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The Dynamics of an Employer Brand

How culture can be used as a Managerial Control Mechanism

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Abstract

The aim of this article is to provide an understanding of how management can work strategically to improve an employer brand. This study is conducted at a municipally owned company in Sweden, which operates in the entertainment and experience industry. By studying the cultural ambiguities in this organization, we can understand how the dynamics of culture continuously shape and reshape the organizational identity through organizational actors. This study shows the tensions between how employees influence cultural processes through their social interactions, while management attempts to steer the organizational culture and identity through the use of normative control. This study contributes to managerial implications of how managers can take strategic actions to influence organizational culture and identity, and thereby influence the employer brand. Based on this study, we have developed the figure “The Pendulum Dynamics of an Employer Brand”, which illustrates our findings in relation to relevant theories. This figure can be used as an analytic tool for future research within employer branding, in order to find out how managers can affect and improve an employer brand.

Key Words

Employer Branding, Organizational Identity, Organizational Loyalty and Commitment, Cultural Dynamics, Normative Control.

Introducing the Trend of Employer Branding

Globalization has led to a world characterized by a rapidly changing business environment (Chhabra & Sharma, 2014). Van Mossevelde (2010) argue that there is a shortage of skilled labor, and fighting over employees is in many companies as important as fighting over customers. Talented employees can lead to competitive advantages and successful organizations (Chhabra & Sharma, 2014; McDonnell et al., 2010). In order to retain talented employees in a competitive environment, Backhaus and Tikoo (2004) discuss employer branding as a long-term recruitment strategy. Many companies allocate a lot of resources to employer branding activities, since recruitment is a time-consuming and costly process (Davies, 2008). Employer branding practices are built upon assumptions that employees are

valuable assets, and that human capital create value to companies, where investments in human capital lead to increased corporate performance (Ambler & Barrow, 1996; Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004). Since the 1990's, when the demand for IT talents became high, employer branding strategies have been commonly used to attract, retain and develop employees (Chhabra & Sharma, 2014). Employer branding is therefore used as a management tool in the war for talents (Beechler & Woodward, 2009). Ambler and Barrow (1996) brought the disciplines of HR (Human Resources) and brand marketing into a framework through employer branding, which is thereby used within strategic branding (Kunerth & Mosley, 2011), and is important within HR strategies (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004; Martin & Beaumont, 2003; Martin & Hetrick, 2010; Schultz et al., 2005). Employer branding is described as an umbrella for recruitment, staffing, training, development and career management, and is used to manage perceptions of current and potential employees and other stakeholders (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004; Chhabra & Sharma, 2014).

Since employer branding involves both HRM (Human Resource Management) and branding principles (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004), the employer brand is related to the product brand (Walker, 2007). However, an important difference is that the employer brand is targeted both inside and outside the organization, while marketing of the product and corporate brand is primarily targeted to external groups (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004). Foster et al. (2010) argue that corporate branding includes internal branding and employer branding, where internal branding takes place inside the organization, and employer branding is communicated externally. Previous research has primarily focused on employer branding from an external perspective, with focus on recruitment and attracting employees (Beechler & Woodward, 2009; Chhabra & Sharma, 2014; Kunerth & Mosley, 2011). This has led to a lack of knowledge of what image current employees have of their employer (Maxwell & Knox, 2009). Backhaus and Tikoo (2004) argue that employer branding strategies aim to affect the relationship between current employees and the organization, in order to encourage employees to stay with, and support, the company. Chhabra and Sharma (2014) argue that companies must integrate organizational attributes into the employer brand, and that internal employer branding towards existing employees is important in order to retain employees, and to have credibility as an employer. In order to shape employees' behaviors and attitudes towards the brand, internal branding has increased in importance within employer branding (Punjaisri et al., 2008). Martin and Beaumont (2003) argue that the strengthening of a brand can be used as a strategy to manage people. Berthon et al. (2005) argues that a strong employer brand leads to reduced costs within recruitment, increased retention of employees and improvement of relations between employees. A company with a strong employer brand can offer lower salaries, compared to companies with less strong employer brands (Berthon et al., 2005; Chhabra & Sharma, 2014). Hence, a strong employer brand can give competitive advantages, which makes employer branding interesting to study empirically. In order to understand the meaning and usefulness of employer branding strategies, this study will investigate the tensions between how the employer brand is continuously created by employees, and how management attempts to influence the employer brand.

This article first gives an introduction of previous research within the area of employer branding in relation to organizational culture, including problem discussion and purpose of the study. Second, we present the theoretical framework of Hatch's (1993) cultural dynamics

model and Kunda's (1992) theories of normative control, together with other related theories within organizational culture and employer branding. Third, the methodology of the study, data collection and data analysis is presented. Fourth, the empirical findings are described and discussed, including the setting, organizational culture and the views of the employer and the employer brand. Fifth, by using the cultural dynamics model (Hatch, 1993) and Kunda's (1992) theories of normative control as analytical tools, and by adding other theoretical perspectives, the discussions are extended by analyzing how an employer brand is continuously constructed. Based on our study, we present a figure that illustrates the continuous creation and re-creation of an employer brand, in relation to previous research. Finally, conclusions are made, and main results and implications are presented, as well as suggestions for future research.

The Cultural Meaning for an Employer Brand

Organizations should promote their uniqueness and value proposition through the employer brand (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004; Chhabra & Sharma, 2014). The identification of the value proposition involves analyzing values, organizational culture, competitors and HR policies within the company, as well as the image, strengths of the brand and current trends (Chhabra & Sharma, 2014). This value proposition is communicated internally and externally to position the image of the employer brand among existing and potential employees, which requires that the employer brand is consistent with other branding activities (Chhabra & Sharma, 2014). The internal employer brand must therefore be congruent with what has been promised to new employees, and be incorporated into the organizational culture and vice versa, which means that the employer brand should be based on the true organizational culture (Chhabra & Sharma, 2014; Froom, 2001; Punjaisri et al., 2008). If employees' expectations of the employer brand are not met, they are likely to become dissatisfied, which might make employees leave the organization (Cable & Judge, 1996; Chhabra & Sharma, 2014; Froom, 2001; Punjaisri et al., 2008; Wanous et al., 1992). The aim with internal employer branding is therefore to keep employees committed to the values and goals within the organization (Chhabra & Sharma, 2014), and to get employees to talk positively about the employer brand externally (Sullivan, 2004). Internal branding is of high importance in order to shape employees' brand attitudes and behaviors (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004). Rucci et al. (1998) describe how the creation of an employer brand improves employee attitudes and thereby influences customer satisfaction, which in turn affects financial performance. Therefore, the employer brand is of high importance for management, in order to have a successful and profitable organization (Rucci et al., 1998).

The image of the employer is shaped through employer brand associations, which are ideas and thoughts that a brand name evokes that affect the company's attractiveness in the eyes of potential employees (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004; Chhabra & Sharma, 2014). The identity and culture of the organization influence employees' loyalty to the employer brand, and the culture is in turn affected by the employer brand (Chhabra & Sharma, 2014). The aim with employer brand loyalty is to move current employees beyond the employment contract and create a psychological contract (Chhabra & Sharma, 2014; Davies, 2008). A strong employer brand can thereby create organizational loyalty and commitment and emotional ties between employees and the organization (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004; Chhabra & Sharma,

2014; Robinson et al., 1994). As argued by Backhaus and Tikoo (2004), organizational values, identity and culture are important in the shaping of an employer brand. Employer branding can create a psychological contract between employees and the company, hence the necessity of an employer brand that is congruent with employees' expectations, in order to keep this contract and ensure employee loyalty. Backhaus and Tikoo (2004) argue that employer branding can be used to actively strengthen employees' identification with the organization, and that organizational culture and identity thereby both shapes, and is shaped by, employer branding.

Kunda (1992) argues that organizational culture is said to be both in the mind and the heart of people, and that culture reflects the rules that are shared among organizational members, governing behavior at work through meanings, norms, assumptions and values. These are textual, symbolic and narrative structures that are encoded. Kunda (1992) compares a company with a family, where members care for, and take care of, each other, and where the cultural outcomes are dependent on the behavior of top managers. Culture is further described as a combination of freedom and commitment, where an emotional bond can be created through shared beliefs (Kunda, 1992). Chhabra and Sharma (2014) argue that organizational culture is based upon assumptions and values that are shared among organizational members, and are passed on to new employees who enter the organization, affecting their behaviors. Kunda (1992) argues that it is through emotional attachment and internalization of values that strong cultures are created and maintained. Congruence between employees' values and organizational values can lead to positive work outcomes and organizational commitment (Cable & Judge, 1996). Foster et al. (2010) further discuss how employer branding can contribute to employee loyalty and commitment, and that employees are more likely to become emotionally attached to an organization when employees accept the values behind the brand. Foster et al. (2010) therefore argue that employer branding strategies are necessary, in order to ensure that values are communicated in the right way and to attract employees with the same values as the organization. Values, norms, and other organizational attributes need to be communicated across the whole organization, in order for the internal brand to be delivered correctly (Foster et al., 2010).

Maxwell and Knox (2009) argue that employer branding can be used as a strategy for managers to identify what current employees see as attractive attributes of the employer brand, which can be used in the communication of the organizational culture and identity, and motivate employees to live the brand. As argued by Ind (2001), in order for companies to be successful in their employer branding work, employees must themselves make the choice to live the brand and identify with the organization, which requires internalization of the organizational values. Managers within the organization can act as role models and be a source of inspiration to live the brand, however, managers cannot command employees to live the brand (Ind, 2001). In order to create engagement, managers should provide opportunities for employee involvement and participation in the process of defining and implementing employer branding strategies. Ind (2001) further argues that ideas are brought to life through open and honest communication, both internally and externally, based on sharing of information and transparency throughout the organization.

The trend of employer branding has created expectations that companies should work with employer branding strategies. Even without employer branding strategies, all companies

have an employer brand, since they have a reputation as an employer (Ambler & Barrow, 1996; Walker, 2007). The actual importance of employer branding strategies as the only solution for companies to become attractive employers, needs questioning, since our study shows an example of a company with a strong employer brand, despite the lack of explicitly stated employer branding strategies. However, companies that have a strong employer brand today cannot take this for granted, since this does not mean that they will be an attractive employer in the future. As argued by Miller (1992) through the Icarus paradox, companies cannot rely on previous success, since a company's greatest asset can lead to its downfall.

We want to provide an understanding of the actual implication and importance of employer branding strategies in practice. The purpose of this study is therefore to investigate how management can work strategically to attempt to control the organizational processes and culture, and how they can thereby actively influence and improve the employer brand from within the organization. Backhaus and Tikoo (2004) argue that employer branding is important in the search for a framework within strategic HRM. Employer branding can be valuable for both practitioners, as a strategic tool for managers, and for scholars, who can use employer branding to integrate related areas within recruitment, selection and retention literature (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004). This study shows that a strong employer brand from the outside is not necessarily a true reflection of the organizational culture and identity inside the organization. We thereby investigate the cultural meaning for a strong employer brand, and how both the social interactions between employees, as well as management's attempts to control the culture, affect the continuous creation and re-creation of the employer brand. Employer branding as a concept in practice is still evolving, which makes it interesting to study empirically (Chhabra & Sharma, 2014). By studying how management can influence an employer brand through the control of organizational culture, our study can contribute to research within employer branding and HRM, and lead to managerial implications that can be useful in future strategies of how to improve an employer brand.

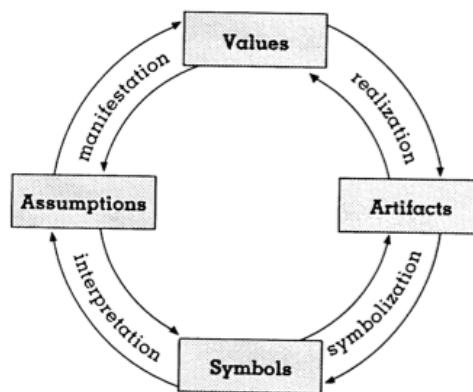
Culture as a Dynamic Process

Chhabra and Sharma (2014) argue that employer branding strategies often are based upon values and organizational culture, which create expectations on the company as an employer. However, the aim of this study is not to discuss how successful this company is in meeting these expectations from an external perspective, nor to look at how successful they are on the market in attracting employees. Instead, this study focus on how an employer brand is shaped within an organization. Employer branding can be viewed as a process (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004; Chhabra & Sharma, 2014), and by using Hatch's (1993) cultural dynamics model to analyze how the dynamic processes of organizational culture influence the employer brand, we have gained an understanding of the ongoing process of how to improve an employer brand. The cultural dynamics model (Hatch, 1993) is a development of Schein's (1985) model of organizational culture, which involves external adaptation and internal integration of assumptions, values and artifacts within organizations. The advantage with Hatch's (1993) model, compared to Schein's (1985) theory, is that the cultural dynamics model includes both change and stability, as well as their interaction, in the dynamic processes of culture and identity creation (Hatch, 1993). Since an employer brand originates from the organizational culture (Chhabra & Sharma, 2014), the cultural dynamics model helps us explain the ongoing

process of how culture influences the employer brand. Hatch (1993) develops Schein's (1985) theory by combining it with symbolic-interpretive perspectives, adding aspects of symbols in organizational processes. Symbols are important in order for organizational members to make sense of images and values within the organization, and symbols are related to corporate storytelling (Dandridge et al., 1980). Jones (1996) argues that organizational actors constantly narrate about their organizational experiences and that communication and social interaction creates a corporate story, where employer branding shapes both the organization and the understandings of organizational actors.

The model of cultural dynamics includes the processes of manifestation, realization, symbolization and interpretation, where assumptions, values, artifacts and symbols are linked. The processes have both forward (proactive/prospective) and backward (retrospective/retroactive) aspects. The role of activity within culture is represented by the proactive/retroactive aspects, while reflexivity and cultural consciousness is representing prospective and retrospective aspects. Organizational culture can be defined by entering the cultural dynamics model at any point depending on the study. (Hatch, 1993)

Figure 1. The Cultural Dynamics Model (Hatch, 1993)



Clark (1972) discuss how collective understandings, when it comes to images and stories within organizations, can lead to loyalty to the organization and to creation of an identity, as well as a psychological contract (Chhabra & Sharma, 2014). This is related to Hatch's (1993) arguments that the creation and formation of individual and organizational identities are created through culture, which in turn is constructed through cognitive and social processes. As argued by Van Maanen (2011), meanings are created, maintained and shaped through social interaction between organizational actors. Both on an individual and organizational level, the processes of manifestation, realization, symbolization and interpretation all lead to the creation of identity, action, image and meaning for the organization (Hatch, 1993). These processes in turn create perceptions and views of the employer, and thereby the cultural processes also contribute to, and influence, the shaping of an employer brand.

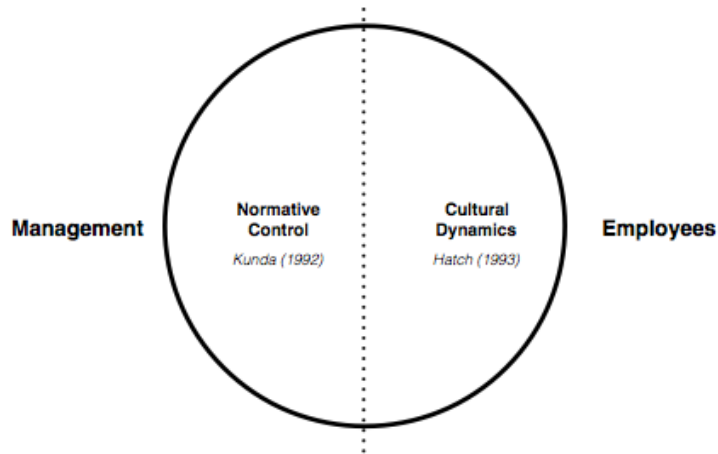
Individuals have expectations of how things should be in organizations, and these expectations unfold through a manifestation process (Hatch, 1993). From a proactive view, one can study how expectations and values come about, based on assumptions. Perceptions, emotions, cognitions and thoughts are all involved in the manifestation process and can be specified through a list of cultural values, where cultural assumptions are the basis. When values are actively acknowledged as part of the organizational culture, assumptions are

updated through retroactive manifestation, in order to align with these values (Hatch, 1993). Values and expectations are also part of processes of realization, where they are shaped to affect organizational behavior. Through day-to-day activities within organizations, values and expectations unfold through artifacts that are produced, reproduced and shaped. Studies from a proactive realization point of view can focus on expectations and values of how something should be, where for instance rituals in the form of meetings can be studied (Hatch, 1993). Rituals are useful when studying social and cultural interaction between organizational members (Rosen, 1985). The use of language affects how cultural values and expectations are maintained or shaped through artifacts, such as stories, humor and greetings. These are examples of retroactive realization, which can be studied through observations (Hatch, 1993). Artifacts are infused with values and assumptions, which leads to proactive realization. However, the importance of artifacts from a cultural perspective is not static, but should be seen as an ongoing realization process where the artifact is either accepted, rejected or ignored. Another process as part of cultural dynamics is symbolization, where organizational members act as manipulators of symbols and create meaning as they socially construct a reality in line with their self-images, in order to contextualize their identities and activities (Hatch, 1993). As part of the symbolization process, organizational members communicate to transform objects, actions and words into symbols and to create a contextualized meaning of culture. Meanings of experiences are also established through the process of interpretation, which involves how symbols are formed through understandings (Hatch, 1993). Alvesson (1990) discuss how individuals' interpretations of what the company stands for affect the corporate image within the organization, which affects relations with external stakeholders.

In this study, Hatch's (1993) cultural dynamics model illustrates how the ongoing dynamics of culture creation affects the employer brand through employees and their daily interactions. This study has identified cultural ambiguities and tensions between management and employees in their influence of the organizational culture, where management attempts to steer the organizational culture and identity, in order to influence the employer brand. Kunda's (1992) theories of normative control have therefore been used in order to understand how management influences the underlying structures and social relations in the studied organization. By nurturing shared beliefs, values and norms, an emotional identification can be created between employees and the company (Fleming & Sturdy, 2011; Kunda, 1992). Kunda (1992) discusses rituals, ceremonies, symbols and meanings as expressions of what he calls a corporate philosophy, where these methods, together with participative decision making, can be used by managers to create and maintain a strong organizational culture. Organizational culture is often ambivalent and ambiguous, and as argued by Martin (1992), the purpose with culture is to maintain a social structure. Rules of how to behave, as well as articulated guidelines for experience, can be imposed on employees through normative control, where corporate interests are prioritized above employees' individual interests (Kunda, 1992). Through symbolic rewards, employee loyalty to the organization is thereby created. Management controls underlying experiences, feelings and thoughts through normative control, by guiding the actions of organizational members. Through normative control, not only employee behavior and actions can be shaped, but the self-definition of them as social actors, their view of the world and their emotional responses (Kunda, 1992). Both the view of organizational culture as a dynamic process (Hatch, 1993), influenced by

employees, and the theories of normative control (Kunda, 1992), influenced by management, have been used in explaining the tensions in how the employer brand both shapes, and is shaped by, organizational culture, see Figure 2. This figure will be further developed throughout the study, by adding empirical findings and other relevant theories, in addition to the theoretical framework.

Figure 2. Tensions between Cultural Influences by Management and Employees



The tensions between Management and Employees are illustrated by the dotted line.

Methodology: How to Study an Employer Brand

Data Collection

The studied company has requested total anonymity, and due to ethical aspects (Kvale, 2007), we have followed this request. In order to protect identification of the company, we are using the fictional name “Experienzo”. In order to understand how the employer brand is continuously created through ongoing cultural processes, we have studied both managers and other employees and their daily activities, social interactions and narratives. During the five months when this study was conducted, we were able to collect data from within the company, as we were given access to an office at the HR department. The case study method has been used for the study, since it is suitable when there is lack of empirical studies within a research area (Maxwell & Knox, 2009; Eisenhardt, 1989). We used a qualitative research method, where data was collected through personal interviews (Silverman, 2013). We have also used other methods to collect data by conducting a focus group, making observations, and through document analysis, which are commonly used in case studies (Eisenhardt, 1989). The interviews were conducted with seven top managers (see Table 1). The selection of interviewees on a managerial level was based on three criteria; their position as a manager, being from different departments, and that they are somehow involved in the work with how to be an attractive employer and/or branding of the company. In this selection, we received help from an HR Specialist. Three HR specialists were also interviewed, as they are involved in recruitment and employee retention. The study was conducted through semi-structured interviews that were held for about 60-90 minutes, where questions were decided upon in advance to create structure in the interviews, and to make sure that the same questions are

asked to all interviewees (Kvale, 2007). The questions were open-ended (Silverman, 2011; Kvale, 1996), and we complemented with additional questions when the answers were not comprehensive enough. As argued by Silverman (1993), interviews can be opportunities of observation. Therefore, we took notes of our personal reflections, both during and directly after the interviews. Through interviews, we gained a deeper understanding of employees' views and attitudes towards their employer, and were able to analyze the views of the employer brand, and how it is talked about within the organization (Czarniawska, 2014).

In order to get co-workers' views of their employer, a focus group was conducted. Saunders et al. (2009) argue that in order to get a broad picture, a focus group should be between four and eight participants. Therefore, we chose eight participants from different departments across the organization, where six individuals participated (see Table 2). In this research area, where little information about the studied phenomena is provided, we chose a heterogeneous group that could represent the company's wide categories of professions, so that different points of view of the company as an employer could be discussed (Carson et al., 2001). However, we only chose participants who are working full-time at the company, since they could provide a deeper understanding of the organizational culture. The questions were open-ended (Silverman, 2011; Kvale, 1996), which provided a forum for open discussion, helping participants to reach consensus (Krueger & Casey, 2000). The focus group provided additional perspectives of the employer brand, which added to the views from HR and management.

Table 1. Interview Overview

Interviewee's Job Position	# Interviews
CEO (Chief Executive Officer)	1
COO (Chief Operating Officer)	1
HR Manager	1
Sales Manager	1
Market Manager	1
Information Manager	1
Project Manager	1
HR Specialists	3

Table 2. Focus Group Overview

Participant's Job Position	# Participants
Purchasing	1
IT	1
Sales	1
Restaurant	1
Finance & Accounting	1
Café	1

Observations were also made for the data collection, since interviews can be a limited source of information, as they only give information on interpretations from interviewees (Czarniawska, 2014). Observations are important when studying culture (Hatch, 1993), and by observing social interactions, we gained an understanding of the workplace and organizational culture. This made it possible to interpret the narrative stories told by interviewees during the interviews. Since we were present at Experienzo for five months, we were able to interact and have daily informal conversations with many employees from different departments and job positions, both managers and other employees, which gave insight in how it is to work at Experienzo. To validate our findings, we conducted different types of observations. Direct observations (Czarniawska, 2014), for instance through observations during interviews in the recruitment of seasonal workers, were conducted in order to study the recruitment practices and how the employer brand is communicated towards potential employees. By studying written documents through the company website (Czarniawska, 2014), we found out what image management is trying to create of Experienzo

as an employer in the external communication, for instance through job advertisements. Internal documents on the company intranet were also studied, in order to find out how the image of the employer brand is created and communicated internally within the organization, and to study management's expectations on employees. In order to get theoretical information, data from articles, journals, books and websites has also been collected.

Data Analysis

The conducted interviews were recorded and transcribed, in order to minimize the risk of bias (Kvale, 2007). In order to get a holistic view of the collected data, the analysis was made by combining data from observations, interviews and the focus group. Through observations, we were able to analyze employees' and management's attitudes towards Experienzo as an employer, and how attitudes were expressed through actions (Czarniawska, 2014). We identified patterns of tensions in the views of the organizational culture, which differed between management and other employees. The ongoing cultural processes turned out to be a strong influence of how the employer brand is continuously created, at the same time as management influenced the culture and employer brand through their strategic actions. Based on the patterns, categorization of data was made (Czarniawska, 2014; Martin & Turner, 1986) with the help of the cultural dynamics model (Hatch, 1993). The data was thereby divided and analyzed based on the processes of manifestation, realization, symbolization and interpretation. To explain these processes, we analyzed the data by looking at what the different categories of data were an example of; whether it was assumptions, values, symbols and/or artifacts, how they interplay and their cultural meaning in the construction of the employer brand. We analyzed how the employer brand was talked about, and tried to find underlying assumptions and values by not just analyzing what was said, but also the actions of organizational members, and the meaning of their behaviors towards each other. By studying actions and practices, we also found out what artifacts and symbols that are used in the daily interactions between employees, and the meaning of these (Hatch, 1993). The findings created an understanding of how ongoing cultural influences continuously shape and reshape the employer brand. The reliability and consistency of the results, and the validity, was critically analyzed by adding other theoretical perspectives (Kvale, 2007). Therefore, Kunda's (1992) theories of normative control were used to analyze management's active role in culture creation, and how they attempt to affect the employer brand through cultural control.

A limitation of this study is that even though managers, HR Specialists and other co-workers are involved in the study, the personal interviews have been conducted only with managers and HR Specialists. This has led to a higher representation of their perspectives, however, since management and HR are most often involved in the work with employer branding (Backhaus & Tikoo 2004; Kunerth & Mosley 2011), we therefore made the choice to focus on these perspectives. Another limitation is that even though the initial idea was to have eight participants in the focus group, two employees were not able to participate, which means that not all departments were represented. Additionally, as this study is only conducted at one company in Sweden, these findings might not be applicable to all industries or companies in all countries. However, despite the mentioned limitations, this study still illustrates the cultural influences on an employer brand, and therefore leads to implications of how management can attempt to influence the organizational culture and the employer brand.

The Case of Experienzo

The company Experienzo operates in the entertainment and experience industry, employing around 500 full-time employees and 2500 seasonal workers. The type of industry in which Experienzo operates, as well as the business strategy, leads to different offerings of products and services depending on the season. As a result, the work tasks are changing for employees during the year, which creates a very dynamic work environment. The dynamism of the organization is also a result of management's drive to continuously develop the company. However, Experienzo has also been described as a stable employer, with a safe work environment. Because of the municipal ownership, the organization is viewed to be relatively slow, with lagging processes. However, when comparing Experienzo with other municipal businesses, the company is considered to be fast moving. Management argues that it is important that Experienzo is allowed to continue to be operated more freely, in order to continue to grow and be competitive on the market. This tension between stability and dynamic change makes the organizational culture interesting to study empirically.

Experienzo is well known for its products and services in Sweden, especially in the city in which it operates, since it is located in the city center and is by many considered to be the heart of the city. Experienzo is considered to have a strong employer brand since they receive as many as 7000 applications each year for seasonal and full-time jobs. However, HR Specialists state that only 3000 of the applications are of good quality and only 1200 applicants are invited for interviews. In some areas, Experienzo has difficulties to find skilled employees, one reason being that employees sometimes are required to work nights and weekends. Despite the many applications Experienzo receive every year, HR and top management have started to discuss the need to work more actively with employer branding strategies, in order to attract competent employees in the many types of job categories that are needed in this type of business. Management and HR Specialists further argue that competitors have started to work more actively with employer branding strategies. They fear that Experienzo is falling behind competitors and has started to become less attractive as an employer, since they have had to cut costs and decrease benefits for employees. HR and top management therefore argue that Experienzo needs to take action to maintain and improve the strong employer brand, so that the company can continue to be an attractive employer. In order to maintain the reputation of being one of the market leaders within the Swedish entertainment industry, profits are reinvested in the company, so that customer offers, and thereby the product brand, can be improved. Due to the municipal ownership, profits cannot be distributed among employees as bonuses or increased salaries. In 2014, large investments were made in new products, and top management started an organizational change where several companies from the old corporate group merged into one Experienzo. This change was initiated by the municipal owner, in order to decrease the number of companies and create a centralized and cost efficient organization. Despite the merger in 2014, Experienzo made the highest profit since its establishment in the beginning of the 20th century.

The full-time employees, who are mostly involved in this study, have offices in two different buildings. Departments such as HR, IT, and the COO are located in one building, while Marketing, Sales, Information and the CEO are located in another building. Many employees have their own office, especially employees who have worked for the company for many years. Several managers have started as seasonal workers and advanced to become

managers and give the impression of being very professional and competent. Due to its municipal ownership, Experienzo has restrictions and cannot offer employees as high salaries compared to companies on the private market. To make up for the lower salary levels, employees at Experienzo have historically received other benefits, such as travel experiences and vouchers. However, the last couple of years, the municipal owner has set new restrictions and taken away benefits. This has been perceived as unfair by some employees. Additionally, since Experienzo has previously been divided into different companies that have now merged into one, some full-time employees are under different collective agreements, which is also considered as unfair by many individuals. Negotiations are ongoing with the unions to create more congruent collective agreements across the organization, however, there are also differences in working hours. Some employees have regulated working hours of 40 hours a week, while others have unregulated hours. This has resulted in some employees putting in much more hours than a normal working week, without getting overtime pay. For instance, the CEO has explained to be working both evenings and weekends, which is also the case for many other managers and HR Specialists. For some other employees, the norm seems to be to work less than a normal working week, which they have been allowed to do for a long time.

The Ambiguities of the Experienzo Culture

Many employees refer to Experienzo as a fun place to work, where their job is characterized by change, challenges, and freedom. Managers have described that the industry in which Experienzo operates contributes to a positive work environment. They argue that as they are delivering joy to their customers, this is spread to employees. When studying group interviews during recruitment of seasonal employees, recruiters describe Experienzo as a place of happiness for both customers and employees. The culture has been described as caring, where employees know each other on a personal level. The core values seem to be deeply anchored in every person, and many employees use the core values as a code of conduct; a guide of how to treat your co-workers. Many employees have been working at Experienzo for 10-20 years or longer, sometimes within the same department, and are very loyal to Experienzo. Top managers have described that when they were new to the company, employees told them that Experienzo is not just a job, it is a lifestyle, and that there are assumptions that no one expects them to ever leave the organization. There is a strong emotional bond between employees and the organization, and the CEO describes Experienzo as a very emotional brand. It has become the norm to stay committed to the organization, which is shown through a statement by an HR Specialist:

We are like a family. If you have worked here, you will always be part of the company. Once an Experienzer, always an Experienzer. The thought of leaving Experienzo one day, and not be part of this, actually scares me.

Since many employees have stayed for a long time, Experienzo has become part of their identity. Both managers and other employees talk about Experienzo with pride and a sense of status and belonging to something more than just a company. Employees have described that people always react in a positive way and treat them with respect when they say that they work at Experienzo. Because of the product, Experienzo is connected to feelings and

memories for people, especially citizens of the city in which Experienzo operates. An HR Specialist has described that she feels important and that she is contributing to the city through Experienzo. Similarly, top managers have described that working at Experienzo is like a mission and that it is like its own world inside Experienzo, which they are emotionally attached to. They further argue that the world outside gets frightening. Therefore, employees stay for many years. Managers and HR Specialists have described that the personal connections between employees cause problems of legitimacy, since employees who get promoted to managers face difficulties in giving orders to co-workers, whom they are friends with. Top managers have expressed a need to set rules and make the distinction between employees' work life and personal life clearer. Top managers argue that if Experienzo is to succeed as a trustworthy employer, they actually have to be an employer, and not a lifestyle.

When listening to the positive descriptions of Experienzo as a wonderful employer, it makes one wonder why top management and HR are discussing the need to strengthen the employer brand. As a result of the merger about a year ago, top management developed new strategies, where they set a goal that Experienzo should be one of the best workplaces in Sweden. The CEO argues that since employees are their most important resource, they must have the ambition to be one of the best workplaces. The general expression is that Experienzo has always been considered to be an attractive employer, which is proved by the thousands of applications each year. Managers argue that Experienzo indirectly has been perceived as being a good employer since employees stay, and that it has been like a "self-playing piano". Since they have never had to work hard to receive applications, they have never had to think of why they have a strong employer brand. However, even though Experienzo is described as a happy workplace from the outside, there are backsides of the organizational culture. Top managers have explained that employees are loyal and positive about Experienzo as an employer externally, but internally, people talk behind each other's back. Employees have expressed that they are afraid of stating their opinions, and that many employees point out each other's mistakes. An HR Specialist has described the culture as a "performance culture", and many managers and other employees have expressed an imbalance in work distribution, and that there is a risk of employees getting burned-out if this continues. Old assumptions are expressed by employees, who feel that they cannot finish their work day until after their manager has left the office. Some employees argue that management has a responsibility to set the work standard, since co-workers feel that they have to work overtime if the manager does so. Today, managers are failing to take this responsibility. While some employees say that there are new things happening constantly, others have described their work pace as slow, which shows the imbalances in workload. The strong cohesiveness and close personal relationships between employees have also been described to have backsides. Relatively new employees have described the culture as excluding against newcomers, who face difficulties to become part of the group. The culture has been taken for granted for a long time, and has by top managers been described to be "stuck in the walls". There are unspoken rules characterized by freedom in how to do your work, what to do and when to do it, in the speed that suits you. This has led to many of the roles being adapted to the person already working in that position, rather than employees adapting to a certain function. Top managers argue that personal interests have been prioritized before the interests of the organization, which is expressed by an HR Specialist:

If I would be very good at knitting, that means that I could be the HR Specialist specializing in knitting, because that is what I like doing and what I feel that I am good at. Jobs have been adapted to individuals to such a high extent that some employees are no longer employable outside Experienzo, since they have no other work experience and have been spoiled to do what they want for such a long time. Many employees do not have any other workplaces to relate to, and therefore they do not know how good of a workplace Experienzo actually is. This has led to problems of competence renewal, and we need to define what strategic competences we need in the long run.

Besides demands from the municipal owner to centralize the organization, top management has also defined a need to increase control. Two years prior to our study, top management decided to make an investigation of the Experienzo culture through a consultancy firm. The consultants identified subcultures and a sense of rivalry between departments. In our study, employees have further described the organizational culture to previously have been divided into several separate “individual islands” for many years, with a lack of a cohesiveness between employees. Employees have said that the culture is characterized by harsh jokes and a feeling of us against them between departments. These descriptions of Experienzo are contradictory to the positive descriptions stated by other employees, where the culture was described as caring. The negative description of the culture as being harsh is also the opposite of the general impression outside the organization of Experienzo as being a fun employer. These ambiguities lead to questions of how Experienzo really is as a workplace, and what actually constitutes the employer brand. Top managers have argued that in order to be able to attract and retain employees in the future, they have defined a need to unite Experienzo to become an employer with a coherent culture and employer brand. By referring to the cultural investigation made by consultants, top management argues that renewal was necessary, and that employees themselves have requested the organizational change. The investigation of the culture has been used as a tool by top management to motivate why they had to make changes, and has thereby been used to create legitimacy among employees, in order to implement the organizational changes.

Discussion: Understanding the Cultural Ambiguities

There are many ambiguities of the Experienzo culture, for instance that some employees describe Experienzo as a wonderful and caring employer, while others say that the workplace is characterized by rivalry, where employees talk behind each other’s back. So why do employees stay loyal to the organization and continue to work at Experienzo? The incentive, in this municipal business, is not increased salaries for employees. A strong employer brand means that a company can offer lower salaries, compared to companies that do not have strong employer brands (Berthon et al., 2005; Chhabra & Sharma, 2014). One of the reasons for why employees enjoy working at Experienzo is that they are delivering joy to customers, which is spread to employees. The emotional connection to the product brand is an important aspect of the strong employer brand, since it is connected to memories and experiences (Foster et al., 2010). This can be illustrated by Hatch’s (1993) cultural dynamics model, where the process of interpretation of experiences creates meanings that are established

among organizational members. Employees are filled with pride of their employment, which distinguishes the company from other companies within the industry (Kunda, 1992). The joy that is created through the entertainment business contributes to the company culture inside the organization, which is explained by Kunda (1992) as something that makes them what they are and thereby contributes to the organizational identity.

As discussed by Kunda (1992), the reason for why employees stay could be the work itself that is satisfying and developing for individuals, or the social context in which the work takes place. The company is, as discussed by Kunda (1992), comparable with a family where employees care for each other, which has created an emotional attachment. Top managers have described that working at Experienzo is like a lifestyle. This statement is a manifestation of underlying assumptions (Hatch, 1993), that employees will always stay loyal and committed to the organization. These collective understandings lead to organizational loyalty and the creation of an identity (Clark, 1972), and shows how a psychological contract is created between individuals and the organization (Chhabra & Sharma, 2014). Experienzo has become an important symbol for employees, and the emotional bond to the organization has made Experienzo become a part of employees' identities. As discussed by Hatch, 1993), culture creates and forms individual and organizational identities through cognitive and social processes, which create meaning within the organization. These positive aspects with the Experienzo culture, where employees feel a sense of belonging, is what employees talk about outside the organization, and this is one of the reasons why Experienzo is considered to be an attractive employer externally. However, internally within the organization, the negative aspects of the culture has made top management and HR identify a need to unite the "isolated islands" of the culture and create a coherent workplace. The merger and organizational changes that are taking place, due to demands from the owner, are therefore used by management as an opportunity to gain control over the culture and organization.

Managing Culture to Create a United Workplace

Tearing Down the Walls

Employees at Experienzo have explained that the "isolated islands" that have characterized the culture for a long time have made it difficult to cooperate and communicate between departments. The lack of internal communication was noticeable by the new CEO, who started at Experienzo around three years ago:

I visited Experienzo before I started here, and walked at the workplace with the previous CEO. He is a really good guy and talented, but we walked for three hours and he did not say hello to a single employee during those three hours. For me that was probably the first time I thought to myself that there is something that is not good here, something that is not working, because I am almost desperate to say hello to people when I walk at Experienzo, that is what drives me.

When the municipal owner requested a more cost efficient organization, where the previously separate companies would merge into one Experienzo, the new CEO, together with other top managers, took the opportunity to attempt to unite the culture and workplace. A part of this change was to move away from taking only the guest perspective into account, where focus

was on how Experienzo was perceived externally, and instead move towards a culture that focused more on acknowledging employees. Tangible assets have previously been highly valued, however, management aims to make intangible assets and softer values the priority. The organization has been described to previously have been hierarchical and male-dominated. In order to erase hierarchies and create a stronger sense of identity where they are all working together, new business cards have been created. All employees now have “Experienzer” as a title on their business cards, no matter job position. This has been said to be an initiative by the CEO, and employees have expressed that these business cards have created a sense of pride that they are all part of one united company.

Top managers have described the company history to be a very important part of Experienzo. Therefore, the aim has been to keep the cohesiveness and sense of belonging from what managers call the “old” culture, while allowing new creative ways of thinking and working in the new organization. This resulted in a new strategic framework with clearly stated vision, mission, business idea, goals and values. The new values are said to be characterized by happiness, care and creativity, with the aim to emphasize these positive aspects of the organizational culture. The principles for the new organization are by managers said to be characterized by common goals, clearer responsibility and roles, similar employment contracts for employees, efficiency, and increased participation, as a way to centralize the previously decentralized organization. A manager has described that top management aims to keep around 90 percent of the current culture, and connect the culture to the product brand and to the pride of working at Experienzo. Some managers argue that the culture needs to be defined from the top down, in order to have a common and united image of Experienzo as an employer. However, top management has not yet defined what the goal to be one of the best workplaces in Sweden includes or what it means. Many employees argue that this must be defined in order for employees to know where the organization is going and how they are affected by the new organization. Setting this goal might be a way for management to attempt to create legitimacy to take away the parts of the culture that management believes is not good for the company. The CEO wishes to make the culture more dynamic and accepting towards change. Top managers have also stated that they want to find the balance of encouragement, commitment, loyalty, and creativity; while there is still a need to control and structure the organization. The aim is said to be to find the balance between being a caring employer and an efficient organization.

Some employees are by managers and HR described to hold on to the past, since they think that Experienzo was a better workplace before the changes. Managers have described that many employees are on autopilot and no longer ask themselves why they go to work. Employees who have been allowed to do their job as they have found most suitable, today feel more controlled with new routines and guidelines. Some employees have therefore left the company during the last couple of years. The recruitment focus has moved towards more specialized positions, in order to find the right person for a specified job description based on the organizational needs, and not individual wishes. Many recruits have previously been found internally within the organization, however, in recent years, several new managers have been recruited from outside of the company, including the CEO. The new roles and routines have created confusion for some employees, who do not know their areas of responsibility or how to work together in the new organization. One of the top managers describes that he has

to explain to co-workers why they have to cooperate with colleagues to do their job, and that employees are used to do their work as they please:

I am the third Manager within my area since 1983 at Experienzo, and time had been standing still here, nothing had changed for at least ten years. When I got here a couple of years ago, I was met by an organization that was afraid of making mistakes. Strong personalities were able to take space and there was friction between people. Many employees have been screaming for changes. It is a nice culture here, it just has not been given the right nutrition.

Managers at Experienzo all argue that the biggest challenge the organization faces is not the structural changes in routines or policies, but the greatest challenge is to create a united culture. The CEO argues that in order for employees to be motivated, they must understand why the changes are taking place, and they must experience the change, in order to truly understand it. Today, new roles and routines are difficult to understand for some employees, since some changes have led to benefits being taken away. Some employees have also lost power over their work, and cannot see how they benefit from the changes.

In order to erase the clear distinction and rivalry between and within departments, top management has taken actions to merge the cultures into one united culture by changing the physical work environment. Previously, many employees have had their own office, especially the ones who have been working at Experienzo for a long time, which has made employees work separately. Recently, some offices have been opened up and been rebuilt to encourage communication and collaboration, in order to minimize hierarchical status distinctions and increase transparency. Previously, managers had their office on their own floor, which was called “the mahogany floor” by employees as a metaphor of being only for top management. A few years ago, top managers moved to offices on the same floor as co-workers within their separate departments, in order to be more present and visible. Another example of how management attempts to create a more transparent organization is the change of the staff dining room. Today, there are informally fixed seats for blue-collar workers. Most of these employees have been working at Experienzo for many years. On some chairs, names are written down to make it clear that the seats belong to them. This has led to a hostile environment, where employees from other departments do not dare to sit there. Top management wants to change this feeling of “us against them”, as employees have described it, by changing the physical environment of the staff dining room. Hence, there are plans to renovate this area to make it more open, with the aim to break old informal rules of where employees are allowed and not allowed to sit. Top managers state that this will hopefully break the old separated culture and make it easier to socialize between colleagues from different departments, and hopefully increase informal meetings and collaboration. There are also discussions about taking away the old coffee machines, which today are placed in different rooms on different floors, making informal communication between departments difficult. Top management aims to replace these with just one coffee machine in one building, that is shared by everyone, in the hope to increase informal socializing between employees across departments. Today, some individual employees are actively trying to break old cultures. The HR and Finance & Accounting departments are located in different office

buildings, and these departments collaborate in some areas. However, the physical distance between these departments prevents spontaneous social interaction. An accountant has described that they attempt to build relationships and increase cooperation between departments. Therefore, one day a week, employees from the Finance & Accounting department have lunch in the staff dining room in the building where HR is located. During these lunches, employees say that they can socialize more informally, and discuss things that do not come up at formal meetings.

A top manager has expressed that everyone can come with suggestions of improvements at Experienzo and that a company must be fair. However, the manager emphasizes that a company can never be a democracy, where everyone gets to make decisions. Top managers argue that they must in a strategic way take away what they call “the rotten apples”, by placing some employees in new positions, or by making them leave the organization and instead employ people “with the right attitude” from the outside. Top managers have further said that complaints from certain employees have been tolerated for many years, but that managers have now had enough. Managers state that if people do not like working here, they should leave. At an information meeting, where all full-time employees were present, the CEO stated:

I want to share a personal reflection with you. We do not know how lucky we are here and how good of a workplace Experienzo is. I feel like I am a kindergarten teacher and that there are kids playing on the rail track, and I am telling them that we have to move, but no one is listening. And I am tired of being a kindergarten teacher, I want fair play and that we are working together.

Many employees have expressed that they think it was brave of the CEO to stand up and say that people should stop complaining. Managers and HR Specialists have expressed that it makes it easier for them to put their foot down against complaints, when the CEO says that enough is enough in front of all employees. A top manager have said that many of the improvements have been realized thanks to the CEO:

When I started at Experienzo, the culture was awful, with harsh jokes. After my first day here, I never wanted to go back. But something happened on the way, and the CEO and his drive was very important in that change.

One can notice that both management and other employees admire the CEO and put a lot of trust in him. Employees have said that all that is needed to gain motivation is a picture of the CEO, and that the CEO has shifted the company values into a softer approach and a more caring culture. Managers have expressed that previously, there has been more focus on seasonal employees than taking care of full-time workers. The CEO argues that he tries to acknowledge all employees and take away the previous hierarchies by leading by example. He argues that managers must treat their employees the way they want the employees to treat the customers, and that managers’ statements must be mirrored in their own behavior. Today, employees describe Experienzo as a less hierarchical organization, with a more present and visible CEO, where it is not unusual that a seasonal worker contacts the CEO directly. The

changes in routines and the physical environment are by many employees viewed to have resulted in more of a sense of working together, with increased cooperation between departments. However, the physical distance between some departments, due to different office buildings that are located about a five to ten minute walk from each other, still makes it difficult for spontaneous interaction between departments, such as HR and Marketing. Also, some employees have described that there is still some hierarchy left, with unclear leadership, roles, division of responsibility, as well as decision making processes, which is especially experienced by new recruits. The CEO argues that even though top management has set new strategies and created new structures and processes, it takes time to change how the people within the organization interact, and to get them to work together.

Common Meeting Forums for Transparent Interaction

Besides the physical transformation, common meeting forums have also been established. The new organizational structure includes strategic groups within different areas, such as groups for development of the brand and the workplace. A top manager argues that the reason for why the CEO created these strategic groups is that he wants to encourage cross-departmental co-operation and stimulate employees to discover new ways of working together. The negative aspect with the strategic work groups is that it takes more time to come up with solutions. Other forums have also been created to open up for cooperation between departments on a co-worker level. Top managers have said that in order to create engagement, they must let all employees participate. Therefore, managers try to communicate that being a good employer is about more than benefits such as bonuses, and they instead emphasize transparency and involvement. In order to make employees feel that they can influence their work, top management has created the Co-worker Forum, which takes place once a year for all full-time workers.

During the Co-worker Forum this year, employees were divided into work groups to come up with suggestions for how to develop Experienzo's sustainability work. Through the Co-worker Forum, management provides opportunities for employees to socially interact, in an attempt to unite the organizational culture. These forums also give opportunities for management to gather employees' ideas for further improvement of the business. However, not all employees actually get the chance to state their opinion during these forums, since one can notice that it is the opinions of employees who normally have high influence in decision making processes at Experienzo, who are most active during the forums. Management's aim to get all employees to participate might therefore not be reached. A similar forum that recently has been created is the Leader Forum, as well as a Leadership Program, in order for top management to create a collective view of what is expected of all leaders at Experienzo. Finally, another forum is the Information Meeting, which is held by the CEO with all full-time employees, three to four times a year. Before one of these meetings, an HR Specialist expressed that the CEO is very good at pausing the organization and gather all employees, to make sure that everyone is on the same track and know where the organization is going. Today, management also attempts to spread information throughout the organization by continuously updating the intranet. Through increased internal communication, the organization has become more transparent.

Discussion: Breaking Old Patterns of Behavior through Forced Cooperation

Top management has identified a need to unite the organizational culture at Experienzo. As stated by Kunda (1992), culture involves rules for feelings and thoughts, and also for mindsets, gut feelings and reactions. The organizational culture has been built up for many years at Experienzo, and it will take time and effort to break patterns of behavior. Top management's efforts to make employees cooperate more between departments can be viewed as a way to force employees into new behavioral patterns, which is a way of using normative control (Kunda, 1992). Tearing down the physical walls can be seen as a strategy by top management to force employees into new patterns of social interaction. The staff dining room has for a long time represented informal rules of where employees are allowed to sit. Opening up the room illustrates management's expectations that all employees must now work together to achieve common company goals. In order to further increase cooperation, the common meeting forums have been established. Top management argues that some employees have used information as a power tool, and that by holding information, a sense of security has been created for these employees. Therefore, the increased transparency that comes with these forums is seen as a threat against their position by some employees, who feel that the culture is characterized by people pointing out each others' mistakes. If mistakes are made in a transparent organization, this will be spread across the organization. This seems frightening to some individuals, especially since roles have been changing as part of the organizational changes, which has made employees afraid of losing their jobs. However, the majority of the employees seem to appreciate the common meeting forums. The forums can be viewed as rituals, and as argued by Hatch (1993), rituals are important when studying culture. In the case of Experienzo, these rituals show how management is trying to take away the feeling of "us against them" that has been the norm for so long, and instead steer employees to cooperate between departments and shape the culture. Management is thereby triggering cultural processes through the use of normative control (Kunda, 1992).

The Cultural Influences on the Employer Brand

Managers argue that the goal of becoming one of the best workplaces in Sweden is used against them by some employees, who are questioning what they gain from management's organizational improvements, since benefits have been taken away. HR Specialists argue that this dissatisfaction is due to a lack of definition of what the best workplace means. There are different opinions of who should be involved in the process of defining the best workplace, and what this means for Experienzo. Some managers argue that it is up to top management to set the definitions from the top down, while others argue that employees should be involved. An HR Specialist argues that it should have been defined what the best workplace is before management started the organizational changes. Top managers argue that it is difficult to be the best employer during the ongoing organizational changes, since employees often see the negative parts of the changes, such as loss of benefits and individual power. HR is of the opinion that both top management and co-workers together should define what the best workplace is. That way, employees are given opportunity to state their expectations of their employer, while management can define what they can offer employees. Managers and HR have stated that people should not work at Experienzo for the money, but Experienzo rather offers other benefits than monetary. Since some of these other benefits have been taken away

to decrease costs, managers and HR therefore argues that Experienzo must communicate what else Experienzo can offer employees, and what makes the company unique as an employer. Today, HR Specialists argue that Experienzo is falling behind competitors when it comes to benefits, hence the discussions of the need for employer branding strategies, in order to become one of the best workplaces in Sweden. Many managers and HR Specialists have stated that they did not apply to Experienzo because they wanted to work for this particular company. For many employees, it was rather a coincidence that they were looking for a job and happened to see Experienzo's job advertisement. This indicates that not all employees work at Experienzo for the product brand or employer brand. Therefore, they cannot fully rely on the product brand to attract employees. A challenge is that even though Experienzo is considered to have a strong employer brand, people outside Experienzo are not aware of all different professions that exist within the company. Therefore, they face difficulties in getting applications to some jobs, and HR Specialists wish to receive applications with more diversity. Since Experienzo hires many young seasonal workers, the workplace is by many people perceived to only be a youth workplace. This is problematic since they also need employees of higher ages, in order to create a more diverse workplace.

HR Specialists explain that an obstacle for the employer branding work is that the general view is that Experienzo has always had, and still has, a strong employer brand. A top manager argues that Experienzo will always be an attractive employer, as long as they do not make any big mistakes that will ruin this reputation. HR Specialists argue that previously, the challenge has been how to handle the many applications, and therefore, some managers do not see the recruitment problems, since they look only at the number of applications and not the quality of them. However, the CEO has stated that historically, they have had better employees than they deserve, and that they cannot rely solely on the product brand to attract talented employees in the long run. He argues that if they want really good employees, they have to deserve them. Top management has also identified a need to renew the competency pool and hire more specialists with an academic background. This leads to another challenge for HR Specialists, who have said that the CEO wants them to find competences on the private market, where Experienzo, because of the municipal ownership, cannot compete with the higher salaries. HR argues that they must define what else they can offer employees, in order to continue to have a strong employer brand.

Top managers define employer branding as how to attract, retain and develop employees, but also how to discontinue people. Employer branding is also said to involve where a company wants to be known as an employer, how a company is perceived by other people, and who to attract. The focus at Experienzo has historically been to create value for customers, however, management now attempts to move towards focusing on employees, which they hope will further strengthen the employer brand. However, the branding platform that Experienzo has today is by top managers explained to be based on an outside and in perspective, where the customers are still in focus. Management and HR argue that this customer perspective, where the importance of employees has previously been ignored, is not sustainable, in order for Experienzo to be an attractive employer in the long run. The CEO argues that the employer brand is owned by the employees, and defines the employer brand as the sum of employees' expectations and experiences. If Experienzo is to improve the employer brand, a top manager argues that:

Living the brand is important. The force of employer branding has to come from the inside out and be real and unique, it should just happen unconsciously. An employer brand should not be created in a laboratory.

The statement “living the employer brand” has been used by several managers, who argue that all employees are ambassadors of the employer brand and that they as managers must be carriers of the employer brand. Today, Experienzo is first and foremost known for its products and services, and HR Specialists have expressed a need to communicate externally that Experienzo is also a serious employer, with many different job categories. The external communication on the website is today focusing on the product brand, and differs a lot from the internal communication on the intranet, which focus more on employees. Managers agree that they have to start communicating Experienzo as a workplace in the external communication, however, they express concerns that this might be perceived as bragging, and thereby not as being genuine. Managers argue that the externally communicated employer brand must be a true reflection of Experienzo as an employer, based on Experienzo’s true identity and culture. Since people have memories and emotional connections to the product, top managers argue that it is through these emotions that they have a great potential to further improve the employer brand. Therefore, the core values are an important part of the employer brand, since these values are a reflection of the organizational culture. HR informs applicants with the core values even before people start working at Experienzo, by sending out information about these values as part of the recruitment process for seasonal workers, before the group interviews. These values are also incorporated into the cases during the interviews, as a way of actively transform core values into action. This way of including core values into the recruitment process sends signals to all applicants of what Experienzo stands for.

The opinions of who should be working with employer branding at Experienzo differ, which reflects the confusion within the new organization, where employees experience unclear roles and division of responsibilities. An employee from the Marketing department has stated that employer branding used to be the responsibility of HR, but that it is today the responsibility of marketing. On the other hand, HR Specialists have said that it is up to HR to work with employer branding. However, most employees seem to be of the opinion that both HR and Marketing should cooperate within employer branding, together with the Information department, but that it is all employees’ responsibility to create a strong employer brand.

Discussion: The Use of Culture to Improve an Employer Brand

The opinions of whether Experienzo will automatically continue to have a strong employer brand in the future differ. However, both management or HR argue that it is crucial that Experienzo starts working more actively to improve the employer brand, in order to attract “the right people”, who have values that are in line with the new values set by management. Despite these statements, both managers and HR Specialists still argue that they do not have the time for employer branding during the ongoing organizational changes. There are also discrepancies in who should be working with employer branding, and difficulties for cross-departmental cooperation. The manifestations of old assumptions (Hatch, 1993) become visible when talking to employees at different departments about whose responsibility employer branding is, which brings the clear distinction and rivalry between departments to

the surface. Managers wish to use employer branding as a form of marketing of Experienzo as an employer and of their products and services, which means that marketing should be involved in the work with employer branding. Managers and HR emphasize the importance of employer branding, however, no one takes action to realize the aim to use employer branding as a strategic tool, even though managers indirectly attempt to make improvements of the workplace and the employer brand. There are different opinions of whether the recruitment is actually a problem, since they still receive a high number of applications. However, many managers have started to acknowledge the recruitment problems discussed by HR. It seems as if managers are afraid of starting the work with employer branding in the ongoing organizational change and ambiguous culture. Since several employees have left the company during the last years, and some current employees are not happy with the changes and decreased benefits, management and HR seems afraid that this dark side of the culture, characterized by rivalry and dissatisfaction, will be exposed and spread outside the organization. We argue that ignoring the dissatisfied employees will not solve any problems. Employees' opinions should instead be used constructively, which together with explicitly stated employer branding strategies would be helpful in order to unite the workplace.

Definitions of what the employer branding work should include differ between employees, as well as the definition of the best workplace, which makes it difficult to have a coherent image of the employer brand. There is a danger in setting the goal to be one of the best workplaces in Sweden, since this creates expectations on Experienzo both within and outside the company. Displeased employees are already questioning this goal, and if Experienzo starts communicating how it is as a workplace externally, this might harm the employer brand, rather than improving it. Because of the municipal ownership, Experienzo is highly exposed in media, which requires caution in external communication. An HR Specialist has said that they have discussed whether they should start measuring how good of a workplace Experienzo is compared to other companies on the market, but that today, it is too risky to say that they are one of the best employers in Sweden, since some employees are of the opinion that Experienzo was a better workplace before the changes. Management thereby attempts to steer the culture from within the organization, to attempt to create a better workplace. If successful, this might improve the employer brand. However, the employer brand is not measured today, which makes it difficult to understand its actual strength. It is too early to say if the attempts to improve the employer brand have been successful, since many organizational changes are still ongoing. Thereby, we cannot fully see the final effects on the employer brand. However, since many employees have expressed that they are now working together across departments to a higher extent, and that the organization is more cohesive today, this indicates that management is on the right track to create a more united workplace and a stronger organizational identity, which can strengthen the employer brand.

Final Discussion

Organizational Identity in an Ambiguous Culture

The strong sense of belonging and identity has created a psychological contract between individual employees and the organization (Chhabra & Sharma, 2014). The emotional connection to the product brand (Foster et al., 2010), which has been created through memories and experiences, is an important reason for why Experienzo has a strong employer

brand. This is an example of what Hatch (1993) calls the process of interpretation of experiences, as part of the cultural dynamics model, which creates meanings that are established among organizational members. This sense of meaning comes from the pride of working at Experienzo, where employees feel that they are contributing to the city, which is due to the municipal ownership. Employees feel that they can spread joy through the product of Experienzo. Therefore, the product brand has become a symbol for why employees go to work, and the product brand itself has acquired surplus meaning in line with Hatch's (1993) symbolization process. Since people associate Experienzo with the strong product brand, the employer brand has automatically been strengthened. As argued by Ambler and Barrow (1996), the employer brand has thereby been created through the general reputation of the company, which is based on the product brand. We argue that Experienzo should not solely rely on the product brand. However, since people have experiences and memories connected to the product, Experienzo should incorporate the strong product brand in its employer brand, since the product and business itself affects the organizational culture and identity. Employees argue that their work is a lifestyle, and this strong sense of belonging has led to organizational loyalty and commitment (Clark, 1972). These cultural assumptions of their employment being a lifestyle both create and form organizational, as well as individual, identities. The loyalty to the organization has made employees talk positively about their employer externally (Sullivan, 2004), which has contributed to the reputation of being a good employer, and strengthened the employer brand.

Despite employees' emotional attachments to Experienzo, the ambiguities of the organizational culture have been affecting the workplace for a long time. Some employees feel a sense of security, while the negative sides of the culture, such as rivalry, has made others fear that they might lose their job if stating their opinions. The impression of an ambivalent workplace is strengthened by the manifestation of old assumptions by employees who have been working at Experienzo for many years. These employees expect new employees to prove themselves in order to be part of the group, both through performance and by following informal rules. The expectations that employees must work overtime without pay has been described by employees to be set by management, who have made it a norm to work overtime. Many employees have a strong organizational commitment (Clark, 1972) and view their work as a mission, which is why many employees work overtime and stay loyal to the organization.

Management's Attempts to Control the Dynamics of Culture

Individual employees have been allowed to gain power and act in their own individual interests for many years. The old assumptions and values have been manifested through the actions of certain employees who have been at Experienzo for many years. By writing their names on the chairs in the staff dining room, these organizational members have been acting as what Hatch (1993) calls manipulators of symbols. When viewing the staff dining room as an artifact, this has previously reflected old organizational values, by representing informal rules of where employees are allowed to sit. This artifact has been used by employees who want to show their power. Through a symbolization process, this artifact has been a symbol for the old cultural assumptions and values (Hatch, 1993), showing that everyone should know their place in the organization. Tearing down the physical walls can be seen as a

strategy by top management to retroactively manifest that old informal rules and assumptions will be transformed into new values. The new values of transparency are transformed into action and imposed onto employees through a realization process of experiencing the change. The staff dining room then acquires surplus meaning in a symbolization process through the physical change, thereby becoming a symbol for the new values and rules of behavior, where management makes employees socialize between departments. Thereby, management is attempting to change the meaning of the staff dining room. If successful, management thereby changes old cultural assumptions through an interpretation process, where power is taken away from individual employees, resulting in a more transparent organization.

Since employees have been able to act as they want for many years, management has lost control of the organizational culture and faced difficulties in breaking old patterns of behavior. However, the CEO has become an important symbol whom employees trust and admire, making the changes easier to implement. Through the newly formed meeting forums and strategic groups, top management attempts to influence employees' behavior and get them to interact, which can be viewed as a form of normative control (Kunda, 1992). As argued by Hatch (1993), meetings can be seen as a form of ritual, and as opportunities to study social and cultural interaction between organizational members (Rosen, 1985). Hence, the forums are rituals used by management as part of the realization of new values, and we therefore argue that the forums are important intangible artifacts. The forums have acquired surplus meaning and become symbols for increased transparency and openness. The information meetings are manifestations of the new strategies, where management attempts to change employees' old assumptions of when departments worked separately, and inform employees of changes in routines and how to work together between departments, as one organization. During the meeting forums, employees are forced to work together, which is a form of normative control to get employees to cooperate (Kunda, 1992). Hence, the meeting forums are a tool used by management to influence the organizational culture and workplace.

Managers argue that it is everyone's responsibility to create the best workplace together, and that the common forums give employees opportunities to participate and influence the organization. Kunda (1992) argues that by combining rituals and participative decision making, managers can create and maintain a strong organizational culture. There are issues of how to balance freedom of individual wishes with the collective action of the organization (Kunda, 1992). The forums create opportunities for employees to influence their work, and Ind (2001) argues that providing opportunities for involvement can increase employee engagement. Ind (2001) further argues that this can contribute to the creation of a good work environment, which can get employees to commit to strategies within employer branding. This can further strengthen employee loyalty and commitment (Foster et al., 2010). When employees help management in organizational improvements to become one of the best workplaces in Sweden, they actively contribute to the strengthening of the employer brand. As argued by Ind (2001), managers cannot command employees to live the brand, but should instead be a source of inspiration. Through transparent and honest communication, where information is shared among employees, Ind (2001) argues that ideas can be brought to life, which is also the aim from top management at Experienzo; to increase cooperation and encourage creative solutions, in order to further improve the business.

Another management tool that has been used to retroactively change old cultural assumptions is the strategic framework, which has become an important artifact in the realization of new values. If nurturing shared values, an emotional identification can be created (Fleming & Sturdy, 2011; Kunda, 1992). By setting new values through the strategic framework and incorporating them into routines and recruitment processes, management aims to strengthen the emotional identification between employees and Experienzo. The physical changes, forums and strategic groups are used by management to get employees to act in the interests of Experienzo, where employees' internal psychological commitment and strong identification with the strategic company goals can lead to employee loyalty to the organization (Kunda, 1992). Management is trying to create a culture with new rules of how to behave, feel and think. These rules do not just guide what is expected of employees, but is used as a tool to influence behavior and experiences, as a form of normative control (Kunda, 1992). By using normative control to influence the organizational identity and culture, management attempts to shape and control the employer brand. Backhaus and Tikoo (2004) argue that by improving an employer brand, this can strengthen employees' identification with the organization, and that identity both shapes, and is shaped by, employer branding. Rucci et al. (1998) further argue that improvement of an employer brand positively affects employee attitudes and customer satisfaction, and that an employer brand thereby leads to a successful organization. Hence, the managerial actions to improve the employer brand at Experienzo are most likely taken to increase profit and create a successful organization, in line with demands from the municipal owner.

The culture is viewed in a highly mechanistic way by top management, since they say that they want to keep 90 percent of the culture that they consider to be good, which means that 10 percent should be taken away. Management thereby attempts to take away parts of the culture that they define as undesirable, so that they can steer the organizational culture and get employees to act in accordance with the new values, and thereby live the employer brand. If viewing culture from this static and mechanistic point of view, there is a risk that management takes away parts that constitute the core of the Experienzo culture, which might damage the employer brand. However, culture is not static, but is continuously developed through the acts of employees (Hatch, 1993). Management can attempt to control the culture, using various tools of normative control, but employees still have power to influence the culture, which can create difficulties for management to steer the culture as they want. Management's strategic goal to be one of the best workplaces in Sweden has made employees agree on changes such as decreased benefits and that power has been taken away from individual employees, since they have hoped that management will create the best workplace for them. The result might be an improved workplace for employees, or it might just lead to management getting increased control, depending on whether one takes the perspective of management or employees. However, as long as it has not been defined what the best workplace is, neither employees nor managers know how to reach this goal.

Cultural Control and its Effects on the Employer Brand

Today, management and HR have ideas that employer branding strategies will help Experienzo to become one of the best workplaces in Sweden. Employer branding is by many companies and researchers considered to be the solution to become an attractive employer

(Chhabra & Sharma, 2014). We argue that employer branding is a trend for how companies work strategically to improve their reputation as employers, which, as argued by Walker (2007), is something that companies have been doing for longer than the term employer branding has existed. Employer branding as a term might therefore disappear, however, we argue that the concept of how to improve companies' attractiveness as employers will continue to exist in practice. Therefore, even if not explicitly stated as employer branding strategies, management at Experienzo still attempts to improve the employer brand, by trying to strengthen the sense of belonging and identity through the creation of employer brand associations (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004; Chhabra & Sharma, 2014). By actively using strategies to improve the workplace through normative control, management attempts to improve the employer brand. Working strategically to become the best employer and improve the employer brand is a way for management to exercise power, in order to create a more controlled and efficient organization.

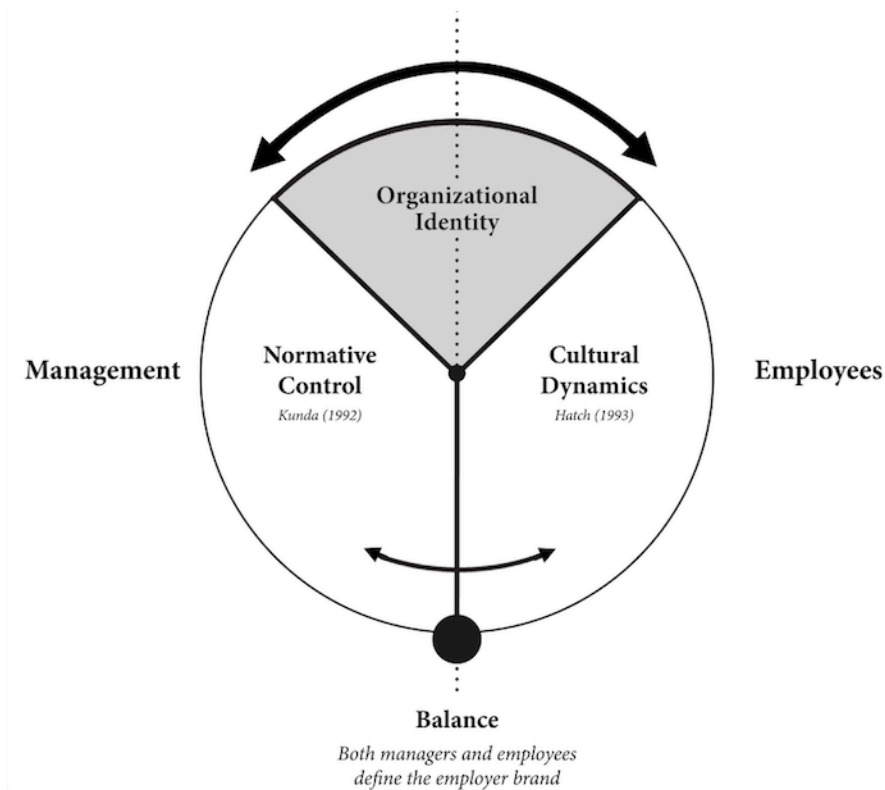
After the merger into one Experienzo, the organization is more centralized structurally. However, one can still notice rivalry among certain departments. Since many organizational changes are not fully implemented, it is not possible to say what the exact outcome will be, nor how Experienzo will reach the goal of becoming one of the best employers in Sweden. Most employees have expressed that so far, the organizational improvements have led to a stronger sense of belonging and identity and improvement of the workplace, and they argue that this has resulted in a stronger employer brand. Martin and Beaumont (2003) argue that by strengthening a brand, people can be managed. Our study indicates that in order to improve an employer brand, management can attempt to steer the organizational culture through the use of different actions and strategies of normative control. Therefore, we add to Martin and Beaumont's (2003) argument, where the strengthening of brand can be used to manage people, and we argue that managing people in turn can be used to actively strengthen a brand. In order to be able to manage people and strengthen an employer brand, we therefore argue that one must understand the organizational culture and how the dynamics of the culture affects organizational identity and the employer brand. We illustrate our findings of how management attempts to improve the employer brand through a figure we call "The Pendulum Dynamics of an Employer Brand".

The Pendulum Dynamics of an Employer Brand

Through "The Pendulum Dynamics of an Employer Brand", we summarize the connections we have found between our empirical findings at Experienzo, previous research and the theoretical framework based on the cultural dynamics model (Hatch, 1993) and Kunda's (1992) theories of normative control (see Figure 3a). By illustrating the employer brand through this figure, we aim to illuminate how different actors influence the employer brand in different ways. We thereby show the relationship of how management can use normative control of culture, and how other employees affect the dynamics of culture, and thereby influence the organizational identity and employer brand. All organizations have a history built upon previous happenings, which defines the organizational identity and affects employees' loyalty and commitment to the organization. As employees continuously influence the organizational identity as they try to make sense of it, the identity can still be influenced, since it is continuously constructed and reconstructed through social interactions

(Hatch, 1993). By understanding how management and employees influence the organizational culture and identity, we can understand how the employer brand is affected.

Figure 3a. The Pendulum Dynamics of an Employer Brand



All organizational actors, including both management and employees, affect the dynamic processes of culture creation. However, in this study, management and employees have been found to have different views of how the organizational development should unfold. The majority of the employees see to their own individual needs, while managers follow the owner's requests of having an efficient organization, hence the tension and separation between management and other employees in Figure 3a. Within the figure, the right side is represented by employees and the dynamic processes in which they interact, which continuously shape and reshape the culture in line with Hatch's (1993) cultural dynamics model. By being involved in the dynamic processes of culture creation, employees influence the organizational identity, which in turn affects the employer brand. The left side of Figure 3a is represented by managers who attempt to steer the culture through different strategic actions. These strategies are used by managers to influence the behavior of employees, with the aim to unite the organizational culture through the use of normative control (Kunda, 1992). By using normative control as a strategic catalyzer to attempt to improve the workplace and influence the organizational identity, management can affect the employer brand. If management is successful in using cultural strategies as a way to manage employees and unite the workplace, this can enhance organizational loyalty and commitment, which leads to improvement of the employer brand. However, if these strategies are not welcome by employees, and they feel that they are being too controlled by management, there is a risk that employees instead turn against management, which might damage the view of the employer

internally within the organization. This would weaken the organizational loyalty and commitment and there is a risk that employees communicate negative aspects of their employer outside the organization, which can harm the employer brand.

Hence, both managers and employees influence the organizational culture and identity, and the process of shaping the employer brand, but in different ways. The dynamics of the continuous shaping of an employer brand can therefore be illustrated by a pendulum, where both management and employees define the organizational culture and identity, and thereby the employer brand. If management succeeds in its normative control and manages to steer the behavior of employees (Kunda, 1992), then management has the power to define the organizational culture and identity to a higher extent compared to employees, which provides opportunities to define the employer brand. If successful, from a managerial point of view, this also enhances organizational loyalty and commitment, which will further strengthen the employer brand. This way of management gaining more control is illustrated in the figure as the pendulum swinging to the right, counterclockwise, and as a result, the part of the figure that defines the organizational identity follows this movement, showing that management gains higher control over the organizational culture, compared to employees (see Figure 3b). If employees instead manage to take control over the culture through their influence in the continuously ongoing dynamic processes of organizational culture, for instance by being manipulators of symbols (Hatch, 1993), then management will face problems of defining the employer brand from the top down. Instead, it is the employees who have the highest influence over the organizational culture. The pendulum then swings to the left, clockwise, and the organizational identity is to a higher extent defined by employees, who then also have the power to affect the employer brand (see Figure 3c). The group of organizational actors who gets the highest power over the organizational culture, management or employees, thereby gets to define and influence the employer brand to a higher extent.

Figure 3b. Management gains Cultural Control

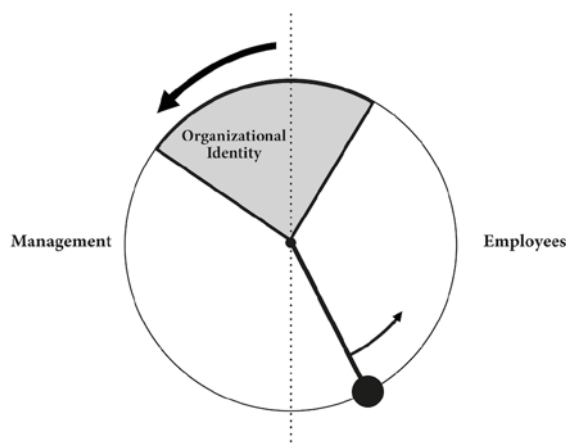


Figure 3c. Employees gain Cultural Control

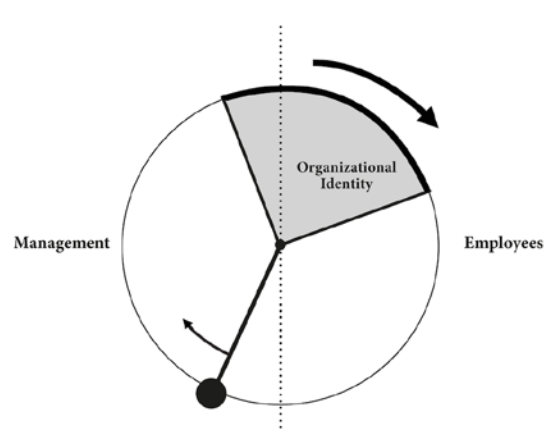


Illustration of which group of organizational actors, management or employees, that gets the highest power to influence organizational culture and identity, and thereby the employer brand.

The risk for managers when attempting to influence the culture through normative control is that if they are unsuccessful in taking control over the organizational culture, and fail to show how employees can benefit from the managerial strategies, this can have the opposite effect and weaken the organizational loyalty and commitment. Employees in turn take a risk when

trying to take away power from management, since this can lead to negative effects for individual actors, if management turns against them. We argue that organizations at least to a certain extent need to be controlled, in order for all organizational actors to work in the same direction and achieve common goals. We further argue that management is never able to fully control an organizational culture, since the culture is continuously shaped and reshaped. Hence, we argue that none of the extremes are to prefer; neither management nor employees should, or are able to, alone define the organizational identity, since all organizational actors influence the organizational culture. The balance point can instead be found when both management, from a strategic and organizational point of view, through the use of normative control, and employees, looking after their individual needs and shaping the culture through their interactions, together influence the organizational culture. This is when both management and employees can shape the organizational culture and identity together, and this is most likely when the employer brand can be defined by all organizational actors, through a combination of both a top-down and bottom-up perspective. Since culture is dynamic and continuously shaped and reshaped (Hatch, 1993), organizations might never reach this perfect balance in practice, since there is an ongoing tension between management and employees. However, if an organization would reach the balance point, this balance would not likely last for long, due to the dynamic creation and re-creation of the employer brand that is causing the continuous pendulum motion, as a result by the tensions between management and employees. This figure needs further development, however, we hope that it can be a useful tool for further research of other organizations, in order to find out how management can improve an employer brand through normative control of organizational culture and identity.

Conclusion and Implications

This article sets out to explore how managers can take strategic actions to gain control of the organizational culture, and how they thereby actively influence the organizational identity and the employer brand. The study has been conducted at a Swedish municipally owned company that operates in the entertainment and experience industry. The study contributes to previous research within employer branding and leads to managerial implications in at least three ways.

First, there is today a trend of employer branding strategies as being the solution to gain a strong employer brand and attract the best talents, in order to create a successful organization (Beechler & Woodward, 2009; Chhabra & Sharma, 2014; Kunerth & Mosley, 2011; McDonnell et al., 2010). In this study, we question the need for employer branding strategies and provide an example of a company that has a strong employer brand, despite the lack of explicitly stated employer branding strategies. Many people have a strong emotional bond to the product brand, as it is connected to memories and experiences, and the strong sense of belonging has made the company become part of many employees' identities. In line with Walker (2007), we therefore argue that even without explicitly stated employer branding strategies, companies already have an employer brand, since all companies have a reputation as an employer, and a product brand that influences the employer brand. Therefore, this study shows that despite the trend of employer branding, perhaps not all companies need employer branding strategies, in order to have a strong employer brand.

Second, our study shows how managers can actively attempt to improve an employer brand through strategic actions, by influencing the organizational culture and identity. The organizational culture has been found to be highly ambiguous, and even though the company is considered to have a strong employer brand from an external perspective, management has taken away many benefits from employees, and has noticed that the employer brand is losing its strength. Management has therefore taken actions to attempt to improve the employer brand. Internal branding has increased in importance during the last years (Punjaisri et al., 2008), however, previous studies have paid little attention to how an employer brand is created within an organization, and how an employer brand can be influenced. Chhabra and Sharma (2014) argue that an employer brand originates from the organizational culture, and that employer branding can be viewed as a process. Therefore, this article investigates how cultural processes continuously shape and reshape the employer brand, by using Hatch's (1993) cultural dynamics model as an analytic tool. This study exemplifies the tensions between how employees continuously affect cultural processes and thereby influence the employer brand, while management attempts to control the behavior of employees, which is an example of how management uses normative control to steer the culture (Kunda, 1992). As organizational culture and identity both shapes, and is shaped by, employer branding (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004; Chhabra & Sharma, 2014), normative control can thereby be used to influence an employer brand. Martin and Beaumont (2003) argue that the strengthening of a brand can be used to manage people. Based on our study, we add to this statement, and argue that by managing people, management can in turn actively strengthen an employer brand. In order to understand how managers can work strategically to improve an employer brand through cultural control, it is therefore important to understand in what way the dynamics of culture affects organizational identity and the employer brand.

Third, this study has resulted in the figure "The Pendulum Dynamics of an Employer Brand", which summarizes our empirical findings in relation to previous research and the theoretical framework based on Hatch's (1993) cultural dynamics model and Kunda's (1992) theories of normative control. This figure represents the employer brand, and illustrates how it is affected by the tensions between management's attempts to shape the organizational culture and identity through normative control, and how other employees influence the ongoing processes of culture creation through social interaction. Managers can attempt to steer the culture, however, despite these efforts, employees will continuously influence the dynamic processes of organizational culture and thereby contribute to the process of continuous creation and re-creation of organizational identity and the employer brand. The figure is only a first step towards understanding how an employer brand can be shaped, and more studies are needed in other organizational contexts. We hope that managers can find this figure useful in order to understand how they can actively influence an employer brand. Also, we hope that this figure can be further developed by being used as a tool in other empirical studies within employer branding, both of organizations with a strong employer brand, and of organizations with a less strong employer brand. Suggestions for future research are therefore to further study how an employer brand is continuously constructed and reconstructed in practice, in order to gain a deeper understanding of how management can improve an employer brand.

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