one researcher conducting the study) the extent they are united in their observations. External reliability has been argued to be difficult to fulfill in qualitative research as it is impossible to replicate the initial studies exact social setting and conditions in order to make it fully reliable (ibid). The internal reliability of this study can be argued to be relatively high, based on the aforementioned statements. Regarding external reliability, however, it is difficult to confirm taking LeCompte and Goetz (1982) statements into consideration.
4 Empirical Data

This chapter presents the data that was gathered during the in-depth interviews. All of the interviewees have been given an anonymous name, starting with a letter stating the company followed by a number that states which interviewee it is. The positions and additional information can be found in Table 1 in section 3.5.2.

4.1 Introduction to Company A

Company A is operating in the transportation industry, where they deliver goods to customers in Sweden. The company constitutes of several associates in the form of road carriers that transport goods from the company's terminal to the end-customer, and has 200 employees that are spread out over four offices and the associates. In addition, they are also offering related services to their main offering, including storage, recycling, and construction equipment. The majority of the customers are other businesses (B2B) but they also offer their services to private customers.

4.2 Introduction to Company B

Company B has approximately 400 employees and is a software company focused on two major business areas: accounting bureaus and strategic partners. The products are mostly used by smaller companies and by entrepreneurs who need assistance with their bookkeeping. The company is operating world-wide, but the interviewees are based at one of their Swedish offices. The parent company of company B was founded in Norway in 1996, and has had a continuous and stable growth ever since. Now considered being one of the fastest growing companies in Scandinavia, with more than 760 000 Northern European customers and approximately 6700 employees.

4.3 Company Visions and Values

Within company A, all of the interviewees referred to their value base as ‘ECBR’, consisting of three determined values: Engagement, Customer Benefit, and Responsibility. Firstly, ‘Engagement’ concerns the company’s knowledge within the business area and that they are engaged with customers and that clients come first. Secondly, ‘Customer Benefit’ relates to keeping promises and to deliver what has been decided upon by company A and the customers. Thirdly, ‘Responsibility’ is connected to the company’s responsibilities in regard
to the environment as well as employees and other stakeholders. These values should be followed by all organizational members, in every action and operation. Respondent A3 stated that the company is actively attempting to incorporate the value base into the organization and that it is pervaded throughout the business.

Since the implementation of the value base ECBR in 2015, company A has tried to imprint the values into the employees’ minds. Respondent A1 expressed that there were no clear and distinct values before the implementation of ECBR, but that there was an enunciated strategy, business concept, goals, and a vision – but that pronounced values were non-existent.

According to respondent A3, it was a challenge to implement and incorporate ECBR internally, but that it has been successful and that the employees who have been employed since then are well aware of the values and their importance for the business. This was supported by respondent A1 who stated that the measures taken to implement ECBR were indeed successful and that most employees are now aware of the values and their significance and meaning. According to respondent A3, this is pervaded in the entire organization, including the chauffeurs. When it comes down to it, ECBR is mirroring what the employees have always been doing, just as much as being guidelines for something that they have to do, it was added.

A measure taken by the company to assure that the values are well understood internally was by implementing a monthly announcement, where one person within each department was praised for extraordinary performance connected to the value base. Respondent A3 explained that this activity was removed after one year, but that it was successful and it increased the perception and understanding of ECBR internally. Respondent A1 continued by saying that the company brand is not as established as the value base and that their view of the matter is that the company logo is the actual brand but that there is not a clearly connected word that the brand equals to.

For company B, they have five major values that should pervade the entire organization; Respect, Innovation, Reliability, Competence, and Team Spirit. Respondent B2 believes that these values are well understood internally and that there is a unified vision of the organization and their operations. It was further added that ‘team spirit’ is the value most closely connected with their personal values, and that employees are thinking more from a corporate perspective rather than from an individual perspective. The value base of company
B is more of a unified image of the five values, where employees should work innovatively and be responsible. Respondent B3 agreed that the employees are aware of the brand values and that there is a clear perception of them internally. It was further claimed that respondent B3 can relate to the company vision on a personal level and that the company’s vision is closely connected to their own values. There was recently a shift in their company vision from ‘simplifying businesses’ to ‘make business happen’, and respondent B1 expressed that this is pervading the entire organization.

4.4 The Internal Awareness of the Brand Values

When discussing the awareness of the brand values amongst employees in company A, respondent A2 stated that:

“If I would ask: What are the basic values of the company? I do not think that many of our chauffeurs would say ‘it is ECBR’, and even fewer would know what it stands for. But it is still there and is present somehow. (…) when I started at company A, the awareness was on a significantly lower level than today. But it was there then, and it has continued on to somehow pervade the organization.”

Respondent A1 agreed on the aforementioned, where it was believed that certain leading questions concerning company vision and their business idea might induce conversations about brand values amongst employees, but that they would not be able to clarify the meaning of them. Although respondent A1 believes that there is a clear vision of the brand internally, when discussing the subject further, it was stated that not all employees have full awareness of the brand. Respondent A1 continued by stating that ECBR has not been conveyed internally as well as it could have and that the management has to understand the perspective of other employees as they are facing very different challenges in their work assignments than the top management. In order to create a more unified knowledge and understanding of the brand and brand values, all of the employees have to be informed more often and more thoroughly. According to respondent A3, it is nearly impossible to control and build a unified brand image amongst employees. However, it was added that it is extremely important as it creates trust. Respondent A1 added that it could be very helpful to actively involve the departments even further, as they might have innovative ideas for executing certain tasks that could help the business performance.
Seeing the attitudes and behavior of employees at company A, respondent A2 expressed that some of the employees are aware of how they can affect the brand, whereas others might not have the same awareness. Respondent A2 continued on by explaining that those staff members who have direct contact with customers have a noticeably higher awareness of their behavior than those who are not having customer contact. Respondent A1 believes that the question of whether there is a clear vision of the brand internally or not is a matter of leadership and that this is something they are working on to improve, by involving employees on all levels to a larger extent.

Respondent A2 believes that the terminal-workers have less awareness of the brand and brand values. The terminal-workers are responsible for positioning cargo at the right place at the right time for the chauffeurs who then deliver the goods to the customers, and the terminal-workers therefore rarely have immediate customer contact. Respondent A4, who works at the terminal, has a contradicting view regarding the awareness of brand values amongst employees and states that it actually is something that the company pushes and put emphasis on. Respondent A2 further explained that there was no training involved for the chauffeurs, when it comes to how they should communicate and approach the customers.

Respondent A2 continued by saying that company A has a very high service-level, which would be impossible to reach if the values base was not established amongst the drivers. This was confirmed with respondent A3’s thoughts about the internal awareness, where it was claimed that it is high within his department and team, but that it decreases substantially on terminal-level. Respondent A2 added that many of company A’s employees are most likely completing their tasks without reflecting upon how their actions can influence the brand and its external and internal perception.

Respondent A3 added:

“I was about to say that I do not think that there are any conscious brand-building efforts if I am going to be completely honest. But I think that even though it is not pronounced, I experience that when I started working here, it was in the walls in a way. We put pressure on ourselves to do the right thing, for the customer to be happy with us.”
When it comes to company B, respondent B2 believes that there is indeed a clear vision and awareness of the brand values internally, but that they might be able to improve it even further by working more actively with it. Respondent B1 added that they are actively communicating the brand values and that the vision is pervaded throughout the organization. This is something that was agreed upon by respondent B3 who argued that there is a clear vision of the values and that it has existed for a long time. Respondent B4 supported the aforementioned statements by adding that there are mutual goals and that everyone is working together, and that this mindset is crucial. Respondent B1 explained that:

“(…) hopefully everyone has the same emotions and feelings towards the brand and what we do. I do not believe that all the employees have to be able to say the company values out loud, neither can I. I want the people to represent the brand and the values, and that they should be able to explain what we stand for, mostly because I believe that our vision and why we are here is more important.”

Respondent B2 added that they have an internal business culture that contributes to the awareness of the brand values and that it is crucial to actively work with building the brand and the awareness internally. This was supported by respondent B3 who believes that the brand values are pervading the whole organization.

4.5 Influencing Employees to Live the Brand

4.5.1 The Start of the Process

For company B, respondent B2 explained that the process of informing the employees about the brand values and vision starts when recruiting new staff members. It was stressed that it is highly important to find the right person for the vacancy who can identify with values on a personal level, and prospects are therefore informed about value and vision during the initial meeting and interview. Respondent B2 further stated that it is crucial to find someone who can actually live the brand and stand for their vision and operations, where respondent B3 supported this by adding that the employees have to have the same core values as the company does.

Seeing at company A, respondent A1 argued that it is significant that the prospect is aware and relates to the company vision and values starting from the recruitment. It was explained that the marketing of the business starts with the first interview with the candidates of the
position, where they present the company and its value base and tries to build a solid picture of the organization and what it stands for. In addition, respondent A1 further stated that this leads to a build-up in anticipations and that the development of an engaged co-worker begins with the first interview.

4.5.2 How to Influence Employees to Live the Brand

Company B recently implemented a so-called ‘competence day’, where a full working-day per month is dedicated for employees to try something new or something they are interested in. Respondent B3 claimed that this measure focuses on the employees and that this was previously incorporated solely within the programming department but has now been implemented in all departments throughout the organization. It was further added that the employees can choose what they want to do and that it does not need to be connected to their position or duties. In regard to this, respondent B3 explained that:

“We have not directed or suggested anything. But everybody has done something with an incredible buoyancy to what they are doing at company B, but it is completely self-chosen. That is very inspiring.”

Respondent B2 said that another measure taken from the company to influence their employees to live the brand is by offering all the staff members the possibility to run their own company alongside their employment. By giving employees the possibility to decrease their working hours by 20 percent, they can run their own companies and respondent B3 stated that this is a way of encouraging employees to actualize their dreams. According to respondent B3, this is very valuable for the company as it gives the employees valuable insights into the customers’ situations and challenges.

Furthermore, respondent B2 believes that it is important to be engaged in the well-being of employees, by listening to them and making them feel included and involved. Respondent B1 agreed and stated that a workplace has to be motivating and inspiring, and that their employees are their greatest ambassadors for the brand. Another way for influencing and inspiring employees to live the brand is by the annual educational trips to abroad. According to respondent B1, one of the commonly reoccurring topics of discussion during the trips are personal and corporate goals. This was further agreed upon by respondent B2, who explained that they will work on the internal communication and will dedicate a session solely for the
brand vision and values. Respondent B4 explained that even though company B has grown to a rather large company, the climate is the same as before the growth – where there are a variety of internal activities that help to build the brand internally and to create strong connections between employees. Respondent B3 stated that company B’s vision and mission is very important and that they have noticed that the more they invest in the internal projects and the employees - the more people are engaged and motivated.

Seeing at company A, respondent A2 claimed that they have faced some challenges in influencing the employees to live the brand. It was explained that one of the reasons behind this is due to the growth of the company and that they have lost the sense of connectedness that was previously present. This has affected the informational flow internally, where it now simmers from the top to the bottom of the hierarchy. Respondent A3 pointed out that:

“We never come together to discuss visions, goals, etc., this is rather divided. The only time everyone comes together is when our CEO has informational meetings, but terminal staff are not included in these meeting, mostly officials. (...) Brand-building efforts are not directly pronounced, but you can basically say that it is everything with a company (...) but I cannot claim that it is openly expressed. Not even within the management, we talk about measures that indirectly is branding, but not branding in a literal sense.”

On the topic of creating commitment amongst employees, respondent A4 believes that it all comes down to how information gets spread within the company, along with worker participation by allowing employees to be involved. When discussing what the outcomes could have been by involving everyone in the organization along with having a more open communication, respondent A4 stated that:

“The result would most likely be a little bit more engagement and commitment along with an overall higher satisfaction amongst employees. If you feel as though you are part of something, the likelihood of becoming more interested will increase.”

The value base is incorporated into all of company A’s operations, where respondent A3 claimed that the multitude of policies combined with goals, visions, and strategies are forming the company’s value base. Respondent A1 further claimed that the work with ECBR is still in progress and that they are continuously incorporating the values into most of their corporate materials such as PowerPoints. The aim of this is to ensure that employees are
aware of the values and that they are frequently reminded of them and to influence them to truly live the brand and its values.

Another way for company A to influence employees is to make sure that there is an open communication concerning behavior and attitudes and how it can influence the brand internally, as well as externally. Furthermore, respondent A3 believed that incorporating a day to discuss internal branding and brand values would have positive results. Respondent A4 agreed with the aforementioned and stated that a measure that could improve employee engagement would be to incorporate meetings, perhaps twice a year, where all employees are present. It was also explained by respondent A3, that one way to keep the employees motivated is about leadership and communication, and to give the staff members responsibility and to include them more. According to respondent A3, this is referred to as ‘Freedom with Responsibility’ and claims that this is a measure taken from respondent A3’s side to make people feel seen and involved. This was further supported by respondent A1, who added that they have implemented a bonus system to increase the efficiency in the warehouse. It was explained that the implementation has improved the internal environment where employees are more motivated as they are earning more.

4.5.3 Internal Branding and how Internal Communication Influences

According to respondent A3 at company A, internal communication is highly important but that his team has not suffered from many conflicts and that he considers himself lucky. Respondent A3 further described that:

“It is generally a little bit more difficult to get the information out to all the road carriers and associates. I do not think it is necessary with meetings for the whole company, seeing as we have such diverse business areas and activities, which makes it quite hard. Then, on the other hand, it would probably not be such a bad idea to have a day together with everyone and discuss things such as the brand and brand-building. I would consider that to be a reasonable idea, but we have not had it since I started working here.”

Concerning internal communication, respondent A1 explained that one of their methods of communicating with employees is to not spend all of the time in the office, but instead tries to occasionally spend more time in other departments. Respondent A1 further claims that this measure has increased the communication where they can more easily receive inputs and
information from employees that they otherwise might not have gotten. On how and where internal communication is discussed, respondent A1 replied that:

“We are probably pretty bad at that. It takes place during department meetings or information meetings, and I think that we often end up with discussions about the past and what has happened. Not what will happen in the future, if we, for example, have signed a new customer. The mindset in these meetings is perhaps not very future-oriented, with questions such as how should we reach this new segment? Here is an area of improvement. We could strive to get better by trying to involve employees on a greater level, to have them take a little bit more responsibility.”

Respondent A1 explained that the management is happy to receive inputs from employees, but that there is a segmental gap. It was believed that they can grow and improve by incorporating more spread-out ideas and thoughts. Respondent A4 agreed with the aforementioned and stated that although the internal communication does not work badly, there is room for improvement, as the information gets spread when the decision has already been made and everything is settled. The respondent further explains that an area of improvement would be to allow the entire body of staff, from top to bottom within the organizational structure, to be more involved throughout the whole process, something which never happens within company A. There is not an ongoing conversation about the future or improvement areas - that kind of interaction is non-existent. The closer you are to the decision-making management, the more information you get. Furthermore, respondent A2 described that a majority of the company constitutes of associates and that they are not aware of the brand values, and that the communication is definitely lacking. Respondent A3 mentioned that they have surveys once per year, both to employees and to the business associates where they investigate various aspects.

Respondent B1 explained that internal communication is continuous at company B, where team meetings and department meetings are conducted rather often. Additionally, there is a monthly meeting where all of the employees are gathered where they are focusing on and discussing the corporate goals and how they are being met, and also the brand values. Respondent B1 further explained that there are strong internal forums for communication, and respondent B2 added that they are continuous employee performance meeting where they discuss the employees’ progress and overall performance.
After discovering that the internal communication was lacking, a workshop called ‘Vision 2020’ was implemented at company B, where all employees were involved as a measure to get an understanding of the internal perception of the brand. Questions such as ‘what does this mean for me?’ and ‘what can we do in our department to contribute to the vision?’ were asked. According to respondent B3 and respondent B1, there is a high level of transparency, and respondent B2 added that the results from the workshop were shared internally and that everyone took part of the outcomes. Respondent B1 described that the workshops are great tools for the company and that they have been appreciated amongst the employees.

Company B measures the employees and their engagement by conducting anonymous Employee Engagement Surveys (EES), that are done twice yearly. Respondent B2 said that the company is currently looking into implementing a system to conduct quick surveys and questions for the employees to answer. The results from the surveys are always analyzed and presented internally, where they have a high response rate of approximately 92 percent. Respondent B2 believes that this is a result of involving the employees and that they take part of the results, and that it is crucial that they feel involved in the process. Respondent B3 supported this by saying that an employer has to be humble, and to find ways to uncover valuable information.

4.5.3.1 Internal Documents

At company A, they have a brochure of the ECBR values. Respondent A3 explained that the top management developed the values, and then informed the organization about its meaning. Furthermore, there are various policies, Code of Conduct, and similar materials that have been distributed internally. Respondent A1 stated that they have done a solid strategy concerning internal communication and branding, but that it has probably not been communicated to all the employees and other stakeholders. It further argued that it is an important task to communicate this in order to get an understanding of where the company is heading internally.

The brand values of company B was not, according to respondent B4, developed solely by the top management but that the development was organizational, and everyone was involved. Respondent B3 further explained that company B is currently in the process of developing a digital booklet, where they are aiming at combining an explanation of the shift
from ‘simplifying businesses’ to ‘make business happen’ with an employee vision and additional internal materials that should be aligned with the company vision and brand values. The respondent stressed that they want the public to be able to acquire this information easily, in order to understand what the company is working towards. Respondent B2 added that they are striving towards implementing an introduction day for the recruitments, which should take place approximately two weeks before the start of the employment. The introduction day would provide the new employee with their logins and the digital booklet, in order to further strengthen the internal brand management and understanding of the brand values and vision.
5 Data Analysis

This section focuses on the empirical findings and comparing it to the presented theories in the Theoretical Framework. The main aim of the chapter is to present similarities and differences between the findings and theories, in order to answer the research questions and purpose.

5.1 Internal Awareness of the Brand Values

As premised in the theoretical framework, in order to reach the often-high desired level of perception of the brand, managers need to inform their staff members about the brand values and have a continuous dialogue about their importance, and how it can bring the organization and its goals forward and reach competitive advantage (Drake et al., 2005; Törmälä & Gyrd-Jones, 2017). The fact that all of the interviewees from company A referred to their value base as being ECBR indicates that there is somewhat of an internal awareness of the values, and supporting this, respondent A3 believed that this was pervaded throughout the entire organization. However, it seems as if the implementation process of the value base was not optimal as respondent A1 explained that the values were not informed internally as well as they could have been and that all employees in company A might not be able to specify the actual meaning of the brand values. Additionally, respondent A2 questioned the awareness of brand values amongst chauffeurs, which implies that the brand values might not be fully established amongst all employees. The lack of internal awareness of brand values could be an indication of employees not being able to adopt brand-supporting behavior, something which Henkel et al. (2007) argued the importance of.

Continuing on the path of internal awareness of the brand value it seems as if company A might lack in the understanding of brand commitment, seeing as there is a close connection between the extent of employees’ understanding of the brand and their brand commitment (Piehler et al., 2016). Respondent A2 believed that there is limited awareness of the brand values and that not everyone is fully aware of the importance of their attitudes and behaviors and how it can affect the business, which indicates that the understanding of the brand values is limited. If the employees would have been well-aware of the brand values, it can be argued that the awareness of how they can affect the business with their attitudes and behaviors could be improved, connecting to the aforementioned statement by Piehler et al. (2016).
Concerning the involvement of employees, respondent A1 believed that leadership plays an important role, which correlates to King and Grace (2008) who argue that leadership involvement and understanding of brand values is crucial in order to be able to motivate employees. Respondent A4 further stated that employees would probably become more engaged and committed to the brand if the management would allow all employees to be more involved, and explained that this could be an area of improvement. Furthermore, successful brands implement a more holistic branding-approach to assure that employees on all hierarchical levels fully understand the brand values (de Chernatony & Cottam, 2006). The importance of strong leadership in motivating employees along with integrating a holistic branding strategy could, as suggested by respondent A4, improve the brand commitment in company A.

Regarding corporate brand management, the goal is to make sure that the brand message has been informed and conveyed to employees and other stakeholders (Foster et al., 2010). It is thus highly crucial that the company has an ongoing and engaged dialogue (Törmälä & Gyrd-Jones, 2017), and although the implementation of ECBR was successful according to both respondent A1 and respondent A3, the company faced challenges in incorporating the value base internally. Respondent A1 argued that there were no clear brand values before the implementation of ECBR in 2015, but that there was an enunciated strategy, business concept, goals, and vision. Seeing as the corporate brand is defined as the foundation of internal branding (Garas et al., 2018), it can be argued that a strong and well-conceived corporate brand identity is necessary in order to influence the attitudes and behaviors of employees. The previous lack of brand values and the fact that the current values have existed for a short amount of time could be an indication of the challenges mentioned by respondent A1 and A3 with the values base for the company.

Taking the monthly departmental announcements into consideration (see 4.3), the findings of Piehler et al. (2015) where it was claimed that top management tend to have a short-term focus, combined with the limited implementation efforts indicates that management seems to have a more short-term focus than a long-term perspective. As managers decided to remove the announcements after one year, it suggests that the managers at company A have long-term goals with the implementation of the brand values, but with a short-term perspective and a lack of internal efforts of raising the awareness of the brand values. Furthermore, internal branding does not improve the short-term business performance (ibid) and should therefore
not be implemented solely with short-term activities but it can be argued that activities should be focused on a longer perspective in order to properly influence employees to live the brand. The aforementioned statements conform with Punjaisri and Wilson (2007) who stated that internal branding is more successful if the values are incorporated into everyday work and activities.

Although infusing enthusiasm into employees has been explained as a difficult task (Gotsi & Wilson, 2001), one of the cornerstones of internal branding is effectively communicating the brand to employees (Bergstrom et al., 2002), which seems to be something that company A has struggled with. Furthermore, as company A removed the monthly announcements and there is no ongoing dialogue about the brand values, it can be argued that the employees who have been hired after the implementation in 2015 might not have full awareness. The view on the internal awareness of brand values seems rather divided, some respondents stated that ECBR was successfully implemented, whereas others argued for the opposite, and in fact stated that the company struggled when implementing the value base. The split opinion regarding the successfulness of the implementation efforts of ECBR indicates that there has not been an open conversation after the implementation process, which is something of high value (Chong, 2007).

Moving on to company B, they have five major values that should portray the business. However, there is not an emphasis on the actual values which became apparent when none of the respondents explained them but only two of them mentioned their existence. Although no one explained their meaning, respondent B1 stated that it is not expected that the employees should be able to know those values by heart but that they should understand their meaning and represent the brand accordingly. King and Grace (2008) argued that the workforce should be informed about the brand promise, in order to be able to communicate it properly. Although it might be argued that this does not correlate with company B’s view of their brand values, the employees’ ability to represent the brand accurately is an indication that internal awareness of the brand values is somewhat present.

Respondent B2 emphasized the importance of an internal corporate culture that contributes to the awareness of the brand values, which correlates to Schein (2010) where he stated that the organizational culture is a strong internal force which strongly influences the employees. Furthermore, both respondent B2 and B3 explained that they believe that the values have
been understood clearly, and respondent B1 stated that there was a recent shift from ‘simplifying businesses’ to ‘make business happen’, a shift that has been communicated internally in a clear manner. These statements indicate that company B has succeeded in informing and conveying the brand message internally, which is the desired goal of corporate brand management (Foster et al., 2010).

5.2 The Involvement of HR

When it comes to internal branding, it has been discovered that the HR department has an influence on the successfulness of the efforts (Aurand et al., 2005). Both company A and B addressed that the process of making employees live the brand starts in the recruitment process, before the start of the employment. Respondent B2 stated that it is necessary to find employees who can identify with brand values on a personal level and that prospects are therefore informed about the brand values during the initial meeting. This correlates to Aaker and Joachimsthaler (2000) who believed that finding the right people is crucial, but that it might be a challenge for the organization.

One of the drivers of brand commitment was *Internalization*, which focuses on the conformity between employees’ personal values with the corporate values (Burmann & Zeplin, 2005). This suggests that company B has understood the value of *Internalization* and that they expect their employees to be committed to the brand. This is something which company A also seems to have understood as respondent A1 argued that the marketing of the company starts at the first meeting where vision and values are presented to the prospect.

5.3 Internal Communication and its role in Influencing Employee Behavior

As presented in the theoretical framework, internal communication is crucial for an overall successful business performance (Ruck & Welch, 2012). One of the key motives of internal communication is to spread the information properly throughout the entire organization (Friedl & Verčič, 2011), something which company A has been struggling with according to respondent A3. It was explained that the entire company does not come together for meetings, and it was argued that it was not needed as there are many different departments who are operating in different ways. The delivery of the brand promise is closely connected with the internal communication (Chong, 2007), and the most effective measure of making employees live the brand is through internal communication (Harkness, 1999). Combining
the theoretical approach to internal communication with company A’s approach, it indicates that internal communication could be an area of improvement as it might affect the employees’ ability to live the brand. Respondent A2 further explained that the company mainly constitutes of associates who are not aware of the brand values and that this is an area where the communication is lacking. Seeing as a main incentive of internal corporate communication is to create engaged and loyal employees (Welch & Jackson, 2007), it can be argued that a lack thereof might lead to the opposite.

Continuing on the subject of internal branding, respondent A1 mentioned that they have created a strategy for the internal communication and branding but that it has not been communicated to all the employees and stakeholders. The respondent further explained that managers are happy to receive input from employees, but that there is a segmental gap that might affect the communication. The managers view on the segmental gap aligns to respondent A4 who works in the terminal, where it was suggested that more involvement throughout the hierarchical structure would improve the internal communication. Applying the aforementioned lack of involvement to the corporate branding toolkit (Schultz & Hatch, 2001), it seems as though there is misalignment between managers and employees. It also indicates that company A might not have applied a fully integrated cross-functional approach to branding (de Chernatony & Cottam, 2006), seeing as all employees throughout the organizational structure are not involved.

The role of internal communication in regard to internal branding is to infuse corporate values in order for employees to deliver the brand promise (Chong, 2007), and spanning the information supply throughout the organization in order to create a sense of belonging amongst employees (Friedl & Verčič, 2011). Although Aaker and Joachimsthaler (2000) stated that the branding should start on top of the hierarchy, the communication within company A is more frequent closer to the management, whilst on lower levels on the hierarchy information is only shared after decisions have been made. This implies that they do not have a say in the decision-making process, respondent A4 further stated that more involvement would improve the internal communication. Staff members have to feel motivated at their workplace, and involvement is a huge part of their ability to live the brand (Hulberg, 2006). It seems as if the internal communication is lacking in company A, and this might have a negative impact on employee engagement (Sharma & Kamalanabhan, 2012).
considering the fact that employees who take part of information are more likely to be more committed to the brand (Jones et al., 2003).

Moving onto company B’s approach to internal communication, respondent B1 explained that it is ongoing and that they have monthly meetings where all of the employees are present. It was further described that company B has strong internal forums for communication, something that Verčič and Vokić (2017) argue is very important. Respondent B1 continued to state that company B has previously noted lack of the internal communication and conducted a workshop called ‘Vision 2020’ where they focused on the internal perception of the brand. All of the employees were involved in the project, which indicates that the workshop was used as an educational tool to strengthen the employee brand commitment (Punjairi et al., 2009b). It can be argued that company B has understood the Compliance brand commitment driver by striving to align employee behavior with the corporate identity (Burmann & Zeplin, 2005). Furthermore, research has shown that it is important to incorporate brand values into internal activities (Gotsi & Wilson, 2001), which company B accomplished by incorporating Vision 2020.

Another measure taken by company B to improve the engagement internally was through the implementation of EESs which are conducted twice yearly. According to respondent B2, the response rate is very high with 92 percent, which is believed to be because of the employees taking part of the results. The continuous conversations and surveys might be an indication of company B’s ability to communicate the brand promise internally, which Chong (2007) state is highly important. It has been discovered that employees are highly affected by the internal branding efforts and how the employees feel towards their managers and the organization in general (Boukis et al., 2017). In regard to the EESs, the implementation of them might have a positive impact on the brand commitment of employees (Punjaisri et al., 2009b). Keller (2013) stated that interviews with staff members and continuous conversations improve the overall branding efforts. This correlates with company B’s efforts of improving and maintaining the internal communication and keeping it on a beneficial level. In addition, the ongoing discussions regarding goals and vision align to Welch (2012), who stated that one of the main benefits of effective internal communication is that it leads to higher level of internal awareness of corporate goals and brand values. It has been argued that internal communication may be used as a tool to increase employees brand commitment and awareness (Thompson et al., 1991; Verčič & Vokić, 2017), which these measures seem to be
an indication of. Respondent B2 further stated that the company is currently looking into implementing a system to conduct quick surveys and questions for the employees to answer. This measure correlates with the views of Chong (2007), who argued that a company’s core values and brand promise should be communicated by having ongoing conversations and trainings. The aforementioned statements further strengthen the importance of company B’s efforts to improve the internal communication.

5.3.1 Internal Documents for Influencing Employees

According to Burmann and Zeplin (2005), one of the most sought-after outcomes of internal branding is aligning employees’ attitudes and behaviors with the brand values, and Drake et al. (2005) argued that one of the core objectives is to positively influence the employees to properly deliver the brand promise. Company A has developed the ECBR pamphlet which presents the brand values and their meaning, which can be argued to be a measure taken in order to align the employees with the brand values. The pamphlet was developed by the top management and was then spread to the rest of the employees. Respondent A4 stated that the managers have to spread such information more seamlessly internally, which correlates to Bergstrom et al. (2002) who argued that effectively communicating the brand to employees is an important aspect of internal branding.

Moreover, company A has certain policies and a Code of Conduct that partially explains the behavior that is expected of the employees. However, these documents were not developed with an aim of influencing the employees, but it can be argued that they might have an effect on their behaviors and attitudes. The fact that only top management was involved in the making of ECBR indicates that an integrated branding approach has not been fully incorporated when looking into the statement of de Chernatony and Cottam (2006) who stated that a brand needs to provide synergy between the company and employees. This, in turn, can be argued to be a cause of weak internal brand equity, since a lack of employee involvement might make it difficult for employees to personally identify themselves with the brand (Baumgarth & Schmidt, 2010).

Seeing at company B, respondent B4 explained that the creation of brand values was not strictly by the top management but that it was an internal collaboration. Taking the words of Baumgarth and Schmidt (2010) into account, where they state that internal brand equity relates to how motivated employees are to participate and being involved in branding
strategies, it seems as if company B’s approach of including employees in the development of brand values might increase the probability of employees to willingly get involved and participate in building the brand. According to respondent B2, company B is currently in the process of developing a digital booklet for new employees. The booklet will include internal materials that are aligned with the brand values and vision and should be distributed to new employees. Other than the soon-to-be digital booklet, company B does not have any specific information that is accessible for others than employees through internal forums.

5.4 How the Companies Influence their Employees to Truly Live the Brand

According to Ind (2007), the concept of living the brand relates to how organizations infuse enthusiasm and empower the employees. As previously mentioned, companies have to align their internal activities with the brand values (Gotsi & Wilson, 2001), which it becomes apparent that company B has done by allowing employees to run their own businesses alongside their employment. Respondent B3 stated that this brings value to the organization as it gives the employees insights into the customers’ perspective. This indicates that company B is truly striving towards influencing their employees to live the brand, as it is clearly connected to the company vision and the brand values. Furthermore, Harkness (1999) stated that employees should live and breathe the brand, which the employees who have decided to run their own company are more likely to do. Keeping company B’s ‘make business happen’ in mind, along with its focus on small businesses, a creative outlet such as this can be argued to influence employees to, in a literal sense, live the brand. As employees’ level of brand commitment is closely connected to their understanding of the brand (Piehler et al., 2016), it seems as if the employees at company B, who have their own company, should have an in-depth and thorough understanding of the brand and should therefore have a high level of brand commitment.

Keeping company activities to influence employees to live the brand in mind, company B also implemented the ‘competence day’ where employees spend one working day per month to focus on something new or to dig deeper into a personal area of interest. This day was incorporated as a measure to focus on the employees and their competence even further, which correlates to Berthon et al. (2005) who stated that the workforce is the first market and should be prioritized accordingly. This indicates that company B prioritize their employees highly, by allowing them to try new things in their interest even though it is not related to
their current position or responsibilities. Another internal branding effort taken by company B is their annual educational trip, where the aim is to inspire and influence their employees to live the brand. Respondent B1 explained that the corporate vision and values are often discussed during the trip and that they focus on corporate and personal goals, as well as internal communication. Boukis et al. (2017) explained that the level of appreciation employees feel from their managers and the organization, in general, can have a positive outcome on the delivery of the brand promise, which company B’s annual trip is an indication of.

When looking into company A and their efforts of influencing employees to live the brand, it was stated that the value base is incorporated into all of the operations. Furthermore, the value base is included in corporate materials, such as PowerPoints. Seeing at King and Grace (2008), where they argued that employees and managers have to be able to deliver the brand promise to stakeholders, it can be argued that implementing the brand values into corporate materials can enhance the internal perception of the brand and the values, and that this can positively affect the external relationships. Furthermore, respondent A3 explained that company A faced some challenges when implementing the value base and making employees live the brand. This correlates to Gotsi and Wilson’s (2001) statement regarding difficulties in infusing enthusiasm into employees.

One of the most prominent measures taken from company A to influence their employees to live the brand is through the implementation of a bonus system. Respondent A1 explained that this system has increased the efficiency in the warehouse and that the possibility for employees to earn more has motivated them to improve their performance. Henkel et al. (2007) explained that certain incentives could increase the brand awareness internally and that it could result in more involved employees. Taking this statement into consideration and seeing at company A’s bonus system, it shows that incentives and challenges might increase certain aspects, such as efficiency.
6 Conclusions and Implications

In the final chapter of the thesis, the conclusion is presented, followed by suggestions for future research and managerial implications. The chapter ends with a critical review, where delimitations are presented. The purpose of this study was to investigate internal branding in a business-to-business context, with a specific interest in which efforts are taken from managers to influence the employees.

6.1 Discussion

6.1.1 The Importance of Involvement

When it comes to how managers influence employees to connect to brand values, the results underline the aspect of involvement. It can be argued that if employees throughout the entire organizational hierarchy are allowed to be actively involved in the creation of the corporate brand identity, the probability of them relating to the brand increases. This, in turn, will have a positive impact on their ability to commit to the brand.

The internal awareness of the brand values is dependent on the managers’ ability to inform employees about the identity of the brand, and to assure that the values are understood correctly in order to ensure proper delivery of the brand promise. This becomes particularly apparent seeing as high levels of employee understanding leads to stronger brand commitment.

The brand values should be incorporated into the internal corporate culture, especially when considering the strong force and power of the organizational culture and the impacts it can have on employees. Regarding how to influence employees, it can be argued that companies who are incorporating the values in a distinct and clear manner internally are more likely to have employees who are showing brand supporting behavior and strong brand commitment. In contrast, companies that are not as persistent with the display of the brand values have a lower probability of having engaged and involved employees.

6.1.2 The Importance of HR Involvement and Internal Communication

This study shows, which strengthens previous research, that the first process involving the influential impact on employees is the recruitment process. HR plays a crucial role in internal branding in the sense that they, before employees actually get hired, have the possibility to
see if there is consensus between the applicant and the company’s brand values. The conformity between personal and corporate values begins at the initial meeting, which makes the recruitment process a cornerstone of influencing employees to connect with brand values.

It is evident that the process of effective and continuous internal communication is a highly useful tool when it comes to influencing employees. As other researchers have discovered, the information should be spread to all employees in a seamless manner, which then contributes to employees being loyal and engaged to the brand. Brand values, managers, and employees have to be aligned in mindset in order to develop a strong brand, and a contributing factor is internal communication.

The level of involvement is also noticeably reflected in internal communication, where managers who are involved and include employees are more likely to have engaged and committed employees. If they are allowed to, and encouraged to, take part in processes where their insights are valued have a higher probability of staying loyal to the brand which in turn is reflected in their actions and behaviors.

Furthermore, internal documents have a certain impact on influencing employees but they are not necessarily a contributing aspect of having an engaged body of staff. However, internal documents should not be underestimated and should be part of companies as they can have an influential impact. It appears that if the value base is incorporated and pervaded in daily operations, it has a stronger effect and is more powerful internally than solely printed materials. The results of this study clearly indicate that continuous work with the value base should be a priority for managers if they want to influence employees’ attitudes and behaviors and connect them to brand values.

6.1.3 The Importance of Connecting Activities to the Brand Values

The most prominent internal activities implemented to make employees live the brand can be argued to be the ones where managers have gone beyond and put in extra effort to create activities that mirror what the brand stands for. We believe that if a company with the vision to ‘make business happen’ along with a strong focus on small businesses and entrepreneurs, give employees the possibility to actualize their small business vision shows strong effort from managers to make employees truly live the brand. A more real-life example of
encouraging employees to live the brand might be difficult to find, especially considering the fact how closely linked this activity is to the corporate brand identity.

The results of this study conclude that activities which are closely connected with the corporate brand identity and the brand values increase the probability of employees to live the brand. Such activities make the values more relatable for employees, seeing as the values are applied in a real-life setting. However, it is understandable that not all companies can incorporate such measures to make their employees live the brand due to for example financial limitations. If companies have the possibility to create tailored activities reflecting the brand values and the corporate brand identity, it can be argued that this is one of the most prominent measures taken by managers and the company to make employees live the brand.

Additionally, if it is not possible to incorporate activities reflecting directly to the brand values, engaging in employees along with allowing them to be involved is concluded to yet again contribute to an internal awareness of the brand values. If engagement and involvement are continuously pervading the activities of the organization, the likelihood of employees living the brand increases.

6.1.4 Connecting the Results
The model below was constructed as a result of the findings within this study. The three concepts on the left-hand side constitutes of managerial measures and it could be argued that these have to be present and well-established in order to influence employees. Moreover, it is suggested that the corporate brand identity should be closely connected with internal activities, as this could contribute to employees’ level of brand commitment. By adding effective internal communication, along with an including and engaging organizational culture, it can be stated that the probability of brand commitment amongst employees is higher. As a result, employees are more likely to live the brand if the aforementioned measures and activities are implemented as an ongoing process. The findings underline the fact that there are no quick fixes when it comes to internal branding. Managers need to actively work with, and incorporate, the brand values into daily operations in order to make their employees truly live the brand.
6.2 Implications for Theory

The focus of this study has been internal branding, and seeing its significance within the concept of branding, it can be argued that further in-depth research could strengthen the research field and make it more substantial. During the research process, potential areas of further research have been discovered. An interesting research approach would be to conduct a similar study but to remove the geographical limitation and widen the research area even further, thus being able to draw more general conclusions of the findings. Another suggestion is to focus on a specific industry and investigate the differences and similarities between organizations and their approach to internal branding.

In addition, applying a mixed method would be interesting, as in-depth interviews with top management, or managers in general, gives one perspective, but to also include a quantitative approach where the entire organization can share their thoughts and opinions on the internal branding would make the study more substantial. It would also provide a more general in-depth contribution to the research field.

6.3 Implications for Practice

The current study provides managers with an insight into how companies can influence their employees. Internal communication is a cornerstone of successful internal branding, and should therefore be prioritized highly amongst managers as it has an impact on both the external and internal perception of the brand. Additionally, it is suggested for managers to focus on connecting the corporate brand identity and brand values with internal activities since this is a concrete measure that can be incorporated to influence employees. However, an
inclusive and engaging corporate culture is a more holistic approach to influence employees, considering it is not dependent on the number of employees, sector, financial situation or geographical location, but rather something that all companies can implement as an internal branding effort. Overall, internal branding is an ongoing process, and should therefore be implemented with a long-term perspective.

6.4 Critical Review
First and foremost, this thesis was written by two authors that have some previous knowledge and understanding of the research field. It is thus important to acknowledge that the findings from the interviews were presented and interpreted from our perspective, and there might be a possibility that someone else who has other experience within the field would interpret the data and results differently.

Furthermore, both of the participating companies are located in Sweden and therefore the findings might not be applicable to other geographical locations. Another aspect to take into consideration is the business fields of the companies involved, and that the findings are not necessarily specific to those industries. The results might have differed if companies in other industries were included, and should therefore be taken into consideration. The results of the present study might have differed if more interviews were conducted, as it could have given a more in-depth perspective for the research.
7 References


**Appendices**

**An overview of questions asked during interviews**

The following questions were used as a foundation for the in-depth interviews with all of the respondents. As the approach was semi-structured, follow-up questions were asked as the interviews progressed and interesting information arose as this allowed for gathering richer data. All of the interviews started with the interviewee being asked whether it was fine to be recorded or not, if they wanted to be anonymous in the thesis, and the purpose of the study. In
addition, the respondents were informed that the thesis will be published online and that it will be available for the public. The questions were asked in Swedish, and both the original version and the translated can be found below.

- What brand values would you say that the organization has? *Vad skulle du säga är företagets värderingar?*
- Do you think that there is a clear view of the brand and its identity internally? *Tycker du att det finns en klar bild inom företaget vad varumärket står för och dess identitet?*
- Within the company values, are there any specific values that you are identifying with on a personal level? *Vad inom företagets värderingar identifierar du dig med på en personlig nivå?*
- Where in the organization do you think branding is the most prominent? *Vart inom företaget tycker du att varumärkesbyggandet sker?*
- How do you think that your position and tasks contribute to building the brand? *Hur skulle du säga att din position och dina arbetsuppgifter bidrar till varumärket?*
- Do you think that all of the employees are fully aware of how their behavior and attitudes can affect the brand? *Tror du att alla de anställda har full kännedom om att deras beteende och attityd kan komma att påverka varumärket?*
- When and where do you discuss proper ways to communicate both internally as well as with customers? *När/hur pratar ni om hur man ska kommunicera med varandra och kunder?*
- How important do you think it is that everybody says the same thing within the organization about the brand? *Hur viktigt är det att alla säger samma sak inom er organisation gällande varumärket?*
- How is it possible to align employees’ attitudes and behaviors with the brand and the brand values? *Hur får man alla att mötas och samordnas gällande anställdas attityder och beteenden?*
- Who is responsible for developing and communicating brand values? *Vem tar fram riktlinjerna gällande varumärket och hur det ska kommuniceras?*
- What is actually documented regarding brand values and the company in general? *Vad finns dokumenterat gällande varumärket och värdegrunder?*
- How is the process of hiring new personnel? How will the new employee acquire information about the brand and the values? *Hur går processen till när ni anställer ny personal? Får den nya anställda information om företagets värderingar?*