

How to Improve Employee Engagement in the Hospitality Business by Developing the Employer Brand During the Covid-19 Pandemic – An Action Research Case Study From the UK

Katja Nurmi
Turku University of Applied Sciences

Keijo Varis
Turku University of Applied Sciences

Employee engagement is an important topic especially in the hospitality business because the turnover rate in this business is typically very high. It would help in tackling the challenge of keeping the talent inside the organisation, attracting new talent, saving in recruitment costs, and preventing disruptions in customer service. Through an employer branding strategy, important objectives can be set for an organisation as an employer which all affect the image of the employer in the eyes of current and potential employees.

The research was done as an action research case study. It focused on studying the reasons for the high turnover rates in the restaurant business, how better engage employees with establishing a new employer brand and correcting actions to decrease the turnover rate. The study was carried by utilizing exit interviews of leaving employees to discover the challenges in a case company, which operates in the UK.

Keywords: employee turnover, engagement and retention, employer branding, hospitality business, Covid-19

INTRODUCTION AND OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The Case Company

The case company of this research operates in the restaurant business in 25 cities throughout the United Kingdom with more than 900 employees. The case company's employee turnover rate was stated to be too high and actions needed to be taken as the organisation struggled with recruitment and employee engagement at the start of this study. Therefore, the case company went through a launch of a new employer brand during autumn 2019 by the HR department. Most of the data collected for this research was during the launch and 9 months after the launch until the worldwide coronavirus pandemic caused the lockdown in the UK. Hospitality businesses had to close temporarily in March 2020.

Employee engagement is the key or the cause of low turnover rates in organisations. Employees are engaged to their organisation when they are committed to their employer and stay in the organisation. Employee engagement is increasingly important as it is more common to change jobs rather than work your

way through to the desired position in the same organisation. Employer brand was first established as a term in 1996 by Ambler and Barrow and defined as the combination of ideas and beliefs of the organisation, which impact on the image seen by current and potential employees. It has been found in studies that the employer brand is one main factor for potential applicants to apply for a job in the organisation and for the current employees to stay in the organisation. The potential employees benefit from the employer value proposition, which is the core of the employer brand, as it clearly states what is expected from the employees and what the organisation promises to offer in return. The current employees may feel proud to be working for an organisation with an employer brand that shares their values and offers them a great work environment. The employer brand can help organisations in cutting costs in recruitment through engaging employees and attracting more high-quality applicants, which means there are fewer open vacancies to fill and the ones that need to be filled will be applied for by the best talent.

The Objectives of the Research

The aim of this research was to support the case company with their existing issues with high employee turnover, and to research and make suggestions on how the company can manage employee engagement through employer branding to lower the turnover rate. To address the research objectives, the following research questions were developed:

- 1) How can employer branding be managed?
- 2) How can employee engagement be increased through employer branding management?
- 3) What actions are needed from the case organisation to engage their employees more through the employer brand?

The research aimed to further the knowledge on employee engagement management specifically in the hospitality business, as this line of business is known to have high turnover rates especially at the team member level. Employees typically work for the organisation just for money, and the basis for a long-term relationship between the employer and the employee is challenging to build. The research concentrated most on how employer brand management can affect employee engagement.

The purpose of case studies is to provide an opportunity for others to learn more generally through an in-depth understanding of an individual case.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Employee Turnover

Employee turnover is one of the key measures for success of the HR management of any organisation. Turnover can be divided into involuntary, where the employment has not been terminated by the choice of the employee, and voluntary, where the employee has made the decision to leave the business. Employee turnover can then again be divided into desirable and undesirable turnover. Desirable turnover would be for an employee who is underperforming to leave the business and then to be replaced with an overperforming new employee. Undesirable turnover means an overperforming employee leaving the business where the company loses talent and skills (Mayhew 2019).

Phillips and Connell (2003) define organisational turnover in five different ways, which support Mayhew's (2019) description and can be used to examine the different aspects of turnover in an organisation. The five aspects are:

- Total turnover rate; the total number of employees leaving the organisation
- Voluntary versus involuntary turnover; voluntary turnover consists of employees who have left the business by their own choice
- Avoidable versus Unavoidable turnover; the total number of avoidable leavers compared to unavoidable leavers
- Dysfunctional versus functional turnover; dysfunctional turnover is the number of leavers with positive performance, and functional turnover is the number of leavers with negative performance in the organisation

- Early turnover; where a new hire decides to leave the organisation within the first few months of employment (Phillips & Connell 2003, 40–44)

After the turnover has been defined, it is important for an organisation to find ways to prevent undesired turnover, as high turnover has negative impacts e.g., high financial costs, dependency on employees with critical skills, issues with employees leaving the business, productivity losses and workflow interruptions, loss of expertise and business opportunities, administrative problems, disruption of internal communication networks, changes in job satisfaction of remaining employees, and changes in the image of the organisation. Boella and Gross-Turner (2013) present four different approaches for organisations as a solution in preventing undesired employee turnover. These approaches are:

1. Reflecting on the possibility for employee turnover rate which can be avoided due to the characteristics in the industry in question
2. Predicting and comparing the employee turnover through the labour market in the industry in question
3. Considering causes for employee turnover inside the organisation
4. Aligning the organisation's culture and visions with the employee turnover. (Boella & Gross-Turner 2013)

It is hard to define and find the most suitable approach for the causes of turnover and it is easy for managers to make mistakes regarding analysing the turnover in the organisation. Phillips and Connell (2003) present five mistakes managers easily make with turnover which makes the related issues undervalued:

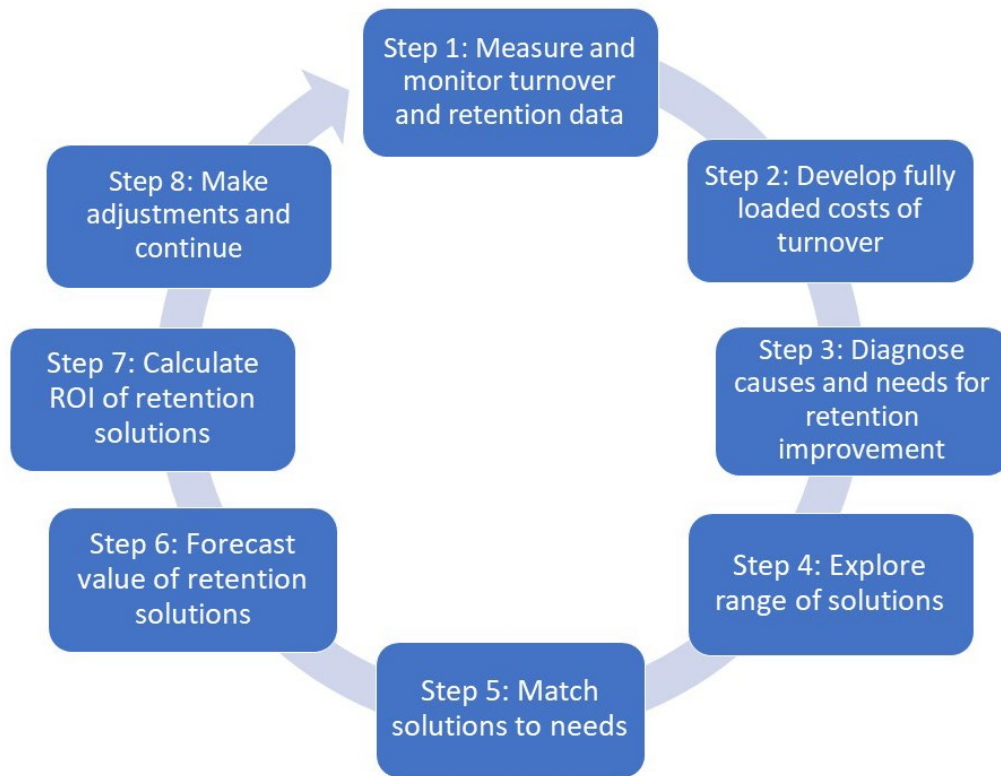
1. The true costs of employee turnover are underestimated
2. The reasons for turnover are not recognised
3. The solutions to lower turnover are mistakenly related with wrong reasons for it
4. The actions taken for turnover are minimised, exaggerated or miss the target entirely
5. The monitoring and budgeting of retention management are partial or non-existent. (Phillips & Connell 2003)

This concludes that the top management of organisations need to calculate the true costs for total turnover correctly, investigate the reasons for turnover in the organisation, analyse and match the best solutions for reasons for turnover, optimise the actions taken to the causes of turnover, and adequately monitor and budget the employee engagement management in the organisation. Hence, to manage employee turnover, organisations need to pay attention to and take actions for improving their employee engagement (Phillips & Connell 2003; Boella & Gross-Turner 2013).

Employee Engagement Management

To tackle the external and internal drivers for higher turnover rate and lower employee engagement, Phillips and Connell (2003) present an eight-step strategic accountability approach for managing them. This approach is described in Figure 1 (Phillips and Connell, 2003).

FIGURE 1
STRATEGIC ACCOUNTABILITY APPROACH TO MANAGING RETENTION



Employer Branding

Figuerska and Matuska (2013) state that employer brand (EB) is an important part in the development of an organisation in a changing environment and in managing employee engagement. The first time someone used the term “Employer Brand” was by Ambler and Barrow in 1996 in their joint whitepaper titled “The Employer Brand”. They defined it as a “collection of ideas and beliefs that influence the way current and potential employees view an organization and the employment experience that it is offering. Briefly, you could describe employer brand as the reputation of an organisation as an employer through the eyes of people inside and outside the organisation (Mosley & Schmidt 2017, 3–4). Organisations need to consider their brand from the perspective of the existing and potential customers but also from the perspective of existing and potential employees (Raj & Jyothi 2011; Boella & Gross-Turner 2013, 265–267).

Employer branding (EB) has been defined from many other perspectives as well. Table 1 (Figuerska & Matuska 2013; Rosethorn 2009, 19–20) presents some of these definitions:

TABLE 1
DEFINITIONS OF EMPLOYER BRANDING (EB)

| Source | Employer branding definition |
|--------------------------|---|
| Ambler and Barrow, 1996 | “Development and communication of an organization's culture as an employer in the marketplace. It is the package of functional, economic and psychological benefits provided by employment and identified with the employing company” |
| Sullivan, 2004 | “A targeted long term strategy to manage awareness and perceptions of employees, potential employees and related stakeholders with regards to a particular firm.” |
| Backhaus and Tikoo, 2004 | “A process of building an identifiable and unique identity of the employer.” |
| Jenner and Taylor, 2008 | “The efforts of the organization in communicating internal and external stakeholders of what makes it both desirable and distinctive employer.” |
| Martin, 2008 | “Attracting talented people to the organization and ensuring that both existing and potential employees will identify with the company (its brand, mission) and deliver the desired by the company results.” |
| Matin et.al., 2005 | “An agreement under which the offer of the employer (manifested in organizational goals, values and initiatives that build trust in the employees) and counteroffer from employees (in the form of a high level of engagement and low retention) are matched.” |
| Rosethorn, 2009 | “An employer brand is in essence the two-way deal between an organisation and its people – the reasons they choose to join and the reasons they choose – and are permitted – to stay. The art of employer branding is to articulate this deal in a way this is distinctive, compelling and relevant to the individual, and to ensure that it is delivered throughout the lifecycle of the employee within that organisation.” |
| Gehrels, 2019 | “EB is a company’s ability to differentiate and promote its identity to current and future employees.” |

Employer branding (EB) can be seen through internal and external EB, where the internal brand consists of the work environment, organisational culture, and the image of the employer through the eyes of current employees. External EB is the image of the employer seen through the eyes of potential employees outside the organisation. To analyse the state of an EB, it is necessary to collect relevant quantitative and qualitative data (Mosley & Schmidt 2017, 3). This data can be collected from external target groups or from the current employees of the organisation. After the results are gathered and analysed, they need to be utilised to the full potential and in the long run (Vaisto 2020).

Raj and Jyothi (2011) support the statement that EB is not only the image of the employer inside the company but also the image the company has in the eyes of people outside the company, including e.g., potential employees and shareholders. Lievens and Slaughter (2016) divide the employer brand into internal and external brands, which are usually linked to different sources. External EB is connected to an organisation’s employer image as in how individuals outside the organisation see it and internal EB is connected to the organisation’s identity through how individuals inside the organisation see it as an employer. (Lievens & Slaughter 2016; Raj & Jyothi 2011; Rosethorn 2009, 153).

This means that everything an organisation does will impact on how people and potential employees view that specific organisation’s EB and the employer experience they have to offer. Raj and Jyothi (2011) also mention that EB helps with the identification of a company compared to other employers, amongst their already existing and potential personnel, and with customer relationships.

To help organisations in stating their EB, Noor and Shahjehan (2018) define employer branding to have seven different values through which the employer brand and its strength can be stated. These values are:

- Interest value: the degree of appeal of an employer who is responsible for providing a work situation with innovation and creativeness opportunities
- Social value: calculation of the mark of appeal of an organisation or a company providing a work environment with good and welcoming team spirit and decent respectable relations among co-workers
- Economic value: estimation of the amount of attraction of an employer providing a worthy remuneration and profits
- Development value: estimation of the degree of attractiveness of an employer providing career development
- Application value: determination of the degree of attraction of an establishment providing the chance to exercise and train what is learnt.
- Management value: determination of good or bad influence of management on employee retention
- Work/Life balance: determination of a balance among the employees' work and personal life (Noor and Shahjehan 2018)

Noor and Shahjehan (2018) determine that most of the employer branding dimensions provide a standard for a better understanding of EB and how it affects employee retention, hence they affect employee retention directly or indirectly through employee satisfaction and commitment.

After the EB and its strength have been stated it is useful to know the benefits of having a strong employer brand. EB can positively impact in succeeding in e.g., the following areas:

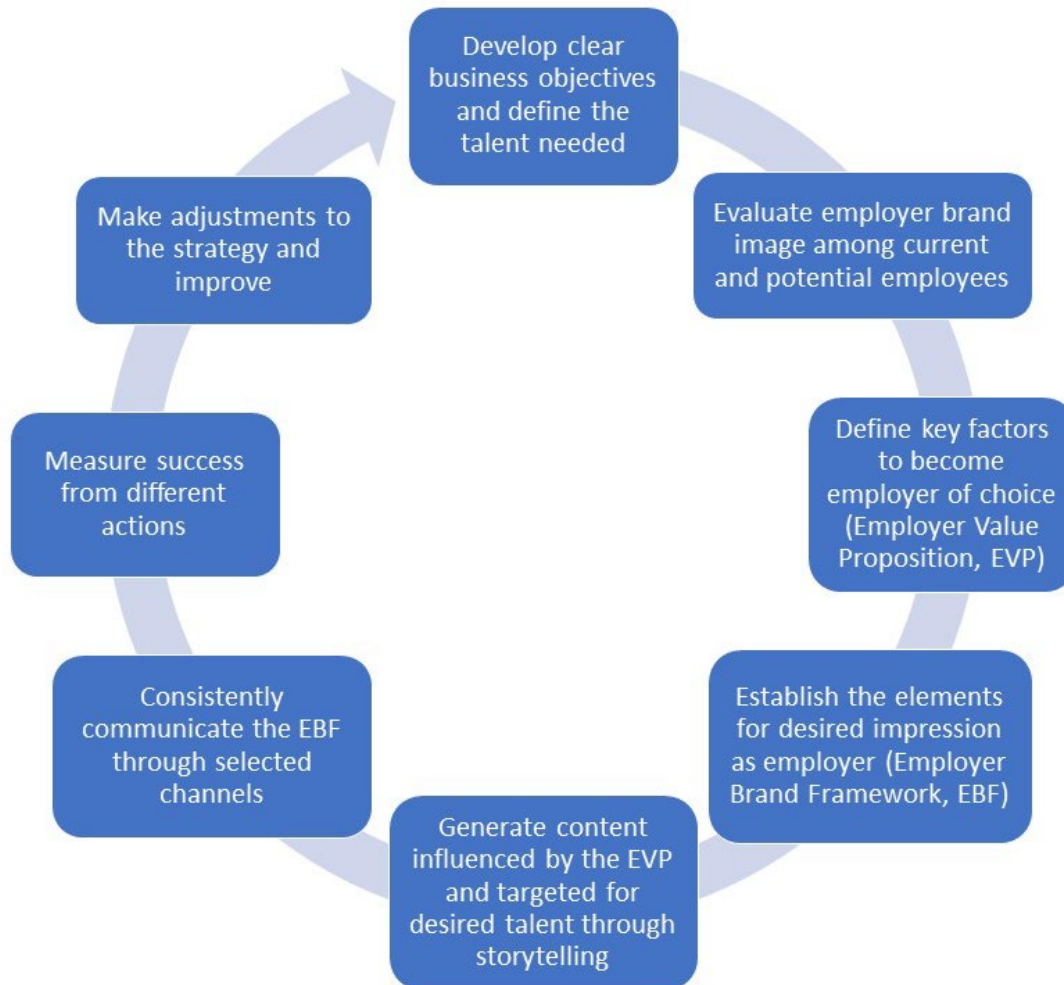
- Recruitment: the organisation attracts more quality applicants and talent which improves the quality of new hires and decreases the cost of recruitment
- Engagement: the working environment engages employees as they are proud to work for the organisation while increasing productivity and customer relations
- Retention: high engagement levels among employees make them want to stay in the organisation longer
- Competitive advantage: the organisation attracts the most talented applicants and employees of the industry
- Corporate culture: engaged employees and a clearly communicated employer brand strengthen the organisation, its culture, and the brand
- Stronger PR toolkit and greater workforce diversity (Mosley & Schmidt 2017, 8–9; Figurska & Matuska 2013)

Kunerth and Mosley (2011) support a description of employer brand as a strategic enabler which should be established early on in terms of reinforcing a group-wide internal focus on quality, leadership development, engagement, and talent retention, and not simply as a shop-window for attracting external talent. Once the line managers understand the importance of internal focus, the EB becomes not only an initiative but a leadership imperative by the business as the corporate brand tagline (Kunerth & Mosley 2011; Boella & Gross-Turner 2013, 265).

Employer Branding Management

To support building a strong and positive employer brand, Mosley and Schmidt (2017) present a simplified two-step approach to do so. These steps are to “make your organisation a distinctively great place to work” and to “make sure the right talent knows how great you are. The two-step approach is then described with more detail as a cyclic and continual process. This cyclic process is presented in figure 2 (Mosley & Schmidt 2017, 9–10):

**FIGURE 2
DEVELOPING EMPLOYER BRAND**



The key point according to Mosley and Schmidt (2017) is to communicate the employer brand and to engage especially leadership and management to the EB to get the message through to the team members and potential applicants. It is important to involve the HR and marketing departments along with employees to create engaging and insightful content for the chosen communication channels (Mosley & Schmidt 2017, 10). EB can be managed through honouring and exemplifying employee performance that is in the core of the company's values and brand image (Branch 2011; Mosley & Schmidt 2017, 113).

Turnover in the Hospitality Business

According to a study by YouGov and Deputy (2018), three out of 10 hospitality employees leave their role within a year, which is double the UK average. Hospitality roles are commonly seen as temporary roles through to their seasonal characteristics or secondary roles to education or as an additional job to a primary one. As much as 40% of the participants of the study responded that they took their job in the hospitality business because it was the only job available. The same report shows that 69% of employees leaving the hospitality business stated unsociable working hours, 63% low pay and benefits, and 35% lack of career prospects as their main reason for leaving (HRMagazine.co.uk).

The high turnover rate in the hospitality business is partly explained through the plentiful supply from high applicant quantity and managers not seeing the point in thorough training for temporary employees,

which both are common in the hospitality industry. The effects of high turnover rate in this industry are specifically bad as it relies on service efficiency, effectiveness, and service quality as their competitive factors. In the hospitality business, many managers expect the employees to have similar high commitment onto their work as the managers themselves. They do not consider that this is not the case among most of the employees working in team level as their pay rate and career development opportunities are not as great (Boella & Gross-Turner 2013, 5; 165–167; Gehrels 2019).

Turnover is not solely a negative thing, as it gives the organisation a possibility to drop out the employees who are not performing well. Another positive side to the turnover is that fresh ideas and new skills might emerge more commonly as the organisation hires new employees. These positive aspects, however, do not level up with the negative aspects of constant change and instability and the employers in the hospitality industry need to find more ways to embed their employees to the work and the employer (Boella & Gross-Turner 2013, 165–167).

As the case organisation operates in the hospitality business, it is quite normal to have a high turnover rate. As a business type, the employments offered are often part-time and seasonal, emphasizing evening and weekend shifts. This is one of the reasons the turnover rate can rise higher than average, as people might not feel financially secure or that they get enough support for their work and life balance (Boella & Gross-Turner 2013). Harver.com presents eight general causes for employee turnover in hospitality business which are: unclear job expectations for the employee, disconnection with managers, mismatch between job and the employee, lack of flexibility, toxic or unhealthy work environment, inefficient communication, lack of recognition, and minimal growth opportunities (Harver.com; HRMagazine.co.uk; Boella & Gross-Turner 2013, 167).

As 61% of hospitality employees say their new job is not what they expected, it is important for the employer to be clear on the expectations for the employee, even though it can be appealing to highlight the positives of the job description in the job advertisement to attract more applicants during the recruitment process. This however is not a good tactic as the employment might end prematurely due to a distorted image of the job (Harver.com).

Additionally, it is highly important for an employer to train their managers and set clear expectations for them, as it is crucial for the communication between the manager and their subordinate to work, and to create a positive connection between them. Training the managers accordingly decreases the possibility for the managers to mismatch a job and employee which can cause short employments and a higher turnover rate (Harver.com).

One of the common traits for the hospitality business is the lack of flexibility in the working hours. The fact that the rotas might change with a short notice can cause more stress to the employees and for some to leave the business and hence increase turnover rates. For this reason, the employer should have a routine on the schedules. As high pressure and stress levels might cause a toxic work environment, it is important to proactively create a positive work environment for all employees by the employer and managers. And when a good performance is noticed and recognised by the employer, the employees will reflect the positive atmosphere onto the customer level as well (Harver.com).

One of the biggest causes of employee turnover in the hospitality industry is the minimal development and career advancement opportunities. If employees feel they are treated as temporary team members or if they are not informed of the career development opportunities, they might leave the business. It is important for them to create career paths for every employment level and to communicate what it takes for an employee to get to the next position (Harver.com).

The monthly total turnover rate for the case company was over 100% during the first two quarters of the year of 2019. This turnover rate meant that there were more employees leaving the business monthly than the organisation had time to hire. The case company struggled also with keeping newly hired managers as the recruitment and the onboarding processes of new hires were inconsistent. As every new recruit is a matter of costs in the recruitment process, onboarding and training, this issue was a red flag which needed actions to be taken. There was a peak on employees leaving the business within their first 12 weeks of employment as there were no assessments measuring how the newly hired managers did. It was essential

to gather and analyse data from the leavers to discover the general reasons for the employees to leave the business.

As stated earlier in the theory part (Noor & Shahjehan 2018), the employee turnover rate can be partly managed through employee engagement, which in turn can be managed through employer branding.

RESEARCH STRATEGY AND METHODS

The research was a case study and can also be seen as a so-called action research. The data collection method was a combination of qualitative and quantitative data collected through observing company meetings and discussions and analysing the collected data through an online survey, the exit interviews. To gather enough valid data it was necessary to observe closely the objectives of the HR department on building the employer brand and to collect and analyse the data from the exit interviews. The exit interviews included 23 questions, of which four (4) were open-ended questions and the others were closed-ended questions with ready-made answer options.

The concept of the exit interview is to gather extremely valuable feedback, positive or negative, from the former employee by a set of questions (survey) that are related to the employer, processes, reasons for leaving and other relevant topics (Tori, F. 2018). The results of the monthly exit interviews from September 2019 until March 2020 were gathered, analysed, and combined for the case company to use for finding out any issues and to further develop the employer brand according to the feedback received and trends discovered.

RESULTS

Exit Interview Results

The exit interview consisted of 23 questions of which 68 responses and results are analysed, and conclusions made with support of the literature review.

Background of the Respondents

The exit interview results show that 22.1% of the respondents left between 0–3 months of service, 16.2% left between 3–6 months of service, 22.1% left between 6–12 months of service, 17.6% left between 1–2 years of service, and 23.5% left after 2 years of service in the case organisation. This means that a total of 60.4% of respondents left the business before their one-year anniversary. As stated earlier in the theory part (Phillips & Connell 2003, 40–44), this type of early turnover might be a cause of an improper recruitment system, ineffective orientation system or inappropriate socialisation process for adapting the employee to the organisation. It is essential for any new starter to be familiarised with the codes of conduct of the organisation and ongoing training of the company policies. This concludes that the case organisation will need to pay more attention to their onboarding of new employees. The case company launched a new onboarding system for new managers in November 2019 which should be broadened to cover team members as well.

The survey also showed that most of the respondents (63.2%) were working in front of house positions and second most (20.6%) in management positions. 11.8% of respondents worked in back of house positions, 4.4% in the support centre and 2.9% in the master kitchen. As a conclusion supported by theory, it can be stated that some of the front of house workers have taken the job just to earn money before the next career move, as a secondary job to their primary one or to support them financially through studies which does not engage them to the employer. These numbers show that more than half of the leavers are working in front of house positions on team member level which highlights the need for focusing most on engaging these employees.

68 respondents stated the branches in which they were employed at the time they left the business and as a conclusion it can be stated that six (6) branches might need more support on their employee engagement. This enhances the importance of training all restaurant managers the same way to ensure the

employee engagement objectives are in line with the other branches and the leadership standards set by the case company.

Reasons for Leaving the Business

The fourth question shows the primary reasons for leaving the organisation with a multiple choice question. The 68 respondents left all together 184 replies, of which 16.3% were unhappy with the management, 13% had some other reason for leaving, 12.5% quality of leadership, 9.8% work/life balance, 8.2% lack of career development, 7.6% communication and engagement, 7.1% better opportunity/promotion, 7.1% personal reasons, 4.3% direction of the company, 3.8% change of career, 3.3% returning to university/college/school, 2.7% relocation, 2.7% going to work for another bar/restaurant, 0.5% compensation package, 0.5% mutual agreement, 0.5% length of commute, and 0% retiring as a reason for leaving. The respondents were given an option to specify the reason for leaving if they had chosen "other". These responses were specified with written free text and the trends on the answers were poor management, change in management, lack of working hours, lack of recognition, unfair treatment by management, workplace too far from home, low pay rate, and insufficient training. It can be concluded that a fair and good manager and thorough training are the top two objectives which should be invested in the case organisation. The newly launched onboarding process for the managers can assist with both challenges as the managers can be trained to be consistent and to give fair treatment and to train their employees comprehensively. Other actions the case organisation took were a launch of the training programme for future leaders and one-to-one training by the HR and managers in the beginning of the 2020.

Induction and Training in the Company

The fifth question covered the induction and how helpful the respondents had experienced it for their role in the organisation. 11.9% stated that they did not have any induction for their role, 14.9% found the induction not at all helpful, 13.4% found it not so helpful, 31.3% found it somewhat helpful, 17.9% found it very helpful and 10.5% found it extremely helpful. This shows that 40.2% did not find the induction helpful or that they did not have any induction at all. As stated earlier in the literature part (Gehrels 2019), many managers in the hospitality business do not see the point in thorough training as the contracts are commonly temporary. This again highlights the importance and need for a clear, thorough onboarding process for the new team members as well.

Question six gave the respondents the opportunity to write suggestions as free text on how the induction process could be improved to help prepare people for working for the organisation. 48 respondents left an answer and 20 skipped this question. The major trends in these responses were to support and give more on floor training considering the individual, support during company changes like menu change, supply of staff handbook, investing more time from the manager on training, and clear communications on what is expected.

The seventh question covered the training in the case organisation and how helpful the respondents had experienced it for their role at the organisation. 14.9% stated that they did not have any training, 10.5% found the training not at all helpful, 14.9% found it not so helpful, 34.3% found it somewhat helpful, 16.4% found it very helpful and 9% found it extremely helpful. This means that 40.3% of the respondents did not find the training helpful or that there was no training available. These results support the previous conclusions on the need for investments for onboarding and training of staff to enhance the job satisfaction and engage the employees more.

Question eight gave the respondents the opportunity to write suggestions as free text on how the training process could be improved to help prepare people for working for the organisation. 47 respondents wrote an answer and 21 skipped this question. The major trends in replies were training every employee for every section of the restaurant, more on floor training, investing more time from the manager on training, communicate company policies on e.g., customer complaints, create more guidebooks, giving training on company changes, having a designated person for training, and offering training for individual needs.

Support From the Company

The ninth question presents how helpful the respondents found the interactions with the support centre, which is the head office of the case organisation. 66.2% did not have any interactions with the support centre, 6.2% found the interactions not at all helpful, 7.7% found them not so helpful, 10.8% found them somewhat helpful, 6.2% found them very helpful and 3.1% found the interactions extremely helpful. This question reveals another challenge for the employees to feel engaged as they might think that the only support they have access to are their team members and the line manager. As a conclusion it can be stated that the Support Centre needs to be more approachable, and the communication needs to be made easy. One solution here is the work community platform Workplace which was launched for the employees in March 2020.

Question number 10 shows how well the respondents feel like they were paid for the work they did. 26.9% replied not at all well, 29.9% not so well, 28.4% somewhat well, 14.9% very well, and 0% extremely well. As stated earlier in the literature part (HRMagazine.co.uk), it is common in the hospitality business to pay the minimum wage or have low pay rates, which might have a big impact on the results for this question especially for the team member level. The case company benchmarked salaries for each site and made sure the salaries and benefits were locally very competitive especially for the management positions.

The 11th question covered how good the relationship was between the respondent and their line manager. 12.1% stated that the relationship was not good at all, 18.2% not so good, 37.9% somewhat good, 19.7% very good, and 12.1% that the relationship was extremely good. As stated earlier in the theory part (Hayward 2010), it is important for employee engagement to build a good relationship between the employee and their line manager, in which implementing whole leadership can help. The managers in the case organisation can be introduced to the whole leadership and the importance of understanding their employees to better the relationship and engage the employees more.

In question number 12, the respondents described how often they felt that their contributions were recognised. 23.9% of the respondents stated that they were never recognised, 40.3% once in a while, 19.4% about half the time, 14.9% most of the time and 1.5% stated that their contributions were always recognised. As stated earlier in the literature part (Phillips & Connell 2003, 168–172), a rewards and recognition system is one of the important tools for engaging employees and as can be seen from the responses to this question, only a few employees felt that their contributions were recognised most of the time or always. To increase these numbers, a clear recognition process or tactics need to be established to engage the employees more.

The 13th question presents how clear the respondents felt the expectations set for them were. 7.5% of the respondents felt that the expectations were not at all clear, 22.4% not so clear, 32.8% somewhat clear, 31.3% very clear, and 6% extremely clear. As stated earlier in the literature part (Harver.com), unclear job expectations are one of the eight general causes for employee turnover in the hospitality business. To tackle this challenge, the employer must set clear expectations for the employees as it is crucial for the communication between the manager and their subordinate to work, along with creating a positive connection between them and get the employees engaged to the organisation. Establishing employer value proposition helps with communicating these expectations through employer branding.

Question 14 covers how often the respondents felt like their line manager listened to the employees' opinions while making decisions. 21.2% stated that their line manager listened to their employees' opinions not at all often, 24.2% not so often, 34.9% somewhat often, 10.6% very often, and 9.1% extremely often. As stated earlier in the literature part (Vaisto 2020), one of the factors for success in employer branding is to get the managers involved to support the EB strategy to engage employees. To realise what is important for the employees, it is essential to listen to what they are saying and how they talk about their work. This can be done through one-to-one catch-ups with the line manager and employee engagement survey.

Teamwork and Feedback

In question number 15, the respondents expressed how well the members of their team worked together. 4.4% stated not at all well, 8.8% not so well, 33.8% somewhat well, 44.1% very well, and 8.8% extremely well. As stated earlier in the literature part (Phillips & Connell 2003, 214), a closely knit team that can work together efficiently, and friendships formed in the workplace have a high impact on the team members by

engaging them to each other along with the organisation they work for. Team building programmes can help the manager to get the team to work together more efficiently and create a better working environment to engage the team members more. It can be stated that teamwork was mainly in good condition in the case company.

Question 16 discovered how often the respondents have one-to-one catch-ups with their line manager. 46.3% replied that they never had a catch-up chat, 22.4% not at all often, 7.5% not so often, 17.9% somewhat often, 4.5% very often, and 1.5% extremely often. The line managers in the case organisation should be encouraged and supported to have regular one-to-one chats with their team members as 76.2% of the respondents did not have one-to-one chats often or at all with their line manager. These regular one-to-one chats could also help with question number 14 with most of the respondents not feeling like their opinions were listened to while managers made decisions. The HR team relaunched coffee chats by the end of 2019 as one-to-one catch-ups for managers to support them in building relationships with their team members. These reviews are a two-way benefit as it gives the manager the opportunity to help the team members develop their skills and for the team member to give feedback for the employer to improve. This will give employees a feeling of belonging to the company, being able to influence on company matters and being connected to the company.

Opportunities in Career Growth and Balancing Work and Life

Question number 17 covered the satisfaction rate of the respondents on the career growth opportunities in the organisation. 28.8% were not at all satisfied, 28.8% not so satisfied, 22.7% somewhat satisfied, 15.2% very satisfied, and 4.6% extremely satisfied with the career growth opportunities. As stated earlier in the literature part (Phillips & Connell 2003, 168–172), a positive organisational culture engages employees and it is the sum of values, support processes, policies, practices, and attitudes of the organisation. For a positive organisational culture, attention should be paid to improve social support, leadership, work-life balance, recognition, rewards, training, and career progress possibilities. To enhance the organisational culture and to engage the employees, the case organisation should offer a variety of training and development programmes to improve skills and implement a career management system for the employees.

In question 18, the respondents described how easy it was to balance their work life and personal life while working for the organisation. 25.4% said that it was not at all easy, 29.9% not so easy, 17.9% somewhat easy, 16.4% very easy, and 10.5% that it was extremely easy to balance their work and personal life. As stated above, one part in improving the organisational culture is to pay attention to work-life balance. To engage employees more, the case company should have given the team members a better basis in adapting their work-life to their personal life. This might have more challenges for the case organisation for working in the hospitality business as the busiest hours are in the evenings and weekends when there is not much room for flexibility. One solution for balancing work and life was the launch of a communication platform Workplace, which enabled the employees to better log off from work related chats than the previously used WhatsApp groups.

Overall Happiness

Question 19 shows overall how comfortable the respondents found their work environment. 10.3% stated that it was not at all comfortable, 22.1% not so comfortable, 38.2% somewhat comfortable, 22.1% very comfortable, and 7.4% extremely comfortable. One of the eight most general causes for turnover in the hospitality business is a toxic or unhealthy work environment. As high pressure and stress levels might cause a toxic work environment, it is important to proactively create a positive work environment for all employees by the employer and managers. These can be done through easing the work-life balance through well generated and organised rota system, team building programmes, and recognising good performance.

Question number 20 discovers the net promoter score for the respondents. The question had a 0–10 scale for how likely it was for the respondent to recommend the organisation to a friend or colleague; 0 being would not recommend and 10 being would highly recommend. 76.5% of the respondents were detractors by choosing a number between 0–6, 14.7% were passive between 7–8, and 8.8% of the respondents were promoters by choosing a number between 9–10. It is very beneficial for an organisation

to have net promoters as their employees who willingly promote their employer to others. These employees are committed and engaged to their employer. It can be concluded that through the mentioned employee engagement actions, the case organisation can increase the net promoter numbers.

In the 21st question, the respondents chose an overall score between 1–10 regardless of their reason for leaving, how happy they felt working for the organisation. One being not happy at all and 10 being extremely happy the responses were 13.4% ones, 4.5% twos, 19.4% threes, 6% fours, 10.5% fives, 9% sixes, 10.5% sevens, 11.9% eights, 7.5% nines, and 7.5% tens leaving the total average score at 5.2. This number shows the average commitment and engagement level of the leavers being quite low and it can be concluded that the employees who left the case company during the study period were unhappy employees. With employee engagement actions, this average number of happiness could be increased over time.

Question number 22 gave the respondents the chance to describe with their own words the culture of the organisation. 48 of the respondents left a reply and 20 skipped this question. The major themes for the answers were unfair and unequal treatment by the manager, disregarding individual circumstances, misleading expectations and promises on the number of working hours, unsupportive management, minimum wage, no culture at all, no recognition or rewards from job well done, poor communication, professional, poor training, great tightly knit teams, friendly, and family. Again, with the employee engagement actions for the challenges arisen through the exit interview responses, many of the negative descriptions of the organisation's culture can be changed for a more positive direction.

The 23rd and final question was another open text question for the respondents to give suggestions on how the organisation can build a better workplace. 51 responses were written for this question and 17 respondents skipped this question. The major trends for the answers were to respect and listen to team members more, training for managers and team members, reward and recognition system, hiring more staff, more communications and support from the top management and head office, pay more, to involve the manager with their team members, enhanced staff benefits, mandatory one-to-one catch-up chats with managers, better work-life-balance, fair rotas, and fairly shared tips. These can be closely connected to the issues in the question number 22 and the same actions can help in overcoming these challenges.

Statistics and Conclusions

The response rate for these exit interviews averaged to 15.3% during the research period. The response rate is not very high as the leavers commonly do not feel any obligations to their former employer. The exit interviews can also give somewhat more negative picture of the experiences of the leavers as it actually is. This can be a result of being seen as the last resort to complain about the employer or bad work environment. Positive feedback is more commonly given face-to-face or not at all. To increase the response rate for the exit interviews, there should be communications about the upcoming exit interviews for the leavers, the organisation should have an executive sign the introductory letter, provide information of the purpose, let respondents know they are part of the sample, use anonymous input, explain who will see the data, describe the data integration process, be as simple as possible, have simplified response process, utilise local manager support, in some cases have incentives, and have follow-up reminders for the respondents.

As this survey was designed and sent out to every employee that left the business, it is not possible to separate the responses of management positions from team member positions. The survey could be of even more use if the answers could be separated to team level and management level responses as there might be a significant difference between these two. It would also make it easier to track the sources of the causes for challenges and then take actions on them more specifically, e.g., on branch level.

New Employer Brand

As it is important to have an employer brand to build trust, credibility, and attraction among current employees and potential applicants for new job openings, the case company underwent an employer brand launch in September of 2019. Even though open job vacancies did attract applicants, the quality of the candidates did not meet the standards. The case company also had difficulties in engaging current employees which was a matter of lost costs and talent. There were meetings with HR and marketing departments to create a suitable inner and outer image for the new brand. The new employer brand was

based on the values and behaviours the organisation proudly announced to be important. These values and behaviours are:

- Passion, Care, and Attention
- Drive
- Influencing
- Team working
- Agility
- Judgement

The new employer brand was established with an objective to offer not just a job, but a family of co-workers, career development opportunities and the organisation’s culture with it.

Employer Branding Tools

Onboarding and Training

Onboarding is a process designed for a new employee in which they are to be introduced to the organisation and its culture along with ensuring that the new employee will stay and become engaged to the organisation (Boella & Gross-Turner 2013, 87). It is important to include and communicate the expectations for the employee through the entire hiring and training process to minimise any misunderstandings or false expectations for the employee. It is essential to focus on manager’s skills in overseeing people and for them to be able to recognise the suitable personality traits of their new hires to avoid mismatching jobs and employees to avoid turnover. Hence, training the management team in the organisation is an essential tool in engaging employees (Harver.com).

As inducting new employees and training them into their new job was found to be one of the important aspects in employer branding and creating the organisational culture, it was quite alarming that the exit interview results showed that quite a few leavers did not feel that the induction or training in the case organisation were sufficient. To tackle the issue, the case organisation started to plan for a new onboarding process especially designed for the management positions. Around November 2019, the new onboarding process was piloted with six different employees. The programme had several steps during the first year of employment. As the monthly reporting, observing and exit interview results showed in the case organisation, the most fragile period for new managers to decide to leave the business was during their first 90 days of employment. This fact was considered in the newly launched onboarding process with concentrating mostly on the first 12 weeks of employment. The onboarding process for this reason was called “the 12-week assessment” even though the process had planned actions for new managers from day one until their first-year anniversary in the business. The outburst of the coronavirus pandemic ended the piloting phase for most piloting managers around the 12 -week assessment and proper feedback was not gathered. Some observations could be made during the piloting phase and the programme was very promising. Table 2 presents the process for the 12-week assessment.

TABLE 2
12 -WEEK ASSESSMENT PROCESS

| Timing | Action | Who actions |
|---------------|--|---|
| Week 1 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Catch-up with line manager to review progress in induction weeks and training manual | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • General Manager/Regional Manager/Operations Chef (as appropriate) |
| Week 2 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Catch-up with line manager to review progress in induction weeks and training manual | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • GM/RM/Ops. Chef |
| Week 3 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Catch-up with line manager to review progress in induction weeks and training manual | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • GM/RM/Ops. Chef |

| | | |
|-----------------|---|--|
| Week 4 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Catch-up with line manager to review progress in induction weeks and training manual | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • GM/RM/Ops. Chef |
| Week 6 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Line manager reviews the job of a new manager, if the new manager is ready for the 12 week assessment. • “Rate the Manager” Form will be sent to a new manager. • Form to be printed out and handed to 5–10 team members to rate the new manager. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • GM/RM/Operations Chef reviews the job of a new manager. • HR sends the form to a new manager • New manager hands the forms out to their team members |
| Week 12 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 12-week assessment to review the finished Training Manual and filled Rate the Manager forms and to go through a practical assessment & onboarding questions | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • GM/RM/ Ops. Director • New manager to bring filled RTM forms and training manual to the meeting |
| After 6 months | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Catch-up call from line manager | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • GM/RM/Ops. Chef |
| After 12 months | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Catch-up call from line manager | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • GM/RM/Ops. Chef |

Once the pandemic subsides, it will be beneficial for the case organisation to continue with the piloting process to gather sufficient data and to carry this project through to further engage their employees within the fragile 90 day’s period. The next step would then be to launch an onboarding process for all team members for which the managers would be trained to and obligated to follow on every new team member who joins the organisation. Alternatively, a training champion could be chosen from every restaurant site and trained for the onboarding process of new team members to make sure every employee gets the same training. A bonus could be added to the training champion’s salary to motivate the employee to succeed in training others. There should be different levels of training depending on the previous experience of the new employee, meaning that everyone would get the standard onboarding and training process but if the manager detects that further support is needed, there could be additional actions for these employees.

Career Development Opportunities

As one of the main reasons for leaving the business in hospitality is the lack of career development opportunities, as also discovered through the exit interview results, the case company took actions in creating career paths for every employment level and to communicate more clearly what it takes for an employee to get to the next position. The case company utilised the existing e-learning platform to offer career development opportunities which were launched in January 2020. These career paths were tailored to each job title. The job titles were categorised by levels and for an employee to get to the next level (next position), all the training courses of the current level had to be completed with acceptable results. The progression at the former level would then transfer onto their next level and yet to get to the next position, they would have to pass the additional training courses. Every employee was assigned to these courses.

As the training models were launched in January 2020 and the pandemic caused the case organisation to close doors in March 2020, there was not much time for the organisation to communicate and observe the execution of the new training models. This means that the actual effects are yet to be piloted and properly launched again after the circumstances with the pandemic have become. It will then be beneficial for the organisation to collect data and analyse the effects of the training models. The data collection could be done through a survey as a part of stay interviews where the employees would express if they were aware of the career opportunities and then rate the different aspects of the training.

Workplace by Facebook

As inefficient communication and disconnection between managers and their subordinates is one main reason for employees to leave the business in hospitality, the case organisation decided to launch a communication tool in the organisation to tackle the issues with WhatsApp groups.

The communication tool was launched in late 2019, first for piloting with the HR and leadership team, and the general managers. The platform was called Workplace by Facebook. This platform works in a similar way to the original Facebook but is designed for work communities. The significant advantages compared to the WhatsApp groups were that this platform was managed through managers and admin, and could be integrated onto existing systems for payrolls, rotas, and employee relations management. The platform also enabled easy communications between different restaurants and the head office. Workplace by Facebook was launched for every employee of the case organisation in March 2020 before the first lockdown caused by the coronavirus.

This communications platform for the work community was extremely helpful during and after the lockdown period in spring 2020 as it made communication between leadership team and employees easy. It was also made possible for the team members to contact their line managers, the support centre or other team members through the platform. Workplace also supports the frames of the whole leadership as an engagement strategy for employer branding as it enables the managers and the leadership team to be open, truthful, and transparent in their communications and to understand the employees and their behaviours better. The transparent communications and the possibility to easily keep in touch with the work community kept the work-family together in the case company even during the most challenging times with the pandemic.

Employer Brand Impact on Turnover Rate

In the case organisation some key performance indicators (KPIs) were measured and reported monthly. One of the KPIs was the total annual turnover rate. The annual turnover rate in the case company before and during the research period over July 2019 to March 2020 is shown in table 3.

TABLE 3
ANNUAL TURNOVER RATE

| Month | Total turnover rate |
|----------------|----------------------------|
| July 2019 | 100.9% |
| August 2019 | 97.3% |
| September 2019 | 99.0% |
| October 2019 | 95.5% |
| November 2019 | 95.3% |
| December 2019 | 95.2% |
| January 2020 | 93.8% |
| February 2020 | 96.5% |

Before the study period started the annual total turnover rate in the case organisation was 100.9% in July 2019, going down to 97.3% in August 2019 and then again rising back up to 99.0%. After launching the new employer brand in September 2019, the total turnover rate started to decrease as in October 2019 it was 95.5%, decreasing a bit further to 95.3% in November 2019, to 95.2% in December 2019, and to 93.8% in January 2020. During February 2020, the turnover rate increased to 96.5%.

The increase of the turnover rate in September 2019 and again in February 2020 can be partly explained by the ongoing trend of switching to another job after summer or beginning of a new year. Additionally, as many of the employees at the case organisation are young, they go back to their studies. It can be concluded that the launch of the employer brand and the use of the EB tools might have had a positive impact on the total annual turnover rate in the case organisation.

As building a good employer brand is not a short-term strategy, it needs to be considered that before the case organisation can see all the effects of EB, they need to upkeep with the EB actions and monitoring for at least a year in normal circumstances and then compare the turnover rates and the exit interview results to the original information.

Suggested Actions for the Case Company

It is usual to find a great number of solutions to an organisation's turnover problem, which might cause challenges in choosing the most suitable and functional ones. It is important to have a positive and strong organisation image (EB) in the eyes of the current employees. For the case company, some of the EB related topics that need attention according to the exit interviews, are the training and inducting of employees, relationship between the employee and their line manager, lack of communications with the support centre, lack of career development opportunities, organisational culture, and lack of rewards and recognition in the organisation. Along with the exit interviews, the case company would highly benefit from annual employee engagement surveys, the case company would highly benefit of annual employee engagement surveys as it is a key action in managing the employer brand and employee engagement. The employee engagement survey for current employees would help in discovering the common opinions about the organisation as an employer and the realities of the employee experience.

Another way to gather current information about the state of the culture and EB are regular reviews with the employees. It also gives the managers a chance to recognise the contributions of the employee, along with building trust and a better relationship between the employee and their line manager, which was one of the defects discovered through the exit interviews. Here, the managers should be trained to execute whole leadership where the manager should engage their employees with helping them to understand e.g., why some changes in the business processes are necessary. Through whole leadership the managers should engage their team members by helping the employees feel connected to their team and the organisation and by helping employees to believe in the organisation through authenticity and involving employees on decision making. The case company should encourage the restaurant managers to keep track and regularly arrange the one-to-one catch up chats with all their team members.

Enhancing the onboarding and training processes in the organisation is another engaging strategy. The planning and launch of the new onboarding process is the key in tackling the issues which arose from the exit interview results. The onboarding process will begin with the engaging and training of new managers which will then affect the relationship between the employers and their line managers as well as engage the new managers. Thorough induction will assure the new hires that they are an important part of the work community, builds positive image towards the organisation, its employees, and the product, and create a good baseline for the new employment. These will then affect the image of the organisation in the eyes of the team members.

Even though onboarding is an essential part of the employee experience, the employer cannot forget to train their employees throughout the whole employment. Career development opportunities are one of the things employees require from an employer while choosing where to apply for a job as it shows that the employee is appreciated. Talent management could also be added as part of training and recruiting in the case company to engage employees through mentoring, and targeted recruitment. The case company made the decision to amend their current career development opportunities during the research. It was clearly stated in the eLearning system which the compulsory training modules for example for a waiter were and which voluntary training modules needed to be completed before the employee could be considered for a duty manager's position.

Rewards and recognition was mentioned as an efficient employer branding tool for engaging employees in many literature sources as well as in the research. There is a clear need for a structured rewards and recognition system in the case company. It would be beneficial to have monthly recognitions for job well done on branch level through e.g., customer feedback or as a thank you from the restaurant manager. These recognitions could be announced or posted in the communications platform Workplace. The platform is a good way to announce any milestones as well, like birthdays and years of service. For these purposes, the platform has been used by the case company already but there is a need for a structured plan and strategy

for a rewards and recognition programme which is clearly communicated throughout the whole organisation. This programme should then be reviewed annually and amended according to the objectives of the organisation.

To build an effective rewards and recognition programme, the following guidelines were suggested in the theory part; all employees need to be aware of the programme and what is required for rewards or recognition, these requirements need to be clear and credible, and achieved through performance or specific period, rewards should be personal and sometimes spontaneous, the standard for the rewards need to be reachable, and the rewards must be aligned with the level of accomplishment.

Through the communications platform, along with the official social media channels, the case organisation should also share content which could be considered as employee generated to enhance EB. Some good sources for content created by the employer for the employees to share are for example job profiles from the perspective of an employee, a culture profile of the attitudes, values and behaviours everyone shares, passion profile of combining personal interests of an employee to their work, a hero profile of overcoming a challenge with the encouragement and support of the organisation, a team profile of successful teamwork, and inside stories from behind the scenes in the organisation (Mosley & Schmidt 2017, 17–18).

All the above actions affect the organisation's culture and job embeddedness either positively, if they succeed, or negatively if not. To figure out the state of the current culture it would be beneficial to arrange annual surveys for current employees to realise the state of EB and add a section or one question about the organisational culture after which it would be possible to compare the results from exit interviews and stay interviews on organisational culture, detect any defects, and start taking actions to strengthen the culture.

Employer Branding Model for the Case Company

The model for developing the employer brand by Mosley and Schmidt (2017) presented earlier in figure 2 is a good basis for the case organisation to develop their EB even further.

The first step is to develop clear business objectives and define the talent that is needed. For the case company, the business objectives are to attract the best local talent and then to engage them to the organisation. There is advantage in defining the basis for the talent which applies to every job title in the case company additional in having local talent pools. The basis for the talent needed according to the employer brand is to have passion, care, attention, drive, agility, judgement, and to be influencing, and work well in teams. Any individual talents on top of these can then be added to the model.

The second phase of the model is to evaluate the EB among current employees. For this, an employee engagement survey is the key in getting the feedback needed. The exit interviews are a good start, but the current employees might give a more specific and accurate image of the current EB. The current exit interview results define the organisational culture with the following words: family, friendly, closely knit teams, and professional.

The feedback of the engagement survey can also be utilised in the third step of the model, which is to define the key factors to become the employer of choice, the employer value proposition. The EVP for the case company can be created by using the model of Müller-Nedebock (2020). The model helps defining EVP and its components in an organisation and supports the model of Mosley and Schmidt (2017) for developing the employer brand. The core and the essence of the employer brand promise (EVP) for the case company is to offer more than just a job for the employees.

The case company also offers career growth opportunities, good employee benefits and a workplace-family of co-workers, which are the supporting pillars for the core proposition of EVP model of Müller-Nedebock (2020) and the elements for desired impression as an employer. This can also be called the employer brand framework and is the fourth step in the model in developing the employer brand.

The attribute claims and proof points of EVP for the case company in the fifth step of the model are for example the career growth programme, employee discounts and an employee assistance programme for benefits, and a supportive family spirit in the work community through the communications platform Workplace. To utilise the storytelling aspect and its benefits it would be useful to create content to promote these proof points from for example the employees who have taken part in the future leaders' programme

and have them tell their story and experience of the training. The case company should have the frameworks for communications which support the EB as the base level of the EVP model. These frameworks could be transparency and friendliness in internal and external communications.

The sixth step in the employer branding development model is to consistently communicate the supporting pillars of EVP through selected channels. The key channel for the case company is to utilise the communications platform Workplace. Another supportive channel to promote the EB to the external audience is to share the content and to communicate in LinkedIn and Facebook's career pages.

The seventh step of the EB development model is to measure success from different actions. As the main channels chosen are social media platforms, it is beneficial to track the reactions and engagement of different kind of posts and content. The communication channels have this data easily at hand, which makes reporting and monitoring of reactions and engagements very easy. The final step of the model is to adjust the strategy and improve. Here the measuring of success is the key as the case company can track which kind of contents are the most successful and adjust accordingly.

Employer Branding During Pandemic in the Case Company

In the beginning of the year 2020, the world fell into a worldwide crisis as the spread of the coronavirus forced many countries to close their businesses. This pandemic impacted every industry, some in a negative way and some in a positive way. A study organised by the Universum (2020) discovered that these uncertain times affected on many employers in the hospitality business among many other industries. It was extremely important to maintain employee engagement actions in the case organisation even though there were many potential sources of disengagement due to the pandemic. These disengagement factors were for example increased need for taking care of family members, fear or anxiety of an unstable future, and lack of social communications (Universum 2020).

Universum's (2020) study suggests that leaders take actions during and after the pandemic in 2020 to upkeep their talent management and EB. It is important to have a talent contingency plan which includes health and safety, travel advisories, work-from-home plans, and employee resources. Another important action is to have an employee resource guide to describe the workplace safety and regulations due to the coronavirus crisis. The third action the Universum (2020) presents for the leaders to manage the exceptional times is an employee resilience task force group to figure out how the pandemic affects employees at the individual level and how the leaders and the organisation can support these individual needs and engage them to their work (Universum 2020).

According to a study presented by Müller-Nedebock (2020), during the pandemic in 2020 one of the most important things for employees has been an employer who offers support and stability for their employees during the pandemic. The pandemic has also highlighted the importance and directed attention to employers acting on their employer promise on taking care of their employees, which means it is increasingly important to focus on the EVP. It is harder to attract talent during a crisis like the pandemic, because people seek certainty in their life and changing jobs might bring instability which emphasises the necessity of employer branding (Müller-Nedebock 2020).

Universum (2020) also presents some unexpected areas where the employer might need to show support for their employees during the times of the crisis brought on by the pandemic. One of the areas is isolation from other people, which might cause challenges to creative problem solving, team building, and communication. One way to help with these challenges is to enable and encourage online gatherings. The employer could also make sure and assist their employees in having good workspace design at home while working remotely and to have the HR department hosting wellness checks through anonymous surveys to analyse the state of mind of their employees and to discover possible grievances (Universum 2020).

As the coronavirus pandemic has changed the way of working with very short notice, Universum (2020) suggest that the managers pay more attention to some key points to ensure their employees keep up with the changes, are not overwhelmed by them and stay engaged to the organisation. These key points are:

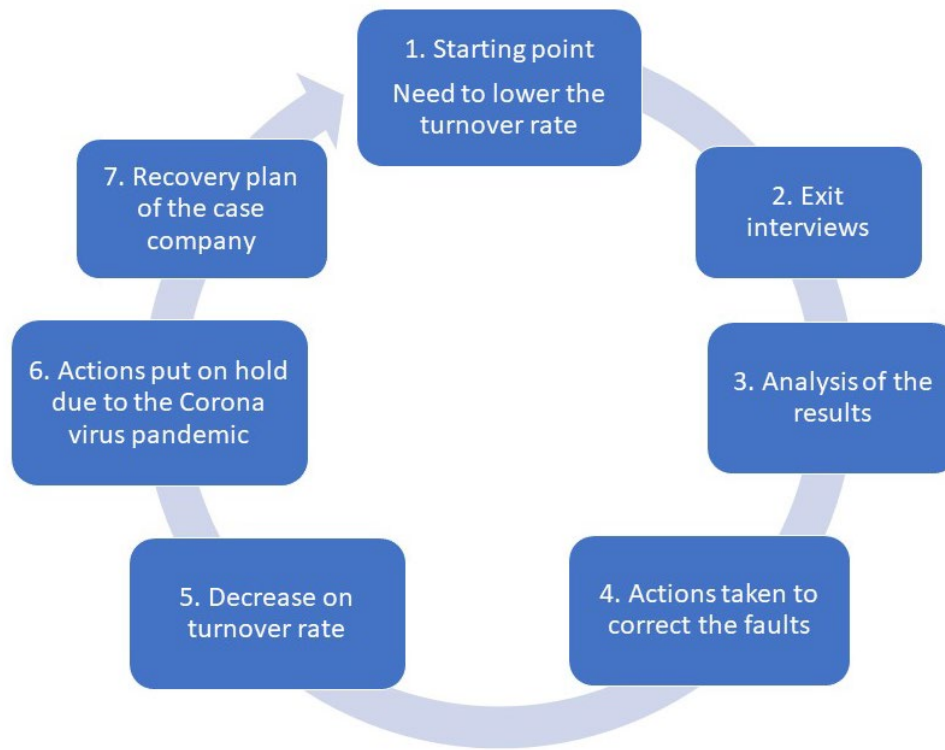
- Clear and consistent communication, as transparency is required
- Support virtual and remote work to ensure effectiveness of meetings
- Evaluate and update the tech tools if necessary

- Create new engagement strategy to replace the missed social engagements while working remotely, which can be remote lunchbreaks and fitness challenges

SUMMARY AND DISCUSSION

This final chapter sums up the research and discusses the results further. Figure 3 presents the phases of the research:

**FIGURE 3
PHASES OF THE RESEARCH**



The research started from a need of the case organisation when the HR department realised the high turnover rates especially among team member level. The new employer brand was designed and exit interview forms were updated as the collection of the data started in September 2019. The data collection ended in March 2020 when the UK fell into lockdown due to coronavirus causing restaurants to close their doors, and the case company to put some of the correcting actions for the high turnover on hold. The aim of the research was to figure out the main reasons for the high turnover rates, analyse them, and to find ways to engage current employees through employer branding. Some of the main actions to decrease the turnover rate of the case company were to

- Establish and follow through employer branding tasks
- Create onboarding and training programmes
- Launch a new communications platform for all employees.

All these actions resulted in lowering the turnover rate from 100.9% to 96.5%. The suggested actions for the case company were:

- To assign a training champion in each brand to onboard new employees
- To make the Support centre and leadership team members more approachable through communications platform

- To enhance the relationships between the managers and their team members with whole leadership through listening and understanding the employees' needs
- To better organise and make the existing rewards and recognition system more consistent
- To establish employer value proposition to clarify the expectations for the employees
- To keep track on employee satisfaction and get feedback through regular one-to-one catch-ups and employee engagement surveys
- To support managers in team building programs

Before the case organisation could act on these suggestions, the pandemic hit and all restaurant businesses had to close their doors for the first lockdown from March 2020. The communications platform, Workplace, launched in March 2020 was the key in keeping employees informed and also in engaging them to the organisation even though the employees were on furlough. The HR department arranged different team building events to keep people connected and a mental health programme was also established and opened for every employee. These actions were to strengthen the employer brand and work environment remotely throughout all three lockdowns and in between.

To continue to decrease the turnover rate, the case company must follow through the suggested employer branding actions as this research has discovered that there is a critical need for the case company to keep their current employees engaged. The pandemic might make it even harder to engage employees as they are not physically at the workplace or might not be in contact with their team members at all. The exceptional time during the pandemic might force some employees to seek work from other industries to make money and hence increasing the turnover rate during the pandemic. This makes it critical to create and follow through a thorough employer branding recovery plan for the time during and after the pandemic to keep the employees engaged to the organisation.

SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

The topics of this research were employee turnover, employee engagement and its management, and employer branding and its management. As the topics are very broad it can be stated that there are still possibilities for further research. An idea for another research topic would be to compare the differences in the results of exit interviews for employees who have left the business and an employee engagement survey for current employees of an organisation. The research could focus on different topics e.g., employer brand, organisation culture, and employee engagement and discover if there are any differences in the results and opinions of the former employees compared to the current ones.

Another research topic could be to further study rewards and recognition systems especially designed and suitable for hospitality business. The study could cover the common characteristics of hospitality workers, what kind of rewards and recognition is appreciated among the employees in the hospitality business and rewards and a recognition system could be built according to the study results for organisations to use in the hospitality business.

Finally, as this research concentrated on the employee engagement management through employer branding, another research could investigate how employer branding effects the recruitment results. It could be studied through time to hire, number of applications per open vacancy, the percentage of high-quality applicants per open vacancy and the effect of employer brand on open applications to an organisation when there are no open vacancies.

REFERENCES

- Ambler, T., & Barrow, S. (n.d.). The employer brand. *J Brand Management*, 4, 185–206. Retrieved November 20, 2019, from <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1057/bm.1996.42>
- Boella, M.J., & Gross-Turner, S. (2013). *Human resource management in the hospitality industry: A guide to best practice* (Ninth edition). Routledge. Taylor & Francis Group. London and New York. Retrieved October 2, 2020, from <https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/turkuamk-ebooks/reader.action?docID=1143774>

- Bradford, D. (2017). Why did they leave? *Human Resource Management International Digest*, 25(5), 21–24. Retrieved December 6, 2019, from <https://search-proquest-com.ezproxy.turkuamk.fi/docview/1922447048/fulltextPDF/B29F26CB9BC46D7PQ/1?accountid=14446>
- Branch, D. (2011). Employee Motivation, Recognition, Rewards, and Retention: Kicking It Up a Notch! CPA Practice Management Forum. *Riwerwoods*, 7(11), 5–7. Retrieved December 11, 2019, from <https://search-proquest-com.ezproxy.turkuamk.fi/docview/923307022/fulltext/F249728B0C1F452APQ/1?accountid=14446>
- Figurska, I., & Matuska, E. (2013). Employer branding as a human resources management strategy. *Human Resources Management & Ergonomics*, VII. Retrieved November 12, 2020, from https://frcatel.fri.uniza.sk/hrme/files/2013/2013_2_03.pdf
- Garg, R.K. (2018, April–June). Employee Retention Management for Medium sized Engineering Firms. *Splint International Journal of Professionals*, 5(2). ISSN: 2349'6045. Retrieved May 12, 2020, from <https://search-proquest-com.ezproxy.turkuamk.fi/docview/2280414712?pq-origsite=primo>
- Gehrels, S. (2019). *Employer branding for the hospitality and tourism industry: Finding and keeping talent*. Emerald Publishing Limited, Bingley. Stenden hotel management school, the Netherlands. Retrieved November 17, 2020, from <https://books.emeraldinsight.com/resources/pdfs/chapters/9781789730708-TYPE23-NR2.pdf>
- Hayton, E. (2020). *8 Causes of Employee Turnover in Hospitality by Erica*. Retrieved September 25, 2020, from <https://harver.com/blog/causes-of-employee-turnover-in-hospitality/>
- Hayward, S. (2010). *Engaging employees through whole leadership* (Vol. 9, issue 3). Emerald Group Publishing Limited. ISSN 1475-4398. Retrieved May 25, 2020, from <https://search-proquest-com.ezproxy.turkuamk.fi/docview/356967758/fulltextPDF/1379F414BD3B4839PQ/3?accountid=14446>
- Kunerth, B., & Mosley, R. (2011). Applying employer brand management to employee engagement. *Strategic HR Review*, 10(3), 19–26. Emerald Group 2011. Retrieved November 20, 2019, from <https://search-proquest-com.ezproxy.turkuamk.fi/docview/868575702/fulltextPDF/68F24F30F57F4198PQ/1?accountid=14446>
- Lievens, F., & Slaughter, J.E. (2016). Employer Image and Employer Branding: What We Know and What We Need to Know. *Annual Review of Organizational Psychology and Organizational Behavior*. Retrieved April 27, 2020, from https://biblio.ugent.be/publication/8100868/file/8100876.pdf?fbclid=IwAR2OnZzTGU3wwDChFIBrKKqspQ0i43KpoOi9nZSONxCjFNZ-ETbMW4_Gkro
- Mayhew, R. (2019). *Houston Chronicle*. 2020 Hearst Newspapers, LLC. Retrieved from <https://smallbusiness.chron.com/employee-turnover-definitions-calculations-11611.html>
- McCann Synergy. (2020). *Finders Keepers: Find and keep the best people with your employer brand*. Retrieved November 26, 2020, from <https://www.mccannsynergy.com/recent-news/finderskeepers/>
- Mosley, R. (2014). *Employer Brand Management: Practical Lessons from the World's Leading Employers*. John Wiley and Sons Ltd West Sussex, United Kingdom. Retrieved December 11, 2019, from <https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/turkuamk-ebooks/detail.action?docID=1753760>
- Mosley, R., & Schmidt, L. (2017). *Employer Branding for dummies*. A Wiley brand. John Wiley & Sons Inc. Hoboken, New Jersey. Retrieved October 23, 2020, from <https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/turkuamk-ebooks/reader.action?docID=4790358>
- Muller-Heyndyk, R. (2018, August 10). *Hospitality struggling to keep workers*. HR Magazine. Retrieved October 2, 2020, from <https://www.hrmagazine.co.uk/article-details/hospitality-struggling-to-keep-workers>
- Müller-Nedebock, S. (2020). *A targeted approach to building your EVP: How to increase relevance and focus*. Webinar. Universum. Retrieved December 8, 2020.

- Narayanan, A. (2016, June). Talent Management and Employee Retention: Implications of Job Embeddedness - A Research Agenda. *Journal of Strategic Human Resource Management*, 5(2). Retrieved May 14, 2020, from <https://search-proquest-com.ezproxy.turkuamk.fi/docview/1839187472/105667D2A20E47E6PQ/6?accountid=14446>
- Noor, U.H., & Shahjehan, A. (2018). *Role of Employer Branding Dimensions on Employee Retention: Evidence from Educational Sector*. Administrative Sciences. Department of Leadership and Management Studies, National Defence University. Retrieved November 20, 2019, from <https://search-proquest-com.ezproxy.turkuamk.fi/docview/2231506745/fulltextPDF/79DA0B2174524F87PQ/1?accountid=14446>
- Phillips, J.J., & Connell, A.O. (2003). *Managing Employee Retention: A Strategic Accountability Approach*. Elsevier Butterworth Heinemann & Society for human resource management. Retrieved April 14, 2020, from <https://search-proquest-com.ezproxy.turkuamk.fi/docview/2132034716/bookReader?accountid=14446>
- Raj, A.B., & Jyothi, P. (2011, September). Internal Branding: Exploring the Employee Perspective. *Journal of Economic Development*, pp. 1–27. Retrieved November 20, 2019, from <https://search-proquest-com.ezproxy.turkuamk.fi/docview/1736300447/fulltextPDF/375002F5B54C4852PQ/1?accountid=14446>
- Rosethorn, H. (2009). *The Employer Brand: Keeping faith with the deal*. Gower Publishing Limited. Retrieved June 23, 2020, from <https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/turkuamk-ebooks/reader.action?docID=446419>
- Scribbr. (n.d.). *An introduction to research methods*. Retrieved November 18, 2020, <https://www.scribbr.com/category/methodology/>
- Survey Monkey. (n.d.). Copyright © 1999–2020 SurveyMonkey. Retrieved September 25, 2020, from <https://www.surveymonkey.co.uk/>
- Tori, F. (2018). *Compelling Exit Interview Questions to Help Boost Retention*. Talent Management Excellence Essentials, Aurora. Retrieved December 4, 2019, from <https://search-proquest-com.ezproxy.turkuamk.fi/docview/2157984525?pq-origsite=primo>
- Universum. (2020). *Shaping up for the downturn. How talent leaders are responding to the slowdown*. Retrieved November 24, 2020, from <https://universumglobal.com/library/shaping-up-for-the-downturn-ebook/>
- Vaisto, L. (2020, November). *Johda työnantajabrändiä: Employer Brand Management tutuksi*. Retrieved November 25, 2020, from <https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/johda-ty%25C3%25B6nantajabr%25C3%25A4ndi%25C3%25A4-employer-brand-management-tutuksi-vaisto/?trackingId=o74a1fOTQ3eHh0sQ3MPu%2Fw%3D%3D>
- Villarreal Larrinaga, O. (2016). Is it desirable, necessary and possible to perform research using case studies? Universidad del país Vasco UPV/EHU (España). *Guadernos de Gestión*, 17(1), 147–172. Retrieved November 20, 2019, from <https://search-proquest-com.ezproxy.turkuamk.fi/docview/1868524277/fulltextPDF/B4FDCA1766C4A10PQ/1?accountid=14446>
- Yuanyuan, G. (2012, July). *What Make People Stay? The Different Effects of On-The-Job and Off-The-Job Embeddedness on Voluntary Turnover*. The Chinese University of Hong Kong. UMI Dissertation Publishing, No. 353687. Retrieved May 20, 2020, from <https://search-proquest-com.ezproxy.turkuamk.fi/docview/1315215463/DB763EE88A244B58PQ/2?accountid=14446>