Public Administration on the edge of the recruitment war
– A study about Swedish municipalities' fight for top-management recruits

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Abstract

“The War for talent” – the fight for talented people, that can improve an organisation’s performance – is getting tougher every day. This study focuses on the topic of employer branding, which is becoming a popular “weapon” in this battle. Private organisations, being used to applying marketing principles, have already discovered this tool. However, the public sector, with a lack of marketing experience, is perceived to have a weaker employer brand. This is why this study has been conducted with regards to public administrations. The aim of this paper has been to uncover potentials within a public organisation, that could be used to highlight the advantages of a public employer.

In order to build a framework for the problem, a literature review, considering theoretical concepts about the “War for talent”, the employee value proposition and employer branding has been carried out.

To gain a deeper understanding of the matter, qualitative research in the form of semi-structural interviews has been executed using the case of a Swedish municipality. Further empirical ascertainment has been achieved by reviewing recently used job advertisements.

The analysis of the data has shown that the municipality’s employer brand image is perceived as rather weak, however, there are strong indicators for potential within the organisation. It is possible to say that the conveyed employer brand image is not congruent with the brand identity.

Moreover the analysis of the employee value proposition has shown factors that can help to narrow the target group of applicants. One significant result considering this issue is the highlighting of social responsibility as one of the more prominent potentials.

Keywords: The war for talent, employer branding, employee value proposition, public administration, recruitment
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1. Introduction

1.1 Background

“In business, the competition will bite you if you keep running, if you stand still, they will swallow you.” - Victor Kiam (entrepreneur 1926 - 2001)

Globalisation has created a new era of business with intense competition in the market. Accordingly, people keep teaching, discussing and talking about strategies that can position organisations of any kind on top of the winners list. “Strategy” is a term that can be heard and read a lot in everyday life. It can be used and understood in diverse contexts. However, it is mostly associated with business related matters (Johnson et al. 2010). A new area of strategic competition has emerged during recent years. It derives from Human Resource Management (HRM) that suggests human capital to be the major factor in enhancing an organisation’s performance (Backhaus et al. 2004). Therefore, there is competition among organisations for talented human capital. This phenomenon is often referred to as “The war for talent”.

“In order to succeed in the war for talent many organisations realise their need to brand themselves as employers of choice.” (Sutherland et al. 2002, p.13) Sutherland et al. (2002) state that it is becoming more difficult to recruit talented employees because the competition has intensified. It is suggested that prospective employees are treated like customers and jobs like products that need to be marketed (Ibid). The increase in competition has already caught the attention of a global player in the consultancy industry – McKinsey. In a quarterly report from 2005 they brought up the topic of employer branding in this context. It can be considered a useful mean to meet the necessity of positioning an organisation in the recruitment market.
"The war for talent is a real one. The public sector is losing that war, and the consequences are going to become more severe." - Max Stier (President and CEO of the Partnership for Public Service in USA.)

According to Michael Färdigh, manager at Växjö Kommun, this complication has reached Sweden as well. Both the public and private sector are searching for competent applicants, which makes them competitors on the Swedish recruitment market (Ibid).

1.2 Problem Discussion

For companies to survive, it is a must to use strategies that focus on enhancing and highlighting advantages over competitors. If a company is outdated there is a high risk of being eliminated (Pindyck and Rubinfeld 2009). One way to achieve such advantages is to focus on entering the war for talent. This phenomenon concentrates on the battle between organisations that seek to employ talented people (Michaels et al. 2001).

Talented employees can perform at their best ten times better, compared with regular employees (Michaels et al. 2001). However, talented human resources are not easy to detect. Instead, one must actively fight for them in order to gain the benefits which these kinds of people can bring to the organisation. Employing talented human capital as a strategy to gain advantages over competitors is a rather new concept (Ibid). Especially recruiting talented managers can add much value to an organisation. This is because their influence on business related matters is greater compared to that of regular employees (Ibid).

Nevertheless, many organisations still have a fairly outdated perception regarding the recruitment of employees. This is because they tend to wait for applicants to approach them instead of moving actively towards the recruitment market (Ibid). This market
consists of potential recruits and recruiters, as well as all employees involved in the recruitment process (Knox 2006). Schweitzer et al. (2008) imply that managers need to think like marketers when it comes to offering jobs and looking for high performers. This indicates that a new area for marketers has emerged – the recruitment market.

“It is an inflection point that says that talent is now a critical driver of corporate performance and that a company's ability to attract, develop, and retain talent will be a major competitive advantage far into the future.” Michaels et al. (2001, p.2)

In this context Michaels et al. (2001) introduce the Employee Value Proposition (EVP) as a mean to identify employees’ expectations, needs and dreams concerning the organisation. The gained insight can be used to attract, develop and retain people (Ibid). This principle comes close to what branding is supposed to provide organisations with. In respect to marketing products and services to customers a brand can be used as a tool to attract and involve them in a relationship with the organisation, which in the end can lead to customer loyalty (Grönroos 2010).

“The application of branding principles in Human Resource Management has been termed employer branding” (Backhaus and Tikoo 2004, p.501) and has gained high popularity in business, though relatively little academic contribution exists on the matter so far (Ibid).

According to Larsen (2000) the general attitude towards working in the public sector is a rather negative one in Sweden. This is due to certain unfavourable associations like low salaries (Ibid). In terms of employer branding the circumstance points towards a presently unsuccessful application of branding principles on the matter.

With regards to the general marketing research carried out about the public sector, it is not surprising that public administrations struggle with the implementation of marketing principles. Kaplan and Haenlein (2009) outline that the majority of scientific publications, covering marketing matters in the public sector, have been written three to four decades ago.
Graham (1994) found that marketing principles are very difficult to implement in the public sector. For this reason it makes sense that the public and the private sector are usually treated separately in marketing matters. As a consequence of the research situation, it appears logical that the concept of employer branding, having emerged in the early 1990s (Rosethorn 2009), is under-represented in the current marketing literature for the public sector.

Therefore, it becomes an important task to push the topic of employer branding in public administration forward and uncover the prospects that could create an essential change in the opinion of public administration as an employer.

1.3 Purpose and Research Question

The purpose of this thesis is to research how public administrations can attain a competitive advantage in order to compete in the war for talent. For this reason this study centres around strengthening the employer brand by highlighting potentials of public organisations as an employer.

What potentials can public administrations use to strengthen their employer brand, in respect to what they are currently displaying?

1.4 Delimitations

To be able to limit the discussion, the focus will be directed to the municipalities of Sweden. By doing this, an overview of the perception of the public sector will be given. In order to further limit the discourse, localisation towards Växjö municipality has been made because the problem of recruiting top managers has already been recognised there. Moreover the focus lies on employer branding as a tool to attract employees, not on its use in retaining policies. In addition to that, employer branding measures are only used to identify already existent potentials within the organisation.
2 Theoretical Framework

2.1 The War for talent

The war for talent is about the war for managerial talent (Michaels et al. 2001). They defined managerial talent as: “...people who can lead a company, a division or function; guide a new product team; supervise a shift in the industrial plant; or manage a store with 15 or 150 associates. Managerial talent is not the only type that companies need to be successful, but it is a critical one and it is at the epicentre of the war for talent.” Michaels et al. (2001, p.2)

Today there is a transformation from perceiving changing jobs as being disloyal to viewing it as a positive matter. The action of switching companies has become an advantage and adds value to the worker (Michaels et al. 2001). The business environment has become more demanding and complex due to the fast-paced mobility of people and global demography (Beechler and Woodward 2009). Since peoples’ views about their careers have altered, it has resulted in a re-prioritisation by companies. These re-prioritisations consist of more extensive relationship management, re-considered human resource development and career processes. Today there is greater diversity in gender, culture, age and variety of employment. These factors could either be perceived as advantages or disadvantages in terms of increased potential applicants or increased conflicts and competition (Ibid). Companies tend to talk a lot about prioritising talents, and state that people are the their most significant asset (Michaels et al. 2001). On the other hand, studies have shown that companies do not actually actively do what they say. To gain a competitive advantage, there are some tools organisations can use, for example creating a winning employee value proposition (Ibid).
2.1.1 Employee value proposition (EVP)

According to Michaels et al. (2001), an employee value proposition (EVP) is about how well the organisations satisfy employees' needs, expectations and dreams on a daily basis at work. If an EVP is strong, it would attract applicants (Barrow and Mosley 2005). Performance would be improved due to the will of contribution from the employees. EVP consists of many different key elements concerned with the satisfaction of employees (Ibid). The strength of EVP depends on those key elements, on which companies want to concentrate (Michaels et al. 2001).

“Just as food manufacturers change the flavors, sizes, and packaging of their products to reflect changing consumer needs, so must companies adjust their EVPs in response to marketplace threats.” (Michaels et al. 2001, p.64)

Companies focus on different core values in order to differentiate and by this create a brand with which to market themselves (Michaels et al. 2001). A competitive EVP has to be designed to appeal to a certain type of applicant which the organisation wishes to attract (Barrow and Mosley 2005). On the other hand, workers who like a specific EVP can also dislike others, due to their different characteristics (Ibid). A strong EVP must outperform the other options which the targeted applicants would have otherwise considered (Michaels et al. 2001). Values between the employees and the organisation have to correspond (Amos and Weathington 2008). If values match the organisation, the employees would be likely to experience greater satisfaction, be more committed and have lower levels of desire to change jobs. It might be a good idea for organisations to identify the values which their current employees would consider to be of significance in order to attract applicants (Ibid).

Even so, the existence of general core factors which top managers tend to be drawn to should be considered to be included in the EVP (Michaels et al. 2001). Talented
managers desire stimulating challenges, development opportunities, trusting organisations and lastly compensation linked to performance. The younger generation who could be the future applicants of managerial roles, grew up with internet, computers and video-games which have required fast and self-paced learning. Their school education encouraged problem solving instead of memorisation. Therefore the younger generation is more attracted to organisations that can support them in the advancement of skills, knowledge and experience acquisition (Ibid). Yet payment is also of significance (Kraizberg et al. 2002). Expectancy theory is based on the link between effort, performance and the expected rewards once the goal has been achieved. The purpose of such a system is to raise the performance and effort level, because benefits are directly connected to these factors (Ibid). The new generation of applicants are more eager to get paid after their performance, than merely slowly climb the corporate ladder (Michaels et al. 2001). The new payment values are to be linked to performance, creation of value would lead to compensation and one should dare to change the “rules” of compensation in order to recruit the right candidates (Ibid). To get paid equally to what other organisations would had been willing to pay is also a new value. Kraizberg et al. (2002) refer to this value as the equity theory.

How to strengthen the EVP (Michaels et al. 2001):

• Create an up-to-date evaluation of the organisation’s EVP
• Comprehend the needs of the targeted applicants
• Understand the current competition of the EVP
• Determine the advantages and disadvantages of the current EVP
• Make a decision about which elements are to be amended. These elements could help to strengthen the brand message

It remains a critical strategic issue for organisations to attract, motivate, develop and retain talented employees (Beechler and Woodward 2009). An organisation’s strengths can determine their ability to survive crises or allow them to flourish (Ibid).
2.2 Employer branding

2.2.1 Employer Branding and its roots

The basic idea behind employer branding derives from human resource management, namely the idea of human capital being a major factor in enhancing an organisation’s performance. Hence, an organisation that has a superior position in the war for talent, has the biggest pool to choose the best people from (Backhaus and Tikoo 2004). Backhaus and Tikoo (2004) define employer branding as the process of building an identifiable and unique employer brand. It is regarded to be a concept that differentiates a firm from its competitors in the recruitment market. They also delineate that employer branding aims at both, internal and external audiences or in other words, current, as well as prospective employees.

Rosenthorn (2009) suggests that employer branding has a lot in common with branding services because it is not only directed towards external audiences but also needs to be internally recognised. This idea corresponds with the concept of internal markets (Grönroos 2010), which are a common issue in service marketing.

Grönroos (2010) defines the general brand from a service perspective, arguing that most definitions of the term lack an important factor, namely the customer. He outlines that the customers are the actual “makers” of the brand. To support a clearer distinction some terms are introduced. The brand image reflects the customers’ perception of the brand and it is the image of the brand that is in the customers’ minds. The company on the other hand is not the creator of the brand image, but can work towards the brand identity they want customers to perceive. The term brand value is applied to the customer side, meaning the value a certain product or service has in comparison to other providers. When talking about the importance of a brand for a company, the term brand equity is used (Grönroos 2010). In general the brand equity develops in accordance to the brand value.
Foster et al. (2010) argue for their definition of the employer brand from a relationship marketing perspective, stating that brands are often referred to as a promise an organisation makes to its customers. They consider employer branding’s main purpose as the securing of the recruitment of the right people for the organisation. It is implied that jobs are products of the internal market of the organisation.

Berthon et al.’s (2005) understanding of the employer brand derives from an internal marketing perspective as well. The argument for the concept of employer branding is generated from that internal perspective. Berthon et al. (2005) take internal branding as a key factor for the credibility of advertising messages into account. It is stated that advertising can only be credible when the internal and external perception of products and services match. The reasoning behind that thought is built upon the assumption that unfulfilled promises have a negative effect on the brand image and value (Ibid). Generally employees are regarded as a key element for delivering products and services, which makes it vital to have the “right” ones (Grönroos 2010). “Right” employees are employees who are capable and willing to deliver the product or service in congruence with the organisation’s values. Likewise this implies that organisations need to hire people whose spirit matches the organisation’s (Foster 2010).

Knox and Freeman (2006) therefore connect the employer brand strongly with employer attractiveness. In the result of their study they notice that there is a correlation between an attractive employer brand image and the likelihood to apply for a job. Still, it is also indicated that external and internal actors need to have the same perception of the image in order to make it authentic.

2.2.2 Measuring Employer Brands

14 (62)
Considering the benefits of a strong employer brand, the above definitions raise the question of what exactly makes a good employer brand. In academic circles there have been efforts to identify indicators that have a major influence on employer attractiveness or the employer brand.

Berthon et al. (2005) have developed a scale for the measurement of employer attractiveness. The result of that research has been a scale that takes five different dimensions into account. As displayed in table 1 each dimension has another five indicators so that the overall scale consists of 25 factors for employer attractiveness.

Table 1: 25-item employer attractiveness scale (adapted from Berthon et al. 2005)

| 1) Interest Value | 1.1) The organisation produces interesting products and services |
|                  | 1.2) Innovative employer - novel work practices/forward-thinking |
|                  | 1.3) Working in an exciting environment |
|                  | 1.4) The organisation produces high-quality products and services |
|                  | 1.5) The organisation both values and makes use of creativity |
| 2) Social Value  | 2.1) Having a good relationship with colleagues |
|                  | 2.2) Having a good relationship with superiors |
|                  | 2.3) Supportive and encouraging colleagues |
|                  | 2.4) A fun working environment |
|                  | 2.5) Happy work environment |
| 3) Economic Value | 3.1) An attractive overall compensation package |
|                  | 3.2) An above average basic salary |
|                  | 3.3) Job security within the organisation |
|                  | 3.4) Good promotion opportunities within the organisation |
|                  | 3.5) Hands-on inter-departmental experience |
| 4) Development Value | 4.1) Feeling more self-confident as a result of working for a particular organisation |
|                  | 4.2) Feeling good about yourself as a result of working for a particular organisation |
|                  | 4.3) A springboard for future employment |
|                  | 4.4) Gaining career-enhancing experience |
|                  | 4.5) Recognition/appreciation from management |
| 5) Application Value | 5.1) Opportunity to teach others what you have learned |
|                  | 5.2) Opportunity to apply what was learned at a tertiary institution |
|                  | 5.3) The organisation is customer-oriented |
|                  | 5.4) Humanitarian organisation - gives back to society |
|                  | 5.5) Acceptance and belonging |
These factors have been developed by using six focus groups of final-year graduate and undergraduate students of an Australian university who have been close to entering the labour market. Together with the researchers the groups developed a 32-item employer attractiveness scale which has later been downsized to 25 items by item-to-total correlation analysis. Berthon et al. adapted the idea of categorizing the indicators from Ambler and Barrow’s work from 1996 “The employer brand” which has been presented in the Journal. of Brand Management. They have introduced three dimensions that are important for an employer brand, namely functional, psychological and economic. Berthon et al. consider their research a refinement of the original model. Berthon et al.’s five dimensions can be put into context with Ambler and Barrow’s. The psychological benefits dimension is similar to the interest and social value. The functional benefits match with the development and application value. The economic perspective of both researches remains basically the same (Berthon et al. 2005).

Knox and Freeman (2006) connect the measurement of employer brands with the employer attractiveness, as Berthon et al. (2005) have done. From a former study, conducted in the UK, the authors have used a short list of twenty key attributes that describe employer attractiveness. These are shown in table 2.

Table 2: Key attributes of employer brand image in graduate recruitment (adapted from Knox and Freeman 2006)

<p>| | |</p>
<table>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Allows a lot of freedom to work on your own initiative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Employs people with whom you feel you have things in common</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Has a dynamic, forward-looking approach to their business</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Has a friendly and informal culture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>In the early years, offers the opportunity to move around the organisation and work in different roles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Invests heavily in training and development of its employees</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Is a pure meritocracy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Is a small organisation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Is widely regarded as a highly prestigious employer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Offers a lot of scope for creativity in your work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Offers a relatively stress-free working environment</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
However, Knox and Freeman (2006) approach the matter from another perspective, namely Vroom’s Attractiveness Model, which has been adapted in accordance to their needs. Some of these measures are recognisable with those of Berthon et al., however there is one more approach to be considered.

Sutherland et al. (2002) have also conducted research related to measuring an “employer of choice”. They define this term as an organisation that outperforms their recruitment market competitors in the task of hiring, developing and retaining valuable employees. The major aim of the study has been to find out what communication channels are used to identify employers of choice. However, it has also taken the underlying attributes knowledge workers use to identify employers of choice into account. Knowledge workers are broadly defined as workers that add knowledge and by this value to business specific tasks and processes.

As table 3 demonstrates, their research has shown eleven major attributes that strengthen an employer’s status as one of choice. The results are based on a two-steps research in which firstly the perceived attributes have been indentified qualitatively and then have been quantified in a second step.

Table 3: Employers of choice factors in order of importance, over all demographic categories (adapted from Sutherland et al. 2005)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ranking</th>
<th>Factor</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Corporate culture of career growth and challenging work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Personal training and development opportunities</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Sutherland et al. (2002) have also segmented their results into age groups (<26; 26-30; 31-35; >36), gender and race (white; black, Asian, coloured). The overall conclusion that has been drawn from their research implies that among all demographic groups career growth opportunities and a challenging work environment are considered the most important attributes of an employer of choice.

Generally speaking it is obvious that there have been varied approaches used in order to determine attributes and measures of an employer brand. In spite of using different paths to achieve their aim, all studies above have shown a couple of similarities in their results. All three models have for instance shown indicators in career growth opportunities, payment, feeling comfortable in the job and organisation and social status benefits. The above indicators signify that the perception of an employer brand is highly subjective. Although the term employer branding at first glance seems an understandable expression, there is plenty of room for interpretation. This is also displayed by scholars’ divergent definitions of employer branding, as discussed before.

As a consequence of that, all of these scales and indicators have been considered in the course of this study, in particular in the analysis chapter. This is based on an attempt to get an as deep as possible insight into the case.

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Pay, including being linked to performance, profit sharing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Global innovative company based on good products</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Large organisation offering job rotation and diversity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Successful company based on strong products</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Challenging work in non-hierarchical company</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Like the work and the industry</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Value based organisation valuing employees, cultural diversity, social responsibility, access to resources</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Benefits like fringe benefits, status and work experience</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Comfort in knowing existing staff, small organisation, casual dress, comfortable working environment</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
3 Methodology

3.1 Research strategy

There are two strategies for conducting business research: quantitative and qualitative. Bryman and Bell (2007) define quantitative research as a strategy characterised by quantifications as far as the collection and analysis of data is concerned. Rijgersberg (2009) supports this by stating that quantitative research expresses scientific knowledge in quantities. Therefore, it is regarded as being connected to natural sciences rather than to social sciences, which also implies a positivistic manner in epistemological terms. Another associated pattern of quantitative research is a deductive strategy or in other words a “theory-testing” course of the study (Bryman and Bell 2007).

In contrast to quantitative research the qualitative approach can be characterised by the use of words and a lack of numerical analyses (Bryman and Bell 2007). Of course this is not the only contrasting issue between the techniques. A major difference can be found in epistemological matters as qualitative research is following ways of interpretivism. This concept can be regarded as the counterpart to positivism, as interpretivists argue that the social world cannot be measured by means connected to natural sciences. After all people may not be mistaken for objects. This falls into place with the different ontological orientations of the two strategies. Qualitative researchers mostly choose a constructionist point of view over an objectivistic, which can mostly be found among quantitative researchers. This constructionist orientation reflects the qualitative awareness of subjective perception and behaviour in the social sciences. It particularly reflects the assumption that social processes cannot be viewed from an external point because any situation is in a constant state of revision through social actors.
This study follows a qualitative research approach. The topics covered can be regarded as inconsistent and highly dependent on subjective perception. Branding has been presented as a matter based on relationships, which implies personal perceptions as the foundation of any findings. Equally the war for talent can be considered a social phenomenon, which is highly dependent on social actors and circumstances, and thus, very unsteady.

Qualitative studies are classically connected to an inductive research approach, meaning generating new theories from empirical research. The idea for this study derived from an conversation with a human resource manager within the Swedish public sector. A theoretical literature review has been conducted to narrow the scope of the research. It has been used to acquire specific knowledge on the topics being discussed in this study. This research can be considered deductive which is according to Bryman and Bell (2007) not essentially a conflicting concept to its qualitative nature.

3.2 Research design

Besides observations and focus groups, interviewing is a common research design for qualitative studies. Conducting interviews has been chosen for this study as the employed research design as interviews provide high flexibility (Bryman and Bell 2007). Moreover, interviewing is considered the most feasible technique of data collection. Observations would take more time, which due to time limitations would not have been viable for this thesis.

However, there are different kinds of interviews. The diversity is mostly due to the extent of planning and execution. For this investigation three kinds have been considered, specifically structured, unstructured, and semi-structured interviews. Quantitative researchers mostly use structured interviews, as it is possible to cover large numbers of interviewees. As this in return requires a greater amount of
interviewers, strictly organised interview guides are necessary to assure consistent results (Bryman and Bell 2007). This technique has been dismissed, as it is rather quantitative in its nature. The direct opposite of structured interviews are the unstructured interviews, which are described as similar to conversations (Bryman and Bell 2007). The interviewer is mostly responding to interviewees’ open answers. Within this design the interviewer is supposed to have only little prompting concerning the questions and should “go with the flow”. Although this interview design represents qualitative research strategies, it has been found inappropriate for this paper. This is because this thesis aims to investigate specific matters, which demand clear questions to some extent. This is why semi-structured interviews have been chosen as a design for this study.

Semi-structured interviews are according to Bryman and Bell (2007) in essence qualitative and use an interview guide which lists brief topics that should be covered. Yet, the interviewer is free to ask any questions that might come up during the process. This method is recommended by Bryman and Bell (2007) for research that starts with a fairly clear focus, which is the case in this study. Moreover, there will be more than one person conducting the interviews in this case. This factor is also mentioned as a characteristic of semi-structured interviews (Ibid).

3.3 Sample

This research paper has been based on the case of Växjö Kommun, the municipality of Växjö. The design has been chosen because the study aims to investigate a specific phenomenon in detail and a case study provides the opportunity for that (Bryman and Bell 2007). Furthermore, “a case study does not claim any particular methods for data collection or data analysis” (Merriman 1998, p.28), which made it a valuable design due to flexibility in the research process. The specific case of Växjö Kommun has been selected as a result of a pre-investigation, namely a conversation with Michael Färdigh, the managing director of the human resource department of Växjö Kommun.
During this conversation it has become evident that the municipality of Växjö could serve as a valid example.

For this study five interviews have been conducted. Four interviewees have been working for Växjö Kommun in management positions. The objective of these interviews has been to identify employer characteristics of Växjö Kommun. To get an additional external perspective on the perception of municipalities’ as an employer, a student interview has been added to the collection. This interview has been conducted with a local human resource management student, who has been employed as an intern by a Swedish municipality. This interviewee has been considered as connected to the municipality as an employee but still external “enough” to provide an outside view on the topic.

Since the research is a case study the sampling possibilities have been restricted. Växjö Kommun provided and selected interviewees. Apart from the student interview there was no opportunity to choose interviewees freely. The student was chosen because of her background. Therefore the sampling can generally be described as a non-probability sampling. That means that the sample has been selected without using random sampling techniques (Bryman and Bell 2007). Literature defines these types of samples as convenience samples. The term signifies that samples are selected based on their accessibility to the researcher (Ibid). Scholars argue that a study, based on convenience samples cannot be generalised (Ibid).

The focus of this research is not to generalise results, but conduct a study in order to gain deep insight into the chosen case. Therefore, there have been no concerns about the appropriateness of the sampling.

3.4 Data collection
3.4.1 Operationalisation

The war for talent is a very broad concept. Therefore it is necessary to break it down into workable factors that can actually be investigated. To get a deeper insight into the theory of the war for talent and in respect to this study’s purpose, the focus has been based on the success in the competition for talented managers. The EVP, is about how well an organisation satisfies the employees needs, expectations and dreams (Michaels et al. 2001). To understand how well these are being satisfied, there is a need to turn the focus on the employees and ask them what they think about their employer. After identifying what the strengths/potentials and the weaknesses are, one can more easily work with strengthening the EVP, because that would directly link to the improvement of the brand message.

Employer branding is considered a tool to uncover the potentials of Växjö Kommun as an employer and has therefore been picked as a subject of the investigation. Yet, employer branding is a broad term in itself and also still an emerging concept. It is therefore necessary to break it down to factors that cannot be easily misunderstood and most likely mean the same thing to different people. These factors are centred around the question of what makes a good employer brand or in other words with what criteria an attractive employer brand is most likely to be associated. Therefore those criteria are at the same time regarded as potentials, meaning potential attributes that could be pushed forward in the sense of developing a strong employer brand.

In the empirical investigation the assessment of work descriptions, which are used to promote vacancies, has been the first step taken. This step has been taken in order to uncover potential positive employer brand attributes that are already used by Växjö Kommun and might just need to be further emphasised. On the other hand an objective of that investigation has been to find out whether their current vacancy promotion contains positive employer brand indicators at all. The necessary material has been provided by Växjö Kommun.
In order to gain a fair understanding of the interviewees’ competences in regards to their current position, it has been asked “What does your career background look like?”. From that point it has been the objective to narrow the reasons for their applications down. Therefore they have been asked “Why did you apply to work for the public sector?”. The theory in correspondence to the EVP indicates that talented managers desire challenges, development, trusting organisations and payment according to performance (Michaels et al. 2001). Since the answers to the question can imply reasons, which could later be compared to the theory in order to determine if the its desires and the reasons correspond. As far as the employer brand is concerned, the question is asked in order to provide information about the interviewees’ employer brand image of Växjö municipality before their application.

Corresponding to the more externally oriented brand image, insight into the actual brand identity is needed to further determine employer brand measures. For this reason it has been asked “What general ideas do you associate with the work of the public sector?”. This third question, would also reveal the interviewees’ perception of how the public sector is as an employer. The EVP is about how well organisations satisfy employees' needs, expectations and dreams on a daily basis at work (Michaels et al. 2001). In order to gain an understanding of these factors, there is a need to receive answers from employees’ point of view to understand how well the public sector as an employer satisfies the needs, expectations and dreams of the employees.

However, one major part of branding remains outside of the organisation, in the minds of people who have a relationship to the brand (Grönroos 2010). Consequently it is essential to further investigate the external brand image. Therefore, “What do you think outsiders think about working in the public sector?” is the fourth question to be asked. Although the external brand image has already been taken into account in the second question, in this there are more negative outcomes in the answers expected.
After covering the rather negative opinions concerning Växjö Kommun’s employer brand it is time to turn to the positive ones again. In order to examine positive employer brand characteristics in the brand identity, the question “What are the advantages/strengths for working in a public administration?” needs to be asked. One way to strengthen the EVP is to identify the strengths and weaknesses of the current EVP in the recruitment of top managers (Michaels et al. 2001). The question is also supposed to give the opportunity to express the diverse reasons of why they thought their employer had the aforementioned weaknesses or strengths and how this could be improved. The last step in strengthening the EVP is to consider what potentials could be promoted to improve the brand message (Michaels et al. 2001). The question would give the opportunity for them to express their opinions and what could be improved in order to attract more applicants.

### 3.4.2 Realisation

The work descriptions have been received via email from Växjö Kommun. They have been in Swedish, so one team member translated them before they could be included in the empirical chapter.

All interviews were semi-structural and recorded for the authors to refer to later in order to summarise the gathered empirical material. The interviews with the managers have generally been held at their workplace, namely the buildings of Växjö Kommun. Both researchers have been present during these interviews and have both equally asked questions. Due to the semi-structural nature of all interviews an interview guide has been used to keep track of and cover the important topics.

Christina Lindberg, the managing director of the Department of Culture and Leisure in Växjö municipality was interviewed on the 13th of May 2011 for approximately 45 minutes.
Josefin Holmberg, the student was interviewed on the 12th of May 2011 at Linnaeus University. The interview was about 20 minutes long. Only one researcher has been present.

Maria Säterdal, the managing director of the property management department of Växjö municipality was interviewed on the 19th of May 2011. The interview took about 25 minutes.

Christine Thorvaldsson, the office manager of the city planning department was interviewed on the 24th of May 2011 in her office. The interview took about 25 minutes.

Anneli Ekstedt, the managing director of the department for environmental development and health care, was interviewed on the 25th of May 2011 in the building of Växjö Kommun. The interview took about 20 minutes.

3.5 Research quality

The quality of a research is classically determined by validity and reliability (Bryman and Bell 2007). Validity is concerned with the integrity of conclusions drawn from a study, whereas reliability describes the degree of consistency of results if a study were repeated (Ibid).

Validity can be separated in two subtopics, namely internal and external validity. Internal validity is achieved when the researchers’ observations match with the theoretical conclusions developed. This issue is paralleled with the credibility of a study (Ibid). Using triangulation, which was done in this study, can push credibility forward. This means that the analysis will not only be based on one empirical source. In fact five interviews were conducted and work descriptions were collected as empirical material, which makes this investigation internally valid. External validity
on the other hand is concerned with the generalisation and transferability of the results (Ibid). When conducting a qualitative case study with a small sample, it is not possible to generalise the results to any extent. However, this case study needs to be as transferrable to other cases as much as possible. This is being achieved by the proper documentation of every step taken during the investigation.

According to Bryman and Bell (2007) reliability is hard to achieve when doing a qualitative study, because social contexts and situations cannot be frozen, but constantly change. However, this study provides a detailed description of the situation and the case so that the ideas can be followed. In addition, a comprehensive operationalisation, which results in a reusable interview guide, is given.

3.6 Literature review and source criticism

In order to build a theoretical basis for this study a literature review about the topics: “The war for talent”, EVP and employer branding, has been carried out. Literature in the form of books and scientific articles has been used. The usable books have been restricted to open sources and the availability at Linnaeus University’s library. Scientific articles have been searched for using recommended search engines e.g. LibHub and EbscoHost.

Keywords for this research have been: employer brand, branding, image, war for talent, recruitment, HRM, competition, executive ability, employee motivation, manager value, employee value, employer value proposition and marketing.

Regarding the war for talent, the primary source is Michaels et al. (2001). The secondary source is a scientific article by Beechler and Woodward (2009). The authors of this article have focused on the war for talent from a global perspective while Michaels et al. (2001) have limited their research to USA. However this factor would not disturb the overall view of this thesis. Since the Beechler and Woodward
(2009) article is quite newly published compared with Michaels et al. (2001), one can make the assumption that the information is still very much up-to-date while Michaels et al. (2001) give an overall view of the topic.

The chapter regarding the EVP consisted of two book sources (Michaels et al. 2001), (Barrow and Mosley 2005) and several scientific articles. The articles did not specifically consist of studies using the term EVP, on the other hand they consisted of factors which were associated with the term. Although Barrow and Mosley (2005) mention EVP, the main focus of the book is centred on employer branding (which is connected with the EVP. Even so, there has been lack of direct information and studies regarding the term EVP. The scientific articles were published between the years 2001-2009 and can be considered to be relatively current. Therefore one can draw the conclusion that the number of studies regarding the EVP is lacking.

The chapter about employer branding is basically built on information from scientific articles. Though having explicitly looked for peer reviewed articles some of them do not fulfil the common standards of length e.g. Sutherland et al. (2002) and Foster et al. (2010). Yet they have been considered scientific “enough” due to their reference lists and appearance in scientific journals.

3.7 Source criticism of the empirical investigation

The total sum of five interviews were conducted for the empirical investigation. Four out of five were employees of Växjö Kommun, while one (Holmberg) was a student of Linneaus University. All of the interviewees were female. An attempt at getting a male interviewee remained unsuccessful. Due to the time frame and the availability, the restriction to five interviews was considered to be an appropriate number. Three interviewees (Säterdal, Lindberg and Ekstedt) are managing directors of specific departments within Växjö Kommun, while one is an office manager (Thorvaldsson). However, Thorvaldsson has worked the longest in Växjö Kommun, therefore the
decision to consider her input was found appropriate. The managing directors had on average one years experience at Växjö Kommun, however, their knowledge of Växjö municipality has been found to be legitimate. Since the interviews were semi-structural, the input of the interviewees has differed and so has the length of the interviews, too. Despite all feelings of appropriateness, it has to be taken into consideration that it is likely that the interviewees have not intended to say anything particularly negative about their current employer.

4 Empirical Investigation

4.1 Introduction

Sweden is a democratic country, which means that Sweden’s public sector is broad and consists of many levels. It is composed of three levels, namely the parliament, the county councils and the municipalities.(www.skl.se)

There are 290 municipalities in Sweden. They are responsible for most of the social services of the area, such as: day care, school and nursery homes. Växjö municipality is Kronoberg county’s largest employer with more than 7000 employees in administrations and corporations. It offers approximately 150 different types of services (www.vaxjo.se). In order to keep the public services going and working, the municipality needs capable managers who ensure its proper functioning.

During the pre-investigation of the municipality of Växjö, Michael Färdigh (managing director of the human resource department) has been interviewed. He stated that there is a lack of applicants for top management positions in the public sector. This problem is not an uncommon one and has generally made its way through Swedish municipalities. According to Färdigh there is presently and will be in the future an increased demand for employees in the public sector. He based this statement on a study Växjö Kommun conducted in 2010. That study found that 33% of the current employees will retire within the next eight years. That being the case
his major concern is the replacement of directing managers. Färdigh expressed his concerns about the situation with regards to decreasing numbers of applications following promoted vacancies. He concluded that the private sector is in need of similar kind of people as the public sector. The private sector however, has apparently greater success in its search for them which is why there are so few applicants for public management positions. Färdigh is of the opinion that public administrations need to change their recruitment approach in order to keep up with the competition in the recruitment market.

4.2 Work descriptions

Växjö Kommun is currently promoting vacancies via official channels like newspapers, online job platforms and through recruitment agencies. In order to get a picture of their current promotion efforts two job descriptions for managing directors have been assessed. The positions of the managing director for property management and the managing director for school and childcare management have been used as examples.

The position of the managing director of Växjö municipality’s department for property management is characterised by the overall responsibility to further develop the division. In cooperation with colleagues and other board members the objective of the post is supposed to lie upon improving efficiency and profitability. This is meant to be done in connection with discovering new possibilities to meet the customers’ wishes and expectations.

Applicants are expected to bring the creative forces that exist within the organisation to action. This shall ensure an environment in which tenants and employees feel a pride in working for the organisation. The position of the managing director of the property management department requires good financial knowledge. Concerning personal characteristics, the applicant should be social, unpretentious and communicative.
The position of the managing director for the school and childcare department of the municipality involves working towards securing a positive development of the sectors. Therefore the manager must be able to work methodically and with a strategic long-term orientation. Moreover the position has an extensive staff which possess great knowledge within their own specialist-area. As a consequence of that a major task is to lead and develop the activities with the help of the management team and staff. Yet, there is also the school and childcare committee, which is also lead by the managing director, to be taken into consideration while generating new ideas for the development of the division. After all Växjö municipality has a clear process of how they engage with the development of the work. The managing director’s post has the goal to further improve students’ knowledge. The objectives are described as high and realistic. In order to meet them communication and cooperation with external and internal organisations, including Växjö municipality's management team, is a necessary and major requirement.

4.3 People and reasons

Christina Lindberg is the managing director of the department of culture and leisure services of Växjö Kommun. She started to work within public administration approximately one year ago. Before she was employed in different management positions within the organisation of Volvo Construction Equipment for 13 years, mainly within finance. She answered honestly that, during her time in the private sector, she has never considered working for a public organisation. This is due to her genuine interest for business. The job opportunity at Växjö Kommun came up at a time when she was in an open-minded state, looking for a new challenge. Therefore it has initially been the right timing that made her switch from private to public sector. The attraction of new challenges associated with the position as managing director essentially influenced her decision. As an example she gave the challenge of managing a larger organisation – an opportunity that she had not had so far. Yet, also
the opportunity to give something back to the city she has lived in for 25 years strongly affected her step into public administration. Since she has a family living in Växjö, her work, including the changes her department intends to push forward, can also be beneficial for them.

Maria Säterdal is the managing director of VöFAB which is the property management division of Växjö Kommun. The organisation is owned by the municipality of Växjö and is a part of the public administration, though more independent than other departments. Säterdal started her career with a civil-engineering degree. Following that she has worked for private organisations for many years. In December 2010 she made the active decision to start working as managing director of the property management division of Växjö municipality. Like Lindberg she had never aimed to work for Växjö municipality before. Public administrations as employers have never entered her mind. However, this is not because she has a generally negative attitude towards working for the public sector. Other organisations, particularly private ones, have had more interesting opportunities so far.

When the municipality’s job offer showed up, it was, as it has been for Lindberg, a good time to consider it. For Säterdal it was a time in which she wanted to take a further step in her career, which particularly meant working at a higher level within an organisation. This idea and the tasks of the offered position have been the major influences in making her decision. As she already had some knowledge about real estate management and legal matters from her work experience, the thought of enhancing these skills appeared very appealing.

Josefin Holmberg is a local student of Linnaeus University who studies a programme in human resource management and is close to graduation. She has been an intern at a Swedish municipality and is working on a bachelor project in cooperation with one at the moment. As a result of the internship, she has considered working in public administrations after graduation. This is mostly due to the very diverse job profiles
human resource managers have, which she does not equally see within private organisations.

Kristina Thorvaldsson is a city planner and is currently working as an office manager for Växjö Kommun. She has only worked for this specific municipality and it is her first and only long-term employment. Before working for Växjö Kommun she had a summer job for the county administration board in planning. When she applied for the job at Växjö Kommun, her previous subordinate recommended her to Växjö municipality and she got the job. According to the interviewee it happened to be a coincidence.

Anneli Ekstedt had an educational background as a chemist. She had previously worked for the private sector within the chemist ware. Afterwards she proceeded to work for a water laboratory. Along with her work in the laboratory, she worked with environmental issues and later was promoted to a quality manager. She recently started to work as the managing director of the environmental and health care department in Växjö Kommun in January 2011. She applied due to family reasons.

4.4 Public prejudices

Although all interviewees have decided to work within public administration they are well aware of outsiders’ prejudices about municipality work.

Säterdal expressed very clearly that there is a myth that managers in the public sector just hang around and basically do nothing. This goes hand in hand with municipality jobs being seen as not intellectually challenging enough. When it became clear that Säterdal was going to change jobs, she has been confronted with attitudes that clearly display the municipalities’ reputation of being slow. The general perception of working for Växjö Kommun is shaped by the impression that it is difficult to make things happen at a good pace. That matched with Holmberg’s view, who mentioned
that her initial image of municipalities has been strongly shaped by the assumption of slow decision making processes due to political matters and many rules. Säterdal stated that indeed some matters process slower, however it is for a good reason, namely democracy. Yet she disagreed with the prejudice people tend to have. Decisions could be made quickly and in addition to that it could add value to certain matters if not processed too fast.

Also Ekstedt mentioned that to outsiders, it could be perceived that processes take time, however it is not entirely true, it probably takes as long as in the private sector. There are certain prejudices about working for the municipalities. An outsider would also have reason to believe that working for the municipality there would be a lack of resources. Surely, there is some truth in these beliefs. They constantly need to adapt to the budgets the departments have been given in order to do something good with it. It is very difficult to deal with myths. On the other hand, Ekstedt experienced that there is a change for the better.

Before she started to work for the municipality, an acquaintance of Thorvaldsson who worked at Växjö Kommun, discouraged her from working for municipalities. The reason was because it is difficult to fully grasp the work of the whole organisation. No one really understands what the municipalities do since it ranges from elderly care to environmental issues.

Overall Holmberg was of the opinion that municipalities are perceived as being worse employers than they actually are. Before her internship her assumptions of municipalities have rather included adjectives like stiff, bureaucratic and low paid. That is also how she believed younger people in general see municipalities and therefore do not consider working for them later on. Salaries and benefits are also a topic brought up by Lindberg. According to her, these variables are not strong motivations for working in the public sector as a managing director. For her personally, these were not her primary motives when applying for the job. Thorvaldsson, also experienced that the responsibilities of a top manager do not
correspond with the payment and rewards. As a top manager or a general manager, the relationship with the politicians, the organisation and the public has made the role fragmented and the salary is just not attractive enough. Compared with the private sector, there are no extra financial benefits at the end of the year. She did not understand why someone would actively choose to become the head of the municipality, due to the unappreciative attitudes from all fronts. It is comparable with “suicide”. The responsibilities weigh heavily on such a complex organisation as the public administration. The work is often unappreciated and thankless. Ekstedt brought up that one has to be aware of others observations of one’s performance. It could be the citizens, the media, politicians and co-workers. As civil-servants, Ekstedt implied, they do not make the political decisions but are the ones to manage and execute them.

Holmberg admitted that she would probably choose an international career option over public administration. This opinion was supported by Lindberg, who explains that the opportunities of following an international career are slim when working for the public sector. However, there are some projects which have taken place internationally but the majority of projects is internally oriented. Lindberg noted that Växjö Kommun could improve itself by creating further international opportunities, invest more in the education of the employees and increase the salaries. She believed that these are some variables which are to be taken into consideration in order to compete for more potential applicants.

4.5 Strengths and improvement

Säterdal thought that Växjö Kommun is not proactive enough regarding attracting new employees. Lindberg did also mention the same opinion, as did Holmberg, who believes, that municipalities should improve their communication policy in order to show how good it can be to work for them. Ekstedt believed that Växjö Kommun has
difficulties with sending out this message. The importance of the work a top manager would have to take on is significant for society.

In Säterdal’s opinion Växjö Kommun has difficulty in attracting potential applicants for top management positions because they are not strong enough in promoting the challenges which come with the jobs. Thorvaldsson stated that one must be able to work with both, long-term and short-term projects, and also keep in mind that since the municipality is a politically ruled organisation, the system is quite special compared with the private sector’s. Säterdal pointed out that there is a major difference in the challenge of municipality management and the managing of private organisations. She explained that it is more difficult and challenging to manage democracy, laws, finance, all the needs of other people and other requirements than working e.g. with international sales where merely cultural differences could be a challenging factor. Thorvaldsson did not believe that Växjö Kommun has a very strict hierarchical organisational structure as some other municipalities do. However, once politicians made their decisions about something, they, as servants of the people must follow these decisions. In order for things to work in harmony, a certain respect for each others roles is required.

Säterdal thought, that if Växjö Kommun promoted the jobs as challenging, stimulating, difficult but also fun, there is still a need to pay for the performance. On the other hand, the interviewee understandably said that it is not possible for Växjö Kommun to pay exorbitant sums. Thorvaldsson experienced that the strengths of working for Växjö Kommun is the stimulation and the exciting challenges that lie ahead. If one possesses ambitions and drive, there are many career options to chose from. Växjö Kommun is a very flexible workplace, one is expected to bring creativity and new ideas for development. Since Thorvaldsson did not perceive Växjö Kommun as very hierarchical in its structure, one can work very independently and take their own initiatives. One is allowed to develop their own networks within the organisation. Säterdal personally needed both responsibilities which the work would consist of but also freedom to act. In the public sector one must consider both the
financial factor and the democracy, however in her opinion, many municipalities in Sweden tend to not consider the financial aspect as much as she does. On a daily basis, Lindberg attends meetings and initiates controls changes. For this reason a major part of her work consisted of cooperation with the other management departments within Växjö municipality. Ekstedt thought that becoming a top manager of some department within Växjö Kommun implies great responsibilities. One must feel challenged in order to be up for the task. Ekstedt believed that the job within the municipality as a top manager would mean the chance to touch people lives. The role as a top manager would influence so many people in the end. However, one must possess a feeling for social responsibility in order to appreciate the job. Lindberg, after having accepted the job offer, experienced that the values of working for the public sector are different. In her opinion, the motivation for working in the public sector, is serving a higher purpose.

Despite some initial prejudices Holmberg’s general associations with municipalities as an employer are positive. However, this is mostly due to having seen a municipality from the inside. The major strengths she stated are the public sectors state-financed character which makes it a less profit-oriented environment, which she has perceived as favourable.

Ekstedt also experienced, that within the private sector, the focus lay heavily on making profits and sales. The quality of the product was not as significant compared with the generation of revenues. The difference in working for the municipality is that money is not the goal, money is perceived as a tool to use in order to achieve goals. The public sector should naturally have an economical focus as well, however it should not be the main focus. In addition to that Holmberg appreciated that many experts work in public administrations throughout the departments, which is favourable to a good leading style.

Säterdal felt that Växjö Kommun had to do a better job to promote themselves regarding employee development. They offer good training and take good care of
their managers. This point is in accordance with Holmberg's opinion that municipalities can provide similar opportunities concerning career and personal growth opportunities. Yet, private organisations are promoting it better. Regarding career growth, Ekstedt believed that one must be active in order to pursue personal growth. There are certain possibilities within the organisation however one must also be willing to actively take steps. She thought that it is absolutely possible to develop towards a desired direction.

Thorvaldsson thought that the advertisements in the newspaper regarding top managers, manager or department managers can easily be perceived as dull. The advertisements should signal more exciting challenges and more plans for the future. If she could had made them more exciting, she would had promoted the importance of the municipality's work and highlight that the work would be for the people of Växjö Kommun. The job the potential applicant would perform would had improved the daily life of the people. The advertisements should be more customer focused. The work of the top manager should be promoted as a challenge and it is for the future and the development of improving the quality of life for the people living in Växjö area.

These ideas go hand in hand with Säterdal, who suggested, that the municipality should try to promote the results and the responsibilities which would come with the job. One way of boosting the promotion of Växjö Kommun as an employer is to tell managerial success stories. For example, information regarding what a certain manager achieved for the organisation and how he or she felt about it. Säterdal saw more possibilities for promoting what the municipality does in reality and what the exact role of Växjö Kommun is.

5 Analysis
5.1 Analysing the EVP

There are several steps one can follow to strengthen the EVP (Michaels et al. 2001). The reason for strengthening the EVP is to attract applicants (Barrow and Mosley 2005). By creating an evaluation of Växjö Kommun’s current EVP would give an overview of the matter (Michaels et al. 2001). However, the evaluation would take form after carrying out the following steps. Which is first try to comprehend the needs of the targeted applicants, which in this case is the top manager applicants. The theory states that talented managers desire challenges, development and payment according to performance (Ibid). What made Lindberg apply was the challenges of the work. For Säterdal, it was also for the challenges and the opportunities to aim for a higher level job with more responsibilities. However in both cases, the main reasons for accepting the positions were not based on the salary. They knew that it was most likely that if they had chosen to work for the private sector, their salaries would have increased. Both of them agreed with the theory (Michaels et al. 2001) that managers desire challenges and development however regarding the salary they had both disregarded that factor. On the other hand, they believed that if the payment was higher, it would have positively influenced the amount of applicants.

The second step in strengthening the EVP is to understand the current competition of the EVP for top managers (Michaels et al. 2001). The private sector is the direct competitor of the public sector regarding the recruitment of top managers. One must compare their strengths and weaknesses in order to determine the current competition. Future applicants want to work for organisations which can help them to advance in skills, knowledge and experience (Ibid). Employees desire development opportunities for their career (Ibid). According to Lindberg, the opportunities to follow an international career is not as pursuable in the public sector as in the private sector. In other words, if one desires to excel internationally, it is not advantageous to apply for a job within Växjö Kommun. In this sense, the public sector is at disadvantage, because they cannot offer the international career growth which the private sector can.
The third step is to identify the strengths and weaknesses of the current EVP for recruitment of top managers (Michaels et al. 2001). As mentioned in the theoretical framework, the EVP is about how well the organisations satisfy employees' needs, expectations and dreams (Ibid). In order to understand how well the organisations do this, there is a need to understand it from the employees point of view. Employees know why they have chosen to work for Växjö Kommun. Thorvaldsson's opinion regarding the weaknesses of Växjö Kommun as an employer for the top managers are that the job is perceived as unappreciated.

Säterdal and Lindberg believed that Växjö Kommun is not proactive enough when it comes to attracting new employees. Lindberg believed there was a need to further invest more in education for the employees. One way of attracting applicants is according to Säterdal to tell success stories of top managers which can inspire.

Regarding salary, the new compensation values are according to Michaels et al. (2001), that creation of new value would lead to compensation, performance should be rewarded and one should dare to change the “rules” of compensation in order to recruit the right candidates. To be paid equally compared with what other organisations would have been willing to pay is also a new value (Kraizberg et al. 2002). However, since it is the public sector, Säterdal has previously mentioned it is not possible for Växjö Kommun to pay unlimited salaries. The system works differently, at the end of the month, there are no bonuses according to Thorvaldsson. Thorvaldsson, also experienced that of the work of a top manager and the responsibilities do not match the payment and the rewards.

As a top manager or a general manager, the relationship with the politicians, the organisation and the public has made the role fragmented and the money is just not attractive enough. One can come to the conclusion that Växjö Kommun are currently not applying the new compensation values. This factor is weakening Växjö Kommun's EVP. Though Lindberg, Säterdal and Thorvaldsson all agree that the challenges of the work are an attractive point. They more or less applied for this
reason. Säterdal stated Växjö Kommun does take good care of the managers and offered good training to the employees. Lindberg saw the job as an opportunity to give something back to the city she has lived in for 25 years. Since she has a family and living in Växjö, her work, including the changes her department intends to push forward, can also be beneficial for them. Thorvaldsson and Ekstedt expressed similar thoughts regarding the feeling of social responsibility.

The fourth step is to make a decision about which elements are to be considered in order to improve the brand message (Michaels et al. 2001). This step would directly lead to employer branding. Expectancy theory is based on the link between effort, performance and the expected rewards once the goal has been achieved (Kraizberg et al. 2002). The purpose of such a system is to raise the performance and effort level, because benefits are directly connected to those factors (Ibid). Even so, Thorvaldsson’s statements can be interpreted as it is not possible for Växjö Kommun to pay salaries in such a manner due to the lack of resources. Values between the employees and the organisation have to correspond (Amos and Weathington 2008). If values match the organisation, the employees would be likely to experience increased satisfaction, be more committed and less likely to change job. It might be a good plan for organisations to identify the values which their current employees would consider to be of significance in order to attract applicants (Ibid). Therefore, the promotion of meaningfulness and higher purpose in working in the public sector is a more ideal way of approaching the improvement of brand message. The reasons for applying for the top management positions have to be strengthened. As mentioned in the theory, one might like an EVP of an organisation but dislike another (Barrow and Mosley 2005).

The target group of applicants are people who can ignore the lower salaries but feel intrigued and desire to carry the social responsibilities. Instead of widely searching for top manager applicants, there is a need to narrow the search down to top manager applicants who have the heart to care for the social responsibilities which come with the job. By searching for this certain type of applicant, this would correspond better
with the values of the organisation and therefore it would be easier to retain them. If an applicant’s motive is receiving a higher salary, they would not be suitable Växjö Kommun, since payment is not directly linked with performance and therefore the applicant might possess a higher desire to change jobs. One suggestion of Säterdal was to tell success stories as previously mentioned, the promotion would hopefully increase inspiration, motivation and the target group would feel challenged.

5.2 Analysing the Employer Brand

The part of employer branding is constructed around the measurement models of Berthon, Knox and Sutherland, that have been introduced in the theoretical framework. All three models will be equally applied to the collected data. The analyses have been separated into two parts. Firstly the current brand image has been examined on the basis of the work descriptions, the interviewees’ reasons for having applied for a job in public services and persistent prejudices towards municipality work. Secondly the internally perceived potentials have been taken into account.

5.2.1 Berthon’s model

*Reality*

Considering the job advertisements, seven of twenty-five indicators of Berthon’s model are mentioned. Two can be found in the interest value. Firstly the factor “forward thinking and innovative employer” meets the job description’s statement of discovering new ways and solutions. The same point can likewise be connected to Berthon’s factor “valuing and use of creativity”, as the discovery of new possibilities can be interpreted as a creative task. Both measures can equally be connected to the second job description. Forward thinking can be concluded out of the strategic long-term orientation. Creativity can be understood out of the leading and development of
projects and activities, whereas on the other hand it is mentioned that the processes are rather strict. Therefore this connection can be regarded a rather weak one.

In addition to that the job description also implies more directly that creativity is favoured when stating that one task is concerned with “bringing the creative forces within the organisation to action”. The social value is slightly touched with one match in the scale, namely the “good relationship with superiors”. This is because it is possible to understand the description’s note concerning the ensuring of a good work environment as a hint towards that issue. The last two indicators can be found within the application value. It appears close to interpret the demanded knowledge in finance as application of “tertiary education”. In addition to that the already mentioned discovery of new possibilities can be meet “customer orientation”, as Växjö municipality is a public service organisation. There is a stance taken in the economic value, namely the match between the inter-departmental experience from Berthon’s scale and the introduced task of cooperating with other internal and external organisations.

Considering the reasons, for which the interviewees have decided to work for Växjö Kommun, it is remarkable that they named reasons that can mostly be linked to the development level, which has not at all come up in the job descriptions. In this level the factor of “feeling good” and “feeling self-confident” out of working for a particular organisation can be associated with the idea of taking a further step in one’s career and having a higher position. In addition to that enhancing competences and gaining experience with the new tasks can become a “springboard for the future”. Considering the interest value there is another factor coming up – “the exciting work environment”. This expression can be interpreted in diverse ways, however in this context it can possibly be connected to the new challenges, many staff and new development opportunities. The last level, that is touched, is the application value, in particular the idea of a “humanitarian organisation”, which is quite clearly in congruence to the idea of giving something back to society.
Summarising the analysis so far, it has to be stated that there are actually ten measures of Berthon that can be considered positively corresponding to either the work descriptions or the interviewees’ reasons for applying at a municipality. This first result does not appear to be too bad, however Växjö Kommun has issues with the amount of applicants. This might be due to a total amount of negative correspondences between Berthon’s framework and the interviewees’ statements concerning public prejudices. On the interest value level there are three negative matches, particularly the factors “innovative employer”, “exciting work environment” and “use of creativity”. It is possible to associate these measures with statements concerning not challenging work, basically doing nothing, being slow in decision making and having a stiff and bureaucratic culture. These statements can also be put into connection with the application value, namely the use of “tertiary education”, which cannot be associated high in respect to not challenging tasks. Considering the economic value “compensation” is perceived as very low. Looking at the development value, it becomes clear that “self-confidence”, a “good feeling” and “the appreciation of work” cannot be considered favourable according to prejudices concerned with unappreciated work. The social value remains untouched.

Overall it can be noted that there are eight negative relations to Berthon’s measures. Among these there are even five concrete contradictions to before positively related factors. In that context the brand image appears indeed weak, considering that negative experiences tend to be perceived stronger than positive ones.

**Potentials**

Despite the rather negative employer brand image measured from externally determined perceptions, the inside associations with the municipality as an employer are more positive. There are overall 17 positive matches with Berthon’s 25-item employer attractiveness scale.
On the interest value level all five measures can be met, starting with “interesting” and “high-quality services” that can be associated with the general impression of having a responsible task to accomplish for society that, however is not fully recognised due to intransparency. Furthermore values of an “exciting”, “creative” and “innovative work environment” can be considered met in respect to the interviewees’ opinion that Växjö Kommun demands and supports creativity, is rather flexible than hierarchical, allows freedom for own initiatives and changes, accomplishes tasks in cooperation with politics and has many short and long term projects.

On the social level, there are matches on the levels “supportive colleagues” and “a fun working environment”. The latter has directly been mentioned by one interviewee, whereas the supporting culture among colleagues can be interpreted by the amount of cooperation that takes place between departments. This indicator also represents a correspondence to the economic value, namely “inter-departmental experiences”. Regarding the economic sphere there is one more measure that matches with the interviewees’ explanations - the “possibilities of promotion”. This point is outlined pretty clearly by statements covering the obvious possibilities of promotion and the access to training and development means.

The development level can be considered completely matching with the interviewees comments. The aspects “feeling good” and “self-confident” can be associated with the tasks fulfilling a higher purpose. That indicator can also be put in a context with “recognition of work”. In addition to these, Berthon’s attributes concerning “career-enhancing experiences” and “springboard for the future” can be found in the interpretation of challenging tasks and new assignments. Regarding the last level, the application value, the challenging work can be brought up as a correspondence again in context with the “application of tertiary education”. This because it can be concluded that challenging work requires a certain educational background. Apart from that the interviewees pointed out that the municipality is actually customer-oriented, which matches with the “customer-oriented organisation” Berthon refers to. The last and multiply highlighted factor, is the “humanitarian organisation” that gives
something back to society and can be understood as serving a higher purpose. All interviewees have stated this aspect, which gives it a high importance on the application value level.

In respect to the rather negatively outlined external brand image there occur, after this analysis, many points that could be pushed forward. After all the above analysis has revealed 17 potentials in accordance to Berthon. Especially regarding the eight mere negative associations there have been seven direct positive correspondences identified within the interviewees positive associations towards the public sector.

These are:
1.2) Innovative employer - novel work practices/forward-thinking
1.3) Working in an exciting environment
1.5) The organisation both values and makes use of creativity
4.1) Feeling more self-confident as a result of working for a particular organisation
4.2) Feeling good about yourself as a result of working for a particular organisation
4.5) Recognition/appreciation from management
5.2) Opportunity to apply what was learned at a tertiary institution

This leads to the assumption that the negative brand image is not in congruence with the actual brand identity. On the other hand it can be observed that nine potentials are already present in reality, however it must not be forgotten, that these have been partly contradicted by prejudices.

5.2.2 Knox’s model

**Reality**

Reflecting on the first work description with Knox’s model there are six of twenty attributes matching. Firstly “freedom to work on your own initiative” can be linked to
the responsibility of improving and developing the division and sector. The same attribute can be associated with the discovery of new possibilities and the joining of creative forces within the organisation. The two latter can at the same time be understood as another key attribute of Knox’s framework, namely the “dynamic and forward-looking organisation”. Two more attributes can vaguely be connected to statements in this work description, namely the “work in different roles” and “the variety in daily work”. Although these factors are not particularly mentioned, they could be concluded from the diverse tasks described. Still, the same measure can be interpreted from a statement concerning diverse job profiles, when it comes to the interviewees’ reasons for applying for a job in public administration. The last attribute is the “use of degree skills” which can be found in the demand for financial knowledge. Yet, it is not a strong connection.

When looking at the second work description the only positive connection can be made between Knox’s factor “a lot of scope for creativity” and the leading and development of projects and activities. However, even this connection is weakened by the statement of clear processes. This very note can also be considered opposed to the freedom allowing organisation.

As it has been the case with Berthon’s model, the summary of Knox’s measure wouldn’t necessarily suggest a completely weak brand image, as one fourth of the criteria can be considered positively touched. However there are also some negative correspondences, when this model is the reviewing mean.

Regarding the negative public impression of municipalities as employer there are four measures of Knox’s model to be taken into account. Firstly the not challenging and “do-nothing” culture, paired with slow decisions, contradict the image of a “dynamic and forward-looking” organisation. In addition to that these factors can easily by associated with the not usage of “degree skills”. The impression about public administration’s of being stiff and bureaucratic can be interpreted as a negative correspondence to a “friendly and informal culture” within the organisation.
Furthermore the interviewees’ comment on work remaining unappreciated by public does not reflect the image of a “highly prestigious employer”.

According to the above analysis there are two direct contradictions between positive and negative associations, namely “dynamic and forward-looking” organisation and “usage of degree skills”.

**Potentials**

When the internal associations on working for Växjö Kommun are reviewed with Knox’s model there are ten measures, that can be met positively. “Freedom and own initiative” can directly be found in the interviewees’ statements. In addition to that the municipality’s need and demand for new ideas and creativity can be associated with that measure. This comment can also be put into context with “a lot of scope for creativity in one’s work”. Concerning a “dynamic and forward-looking” organisation, freedom and the possibility to change things can be considered correspondents. Furthermore the described non-hierarchical structure can be interpreted as a rather “friendly and informal culture”. A similar point is that the municipality is said to really care for its managers, which can also be related to the equally named measure. Explaining the many career options the municipality provides can be related to multiple theoretical measures, namely “work in different roles”, “training and development opportunities” and possible “long-term career options”. “A variety in daily work” can be seen in the mentioning of long- and short-term projects, which can be regarded as working in diverse contexts and on different topics. Another quite directly mentioned relation can be seen in the employer that “really cares”. The last factor, that is indicated is the “use of degree skills”, which can be associated with challenging and different tasks.

Generally the potentials-analysis reveals that all six positive correspondences, mentioned in the “reality-part” are also mentioned as potentials by the interviewees. These are:
1) Allows a lot of freedom to work on your own initiative  
3) Has a dynamic, forward-looking approach to their business  
4) Has a friendly and informal culture  
5) In the early years, offers the opportunity to move around the organisation and work in different roles  
10) Offers a lot of scope for creativity in your work  
16) Offers variety in your daily work  
20) Uses your degree skills

In addition to that all negative factors could possibly be outweighed by potentials. Last but not least three potentials have been shown that have neither been taken into account positively nor negatively:

6) Invests heavily in training and development of its employees  
13) Offers clear opportunities for long-term career progression  
18) Really cares about their employees as individuals

5.2.3 Sutherland’s model

Reality

When reviewing the first work description with Sutherland’s model there are basically two applicable factors. Firstly, though being highly subjective, it is possible to interpret the announced responsibility for development and improvement of the sector as a “corporate culture of challenging work”. Secondly the part “valuing employees” of the ninth factor can be connected to the securing of a good working environment.
Turning to the second work description, there are three factors that can be linked to a couple of indicators. Factors one “culture of challenging work” and ten “benefits out of work experience” can be connected to the securing of a positive development of the sector, the strategic long-term orientation of the tasks, the extensive responsibility for staff, the leading and development of projects and the cooperation with other departments within and outside the municipality.

When the interviewees’ actual reasons for taking on a municipality job are examined, there is particularly one factor to be taken in to account from Sutherland’s findings. This would be the second ranked one, concerned with “personal training and development opportunities”. This can be met with the interviewees points in new challenges, many staff, new development opportunities, taking a further step in the career, enhancing one’s competences and obtaining a higher position.

Generally speaking there can be four of eleven positive indicators be found in the external view. However, taking a look at the negative image patterns of municipalities as employer, it becomes clear, that there are more and especially stronger negative connections to Sutherland’s factors. The “myths” that municipality managers do nothing and have a non-intellectually challenging job is a negative equivalent to the first ranked factor “culture of career growth and challenging work”. The two factors can equally be linked to factor seven, that is also concerned with “challenging work in a non-hierarchical environment”. In addition to that the reputation of slow decisions can be associated with hierarchy which makes a double negative link to the seventh factor. In the third place there is the topic of payment coming up, which has a very strong bad reputation in the public mind. In addition to those, the factor ranked sixth “successful company based on strong products” corresponds with the impression that the work remains unappreciated from customers, that are the population. Concerning a “comfortable working environment” it is, though highly subjective, hard to believe that a stiff and bureaucratic organisation can provide it.
Overall there are five of eleven negative connections to Sutherland’s findings. This is a rather bad sign for the brand image, as the amount of negative correspondences is higher than the number of positive ones. However, there is only one direct contradiction, in matters of career growth and challenging work.

Potentials

Taking the positive associations of the interviewees into account a totally different image appears in terms of Växjö Kommun’s employer brand. Reviewing those positive indicators with Sutherland’s findings, there can be a total amount of seven positive correspondents revealed. The interviewees have put emphasis on the challenging nature of their work and its variations in daily business. This can be understood as a sign for the “culture of challenging work and career growth” as well as for “the work experience benefits”. Additionally the perceived challenges and the not so hierarchical perceives organisational structure can be associated with Sutherland’s aspect of “challenging work in a non-hierarchical environment”.

The second ranked measure “personal training and development opportunities” is met with the interviewees’ perception of having training possibilities. A similar aspect is “job rotation and diversity” which finds correspondence in the opinion that the municipality generally offers many options to follow one’s individual career wishes. Concerning the “value based organisation” there can quite some strong correspondences be found. Firstly the overall strong feeling of the interviewees to work for a higher purpose is an indicator for social responsibility, which goes hand on hand with the overall responsible nature of their work. Furthermore the less profit-oriented character of public administrations’ work is possible to be associated with other values than money. Last but not least the statement of Växjö Komun taking good care of its managers, can be understood as a sign for valuing employees. A last positive match can be seen in the sixth ranked factor, namely “successful company based on strong products”. In this case, it is of course services, that are the products.
However, the interviewees consider their “products” important, and just believe that people do not fully understand to what extent the municipality influences their daily life and tries to improve its standard. Therefore the public services can be considered strong products, that are not transparent enough to be seen.

Overall there are seven positively connected measures out of possible eleven. In comparison to the initial externally displayed image, this combination would make the employer brand a lot more attractive.

This analysis shows that all positive indicators from the “reality-part” can also be considered potentials. These are:
1) Corporate culture of career growth and challenging work
2) Personal training and development opportunities
9) Value based organisation valuing employees, cultural diversity, social responsibility, access to resources
10) Benefits like fringe benefits, status and work experience

However, it has to be noted that the first factor has also been subject to negative associations. Considering those, the potentials-analysis has revealed, that three negative associations could be outweighed by the corresponding potentials, which are:
1) Corporate culture of career growth and challenging work
6) Successful company based on strong products
7) Challenging work in non-hierarchical company

Furthermore the fifth factor, concerned with job diversity has not been taken into account in the reality check.

Generally speaking all models display the same situation – the brand image is worse than the brand identity. Växjö Kommun obviously possesses many potential characteristics, that can be considered positive measures in terms of employer
branding. However, these are apparently not sufficiently conveyed to the outside world.

6 Conclusion

The purpose of this thesis has been to research how public administrations can attain a competitive advantage in order to fight in the war for talent. For this reason this study centres around strengthening the employer brand by highlighting potentials of the public organisations as an employer. Founded by the theoretical framework and the empirical investigation, the outcome of the study indicate that:

- The result from the EVP is that the reasons to work for the public sector, such as fulfilling a higher purpose, carrying social responsibilities and the challenging work should be further highlighted in order to attract more applicants. These reasons are strong potentials within the public sector.
- The targeted applicants have to be narrowed to people who have the heart for social responsibility, in order to correspond with the organisation’s values. By making an identification of the targeted applicants, it is easier to focus on strengthening the employer brand for this specific group.
- The conclusions of the EVP work in congruence with employer branding shows that career growth, challenging work, valuing employees, social responsibility, benefits like work experience are strong indicators of potentials.
- Overall all positive factors about the public sector as an employer, mentioned by the interviewees, can be regarded and used as positive employer brand attributes in at least one of the models.
- The comparison of external and internal associations with working for the public sector has shown, that there is a strong dissonance between the brand image and the brand identity. Therefore the employer brand value is, from an external point of view, rather low, however insiders perceive it differently.
7 Reflections

The case of Växjö Kommun has merely been one example of the municipalities’ situation in Sweden. Therefore this study cannot be generalised. However, it might be possible to transfer some findings to other Swedish municipalities, facing the same problem. On the other hand it is necessary to note that most of the interviewees are employed by Växjö Kommun. In addition to that, interviews are a highly subjective way of gaining information – not only because the interviewed people are giving their personal opinions, but also because the interviewers’ attitudes and characters might have an influence on the situation. In particular, the overall atmosphere of an interview is dependent on the rapport built up between the social actors in that situation. As a consequence of this the answers might have been different, with other interviewers. In addition to that interviewers are, despite interview guides, likely to adapt their questions to the current situation, which makes it hardly possible to ask every person the exact same things.

The results are further limited in terms of the source of the prejudices, found during the analysis. It has not been taken into consideration how these prejudices about the public sector have been founded and how strong the source is. For this reason it is not possible to say, in how far the usage of the indentified potentials would actually change the brand image.

In order to improve the situation there could be further research conducted within the field of recruitment communication channels in the public sector. Furthermore, this study has been restricted to potentials, that can already be found within the organisation. Therefore the investigation of not yet existing capabilities could uncover even more possibilities for improving the employer brand image.
In addition to that it would certainly be helpful to broaden the empirical information on the topic, in a sense of more diverse sources e.g. gender. Connected to that idea it could be helpful to study different Swedish municipalities, having similar problems. There are many approaches towards gaining a competitive advantage in the war for talent, employer branding was just one approach. Research could be conducted on other approaches to competing in the war for talent.
8 References

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8.2 Articles


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Appendix 1

Work advertisement for managing director of the property management department  
(provided by the staff Växjö Kommun)

VöFAB är ett kommunalt fastighetsbolag som äger och förvaltar fastigheter med lokaler i Växjö stad. Vi äger skolor, förskolor, idrottsanläggningar, kontor, offentliga toaletter och föreningslokale. Totalt omfattar ansvarsområdet ca 295 000 kvm och vi är 68 anställda. Läs gärna mer på www.vofab.se.

Förbättra inledning

Vår nuvarande Vd går vidare till nya utmaningar och vi söker nu en efterträdare.

VD


Du förväntas samla de kreativa krafter som finns inom företaget till insatser som garanterar en verksamhet där hyresgäster och anställda känner stolthet. I organisationen finns en hög kompetens som ansvarar för den operativa verksamheten tillsammans med funktioner för ekonomi, personal, IT och information.

Vi söker dig med goda ekonomiska kunskaper som genom samarbete, helhetssyn och affärsrörelse skapar resultat. Som person är du social, prestigelös, kommunikativ och tydlig i dina krav. I din bakgrund finns ett framgångsrikt ledarskap och det är en fördel om du kan fastighetsbranschen.
Din insats blir av stor betydelse och vi erbjuder en utvecklande tjänst i ett framgångsrikt företag!


Välkommen!

Högström & Co logo

Work advertisement of managing director of the school and childcare department
(provided by the staff of Växjö Kommun)


Skol- och barnomsorgsnämndens verksamhet omfattar förskola, pedagogisk omsorg (familjedaghem), förskoleklass, grundskola, särskola och fritidshem. Dessutom ingår kulturskola, fritidsgårdsvirksamhet och skolbibliotek. Vi har ansvaret för ca 15 000 barn och ungdomar och är ca 2 200 anställda med en bruttobudget på ca 1,3 miljarder SEK. För mer information: www.vaxjo.se
Skol- och barnomsorgsförvaltningen söker en **Förvaltningschef**


Vi ser positivt på framtiden, Växjö kommun fortsätter att växa befolkningsmässigt vilket ger oss en grund med fortsatt högt elevunderlag och en stabil ekonomi. Linné Universitetet med 35 000 studenter och en lärarutbildning skapar goda förutsättningar för utveckling, kompetensutveckling och rekrytering. Det ger oss också möjligheten att utveckla ett mer evidensbaserat arbetssätt som förstärks vid ett samarbete med Universitet.


61 (62)
Vi söker dig som trivs i ledarollen och att arbeta nära politiken, du leder genom upprättade strategier och styr verksamheten genom samsyn med dina närmaste chefer och övriga styrmedel som du förfogar över.

Du en akademisk examen och har erfarenhet av att leda större organisationer som i sin tur styrs av en politisk ledning. Du har ett intresse av utbildningsfrågor men behöver inte vara pedagog.

Linnaeus University – a firm focus on quality and competence

On 1 January 2010 Växjö University and the University of Kalmar merged to form Linnaeus University. This new university is the product of a will to improve the quality, enhance the appeal and boost the development potential of teaching and research, at the same time as it plays a prominent role in working closely together with local society. Linnaeus University offers an attractive knowledge environment characterised by high quality and a competitive portfolio of skills.

Linnaeus University is a modern, international university with the emphasis on the desire for knowledge, creative thinking and practical innovations. For us, the focus is on proximity to our students, but also on the world around us and the future ahead.