Dream teams and their role as a facilitator of a corporate brand.

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Title of thesis:
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Abstract:
This study examines topic of dream teams, and their role as a facilitator of a corporate brand. Dream teams can alternatively be called high performance teams, however essentially they are teams capable of high levels of performance that satisfies client's needs.

Theoretical framework includes concepts of corporate brand identity, corporate brand image, as well as critical incidents and critical success factors. There is a relationship between corporate brand identity and corporate brand image, and since the two can differ a lot from each other, a gap exists in between. In this study, dream teams are regarded as facilitator of such gap. A new model picturing this relationship was generated.

This study is a qualitative case study. It is based on a single case, a large project development company. Only their operations on the Finnish market are in focus. Data was collected through 7 in-depth, open-ended and unstructured interviews. Five interviews were conducted with case company employees, and two with their clients. Respondents were chosen with help of snowball method. Written materials, such as employee newsletter and web site, were also examined. Data was recorded, transcribed, and categorized for analysis.

Results show that there is good alignment between the communicated corporate brand identity and the perceived corporate brand image. Thus, dream teams seem to be an effective facilitator of a corporate brand. Several critical success factors were exposed, and their role was more present that that of critical incidents when considering dream teams.

Results of this study cannot be generalised, nevertheless valuable theoretical as well as managerial implications were made. A new model was generated. The study also makes suggestions for future research.

Keywords:
Corporate brand identity, corporate brand image, link between brand identity and brand image, critical incidents, critical success factors, dream teams, high performance teams, case study.
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1 INTRODUCTION

Today’s firms have to face not only turbulent economical development, but also a rapidly changing environment that constantly comes up with new challenges. In many cases, successful teamwork is not only essential for businesses, but also used as a way to improve current performance. Especially within big corporations, many tasks have to be co-ordinated between multiple employees thus combining their knowledge, skills, experience and perspectives. (Irani and Sharp, 1997)

According to Kur (1996) statistically, certain teams will always perform better than the other ones. They might even be so successful, that they are said to provide high performance. Such teams are able to satisfy the client’s needs, and hence are sometimes even called by the name dream teams due to their positive impact on company’s business.

Every brand has a certain corporate brand identity, a way in which the company sees themselves and the brand from the internal point of view (Nandan, 2005), and it can be identified through different dimensions that should all be closely aligned together (Balmer, 2001). Corporate brand identity is affected by many different factors, one of them being employee behaviour, which therefore affects the entire corporate brand (Blombäck and Ramirez-Pasillas, 2012).

Company expresses its brand identity in a certain way, however the counterparty – for instance a client, has its own impressions through which this identity is seen and used in formation of a corporate brand image. A gap exists between the send expressions and received impressions. Also, time dimension affects this process. Hence, what a firm perceives as its corporate brand identity might not necessarily be what the client sees as the corporate brand image. (Rindell, Strandvik and Tikkanen, 2015)

According to Edvardsson and Strandvik (2000), interaction between two firms usually means positive as well as negative incidents. Some of them are more significant than others, and some of them can even become important enough that they can define or change dynamics of the entire relationship. Such episodes are therefore perceived to be critical incidents and are important to be recognized. If neglected, such incidents might have severe aspects on entire firm performance.
Critical success factors are “the limited number of areas in which results, if they are satisfactory, will ensure successful competitive performance for the organisation” (Rockart, 1979:85). In this study critical success factors are seen as otherwise similar to critical incidents in their nature, nevertheless they are called factors since they describe certain things, instead of concentrating on occurred episodes. Alike critical incidents, they can have measurable impact on client-firm relationship.

The teams facilitate a corporate brand identity to the outer world; through their behaviour and professional actions, they communicate the corporate brand to firm’s clients (Blombäck and Ramirez-Pasillas, 2012). Hence, they can be seen as minimizing the gap presented by Rindell et al (2015), which exists between brand identity and brand image. This study examines dream teams as facilitators between the brand identity and brand image, thus filling the gap.

1.1 Problem area

At the core of every company are its values and priorities; things that will not be compromised upon no matter what, and that will constitute a base for creation of corporate brand identity (Aaker, 2004). Importance of employees for a firm is not questionable. However, they work within a certain framework, which also constitutes of a corporate brand identity.

Many companies desire for creation of a strong brand identity. However, even when holding a strong brand name, what the client perceives as a firm’s brand image might differ from the firm’s corporate brand identity, since a gap exists between the expressed identity and received image (Rindell et al, 2015). Therefore, every client will have a certain image of a firm’s brand, and this brand image will affect their opinion about a company. It is therefore important for every company to investigate this gap, and teams can be seen as facilitators that minimize it.

If the gap between brand identity and brand image is filled by actions taken by dream teams, then the emerging perceptions on both sides will also be affected by the critical incidents or critical success factors relevant for the particular client-firm relationship. Thus, this notion is of high interest.
As Blombäck and Ramirez-Pasillas (2012) point out, there is a need for further research that will scrutinize the processes of corporate brand identity formation of which employee behaviour is a part. This notion is also touched upon in this study, since dream teams are investigated as facilitators between corporate identity and corporate image. Edvardsson and Strandvik (2000) highlight importance of viewing critical incidents from relationship level, instead of concentrating on episodes alone.

Critical success factors are essential knowledge for companies, especially if firm’s operations are project-based (Mishra, Dangayach and Mittal, 2011). This study will explore both notions of critical incidents, as well as critical success factors. As Mishra et al (2011) point out, previous research has not focused on the role of soft or people dimension of the project management, and there is greater need for identifying the human issues. Dream teams and their interaction with clients picture such concerns.

Even though their existence is sought after and highly desirable for companies, dream teams are rare to come across (Castka, Bamber, Sharp, and Belohoubek, 2001). Dream teams, due to their satisfactory performance and fulfilment of customer’s needs, have a highly positive effect on the entire firm as well as their operations (Kur, 1996). Additionally, personal interaction represents one of the vital issues in business (Mainela and Ulkuniemi, 2013). In this study, personal interaction is viewed from a perspective of a team. Thus, topic of dream teams is relevant for any company aiming to sustain or enhance their efficiency, bottom line, or even customer satisfaction.

There is a lot of existing theory about dream teams (even though it exists under various names, such as high performance teams or personal relationships in business settings), and there is a need for testing existing theories in practice. Through case studies different phenomena can be observed within their real-life context, offering a possibility to test theory (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2012:145-147). Thus, such studies provide valuable contribution to existing research, and have an important complementary role that does not always aim for producing new generalizations (Aastrup and Hallordsson, 2008). This study is a case study conducted at one company, with core business that is highly dependant on their in-house talent and therefore also team performance.
1.1.1 The case company

The case company in this study is a project development group. This study concentrates on the company’s operations on the Finnish market only. For the purpose of this study the company can roughly be divided into two business units, called division 1 and division 2. The divisions are separated from each other since the business areas they operate within are extremely different, and hence also affect the matter of dream teams in different ways, thus producing slightly different answers to posed research questions.

When projects are sold to the client, it is often certain teams who in reality are being offered. In most cases, clients want the resumes of key employees that will be engaged in the project, and thus a lot depends on the competences as well as performance of these teams.

1.2 Aim and research questions

Aim of this study is to investigate in depth such teams within the case company, which performance is considered to be very satisfactory or above average, thus making them dream teams. This study investigates why dream teams within the company perform well in their work, as well as what can be identified as reasons to such high levels of team performance.

1. What is the cause of high performance among dream teams?

Dream teams’ role as facilitators of company’s corporate brand identity is examined, and then again as the channel through which feedback based on corporate brand image is delivered back to the company. It is also of interest whether the expressed corporate brand identity is similar to the corporate brand image perceived by the case company’s clients.

2. Is corporate brand identity that is facilitated by dream teams to the client consistent with the corporate brand image that the clients hold?

This study takes a closer look at company’s corporate brand identity, at the perceived corporate brand image, as well as at the role that dream teams play in that process.
Notions of critical incidents and critical success factors are explored, and the study aims to uncover what they are, and whether both or only one of them are present.

3. What are the critical incidents or critical success factors?

1.3 Limitations

This study was carried out as a case study for the case company. Hence, all materials, information and empirical research were examined with focus on the case company, its clients, and the respective line of business as well as industry. Therefore, even though this study provides valuable contribution to overall academic research due to its real-life nature, extensive usage of theory, and through generating new theoretical model, it is based only on a single case. The presented results, conclusions, suggestions, and implications may vary, if another company within another industry was considered (Patton, 2015:255-263). Also such aspects as size, maturity, and origin of the company may play a role when considering the finding of this study on a larger scale (ibid).

Part of the data collected for analysis in this study comes from interviews with the case company's clients. These respondents, even though employed at their respective firms, only represent their personal opinions, perceptions, ideas and experiences. Therefore their responses should not be viewed or treated as official company statements.

This study is largely based on the theoretical framework within discipline of marketing. However, the topic of teamwork, brand identity as well as brand image also includes many questions that touch upon concepts relevant for other academic fields, for instance corporate communications. Due to the nature of this work, which is a master thesis in marketing, such aspects have only been considered as minor addition. The topic of this research could therefore yield different perspective, if it was examined within another field of science, or using a different theoretical framework.

1.4 Research approach and structure of the study

In qualitative research, a case study can be defined as a method of inquiry uncovering detailed and rich story about a certain empirical unit or theoretical construct (Patton,
This study is touching upon both notions, as it looks at one empirical unit, the case company, and one main theoretical construct, dream teams.

Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill (2009:136-167) describe various ways of research design, each suitable for a different aim of study. One of them is an exploratory study. There, the aim is to uncover new insights and to assess a phenomenon in a new light. Therefore, an exploratory study is used when examining problems over which a researcher does not have a clear understanding, or is unsure over their precise nature. This study is of exploratory nature, and since it is a case study looking at the topic of dream teams within one specific company, the researcher had to closely examine a phenomenon of dream teams at that specific firm. In order to be able to put emerging findings into the right perspective, such examination first required an in-depth understanding of the case company, its operations, corporate culture, its clients, and nature of an industry that it operates within. Researcher had a limited pre-understanding over these aspects, and hence exploratory approach was chosen to uncover these insights in detail as well as within their natural environment.

There are three main ways of conducting an exploratory study: search of literature, interviews with experts on the subject, and conducting focus group interviews (Saunders et al, 2009:140). This study pursued both search of literature as well as interviews with experts on the subject: case company’s employees, and their clients. This study was also flexible and adaptable to change, as new information was uncovered. The focus of the topic became progressively narrower, however still maintaining a certain direction to the enquiry (ibid). There were no pre-defined hypotheses to be tested, only research questions.

This paper is structured as following. First, it examines the theoretical framework on the topic of corporate brand identity, corporate brand image, critical incidents, critical success factors, and dream teams. Then, methodology is described. This chapter includes details and justifications on the chosen philosophy of science, research method and design, how collection of data was carried out, as well as how the data was analysed. Ethical aspects along with trustworthiness of the study are also discussed. Afterwards, results are presented, and data gathered during interviews is connected to the theoretical framework. This research ends with discussion and conclusions. Implications on theoretical and managerial level, as well as suggestions for future
research are presented. Finally, this study also includes a short summary in Swedish, which covers content of the entire paper.
2 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This chapter presents a review of theories relevant for this study including concepts such as corporate brand identity, corporate brand image, critical incidents, critical success factors, and dream teams, also referred to as high performance teams. Chapter ends with a short summary over the most relevant aspects.

2.1 Corporate brand identity

Corporate brand identity is how the firm wants to identify itself among its publics, and it originates from the company’s differentiated offering (Margulies, 1977). It can be defined as a mix of features and values that are chosen by a company to represent it, its products, as well as its corporate culture (Blombäck and Ramirez-Pasillas, 2012). Alternatively, brand identity can be viewed through the perspective of a brand concept, which is based on the needs that consumers have, and that a brand can satisfy (Nandan, 2005). Overall, brand identity is a diverse concept with many multidisciplinary roots, and it is a highly complex construction (Balmer, 2001).

Corporate brand identity works as a link between the company and its stakeholders (Aaker, 2004), and identity is formed in interaction with others (Hatch and Schultz, 2002). With help of their corporate brand identity, company aims to signal the ways in which it is distinct and individual (Nandan, 2005). A strong link exists between marketing activities and corporate brand identity, and it stresses the importance and effect of corporate culture including norms, values, and behaviour shared by groups within the organization (Balmer and Wilson, 1998).

Balmer (2001) presents an approach called “Dr Balmer’s AC2ID Test”, which distinguishes five corporate identity types that every firm is affected by: actual, communicated, conceived, ideal, and desired. Actual identity describes the existing identity expressed in the present time through for instance strategy, reputation, or leadership approach. Communicated identity covers all time dimensions, from past to future, and as the name suggests concentrates on corporate communications at its various levels, covering both the controllable as well as non-controllable communications. Conceived identity occurs in the past or present, and comes from reputation, image, and corporate branding strategies. It exists in the minds of
individuals, through the perceived image or reputation. Ideal identity looks into the future, and focuses on strategy, leadership, structure, as well as various analyses. It is fully conceptual, and strives for a possibly favourable market positioning. Desired identity also focuses on the future but it is present solely in the minds of corporate leaders, taking form of a vision that drives their performance, making it more personal than the ideal identity. By using AC²ID Test, a corporation’s brand identity can be thoroughly analysed, both in the present situation as well as over time, since the test makes a strong use of different time dimensions.

According to the test, companies should strive for the mentioned five factors to be possibly compatible and consistent with each other, as well as with current market trends. Lack of alignment between the different factors results in dissonance, which in turn can cause a crisis for the entire organization. Each factor is connected to all the other ones, creating a tight and comprehensive network that increases importance of alignment. Additionally, all of the factors are equally important. (Balmer, 2001)

Dissonance describes a situation where corporate brand identity does not match well with the reality, which in turn consists of actual perceptions that others have about a company. This can be caused by actions that do not represent the established corporate brand identity and reputation accurately, or when strategic objectives are not fulfilled according to expectations. All interactions take place within a certain time. As a matter of fact, different identity types occur within different time frames, thus making time an important factor affecting brand identity. (Balmer, 2001)

Three most important characteristics of corporate brand identity are its complexity, its variability, and its heterogeneity. Complexity occurs due to the diverse and manifold nature of brand identity. Variability describes the evolving nature of brand identity, where due to various interactions or incidents that take place over time, even the identity changes. Heterogeneity works as a reminder that brand identity is a relevant topic for many fields and scholarly disciplines, and consists of many components. (Balmer, 2001)

According to Blombäck and Ramirez-Pasillas (2012), one aspect of corporate brand identity is employee behaviour, along with for instance name, market offering, slogans, or planned communications. These channels represent different points of contact between the firm and the market, through which the different stakeholders interpret
corporate brand identity. However, decisions that affect formation of corporate brand identity are not necessarily a result of detailed marketing plans, but can be made without having a concern about marketing at all, and can even be fully unplanned. An example of such unplanned action can also be an everyday professional behaviour of an employee, or a team.

Balmer and Wilson (1998) identify values held by the personnel as one key element of corporate brand identity, along with understanding of the different subcultures that exist within organization’s identity. Nandan (2005) argues that a successful brand is formed not only with the help of a marketing department, but it also dependent on the capabilities of the personnel belonging to other departments within the firm. Margulies (1977) elaborates that formation of a corporate brand identity is an extensive effect requiring many phases and steps that initially engage everyone in the firm. Thus, it can be concluded that employee behaviour affects both the corporate brand identity, as well as overall reputation of the company.

2.2 Corporate brand image

Corporate brand image is the perception held by different stakeholders and publics about the company, and it encompasses the beliefs that they have about the brand (Nandan, 2005; Margulies, 1977) as well as prejudices they hold towards it (First and Tomic, 2011). Similarly, Hatch and Schultz (2002) define corporate brand image as the set of views that the outsiders (and not the people within the firm itself) have on the organization and its corporate brand identity. This definition includes practices within strategy, communication, and marketing. Weiwei (2007) agrees and underlines that corporate brand image is the external perception of the company. Balmer (2001) described brand image as the instant image that comes to mind when thinking of an organisation. Aaker (1991:109) sees brand image as a “set of associations, usually organised in some meaningful way”, while Nandan (2005) points out that even though brand image has been defined by many scholars in various ways, an emerging commonality is that brand image is a notion of a brand constructed by a consumer. In this study, such consumer would be a client firm of the case company.

Identity of employees plays a role during construction of a corporate brand image of the firm that they are employed at (Blombäck and Ramirez-Pasillas, 2012). An identity of
an employee will affect identity of the team they are working within, and further the corporate brand image. Firm’s clients will perceive and evaluate the brand identity according to their own subjectivity, thus using their own interpretations when decoding the communicated identity and forming their brand image (Nandan, 2005).

The case company relies heavily on their personnel, as their business has a strong service component. The execution of their projects is heavily dependable on the human capital acquired by the firm. Within such service-oriented companies, employees provide the basis for creation of corporate brand image (Aaker, 2004). Respect, liking and loyalty towards the brand can all be enhanced by highly customer-focused, engaged, empowered, responsive, and competent people (ibid). An importance of dream teams is therefore enhanced.

Even though brand identity as well as brand image are closely related to each other, it is important to underline that they nevertheless are two different concepts that should not be confused, or used interchangeably. Brand identity focuses on the source (company, also described as brand originator), while brand image concentrates on the receiver, the target audience. (Nandan, 2005)

2.3 Interplay between corporate brand identity and corporate brand image

As Balmer (2001) writes, it is important for the company to minimize possible dissonance between the expressed corporate brand identity as well as receivers perceptions, corporate brand image. Clear relationship exists between the two.

Figure 2 below visualizes the relationship between the client, the team, and the emerging concept of dream. Both the team as well as the client affect the final outcome (Aaker, 2004; Blombäck and Ramirez-Pasillas, 2012), the dream, which in its essence stands for a satisfactory co-operation. The boxes on top show how the brand develops during the interaction between a team and a client. On the company's side, the brand is perceived as a corporate brand identity (Balmer, 2001; Nandan, 2005; Blombäck and Ramirez-Pasillas, 2012; Margulies, 1977). On the other hand, the client perceives that corporate brand identity as a corporate brand image (Nandan, 2005; Margulies, 1977; Hatch and Schultz, 2002; Weiwei, 2007; Balmer, 2001). What emerges in between the
corporate brand identity and the perceived corporate brand image is the “living brand”, a mixture of both identity and image that is being created during the interaction between the team and the client.

Figure 1 Interplay between corporate brand identity, corporate brand image, and the emerging living brand as well as dream.

Living brand, alike the corporate brand image that a client has about a firm, does not necessarily have to be what the corporation perceives as its brand identity. The communicated brand identity is not always planned carefully (Blombäck and Ramirez-Pasillas, 2012), and employee behaviour is one of the factors affecting it, whether the employees think about it consciously or not (Aaker, 2004). Both parties, the team as well as the client, affect each other along the process both ways. A firm can influence its brand image through actions it takes upon the factors affecting its corporate brand identity (Margulies, 1977). It is therefore of interest, what these factors are.

From the point of view of both the company and their clients, value can be created only in the case when brand identity is understood, as well as appreciated by the client (Nandan, 2005). This implies that perceived corporate brand image should be possibly close to the corporate brand identity in order for it to create most value. Additionally,
the more consistent the brand identity as well as message it sends is, the easier it will be to understand by the receiver (ibid).

Hatch and Schultz (2002) explore the notion of brand identity process at an organizational level, and present four processes linking identity, culture, and image: mirroring, reflecting, expressing, and impressing. They argue that in order to understand how internal as well as external meanings of corporate brand identity and corporate brand image affect each other, corporate identity has to be looked at from a perspective of both corporate culture and corporate image. They bring together theory on corporate identity as well as corporate image, and create a following model, according to which corporate identity is a relational, social construct:

Figure 2  Corporate brand identity as a relational construct. Model by Hatch and Schultz (2002).

Identity, culture, and image are linked through processes of mirroring (through which brand identity is mirrored by others and brand images they hold), reflecting (how brand identity is related to cultural understanding), expressing (how brand identity is being claimed), and impressing (how the express identity leaves impressions on others). (Hatch and Schultz, 2002)

When communicating a brand’s identity, a gap may exist between the sender, company’s reality, and the receiver, customer perception (Nandan, 2005). In a model, which is a further developed version of the work by Hatch and Schultz (2002) discussed
above, Rindell et al (2015) show that there is indeed a gap between what the company sees as its corporate brand identity, and between the corporate brand image that others have formed about it. On one hand, a corporation expresses its brand identity, and these expressions are interpreted into impression by the receiving counterparty. Thus, receiver views these expressions according to their own perspective. On the other hand, the receiver gives the firm feedback. Such feedback can take various forms. For instance it might be word-of-mouth, recommendation to others, decision of a repeated purchase, or lack of it. Firm receives a reflection of that feedback, which may (or may not) have impact on its operations. The model also includes a time dimension, acknowledging that brand identity as well as brand image are built over time.

**Figure 3** Interplay between identity and image. Model by Rindell et al (2015).

Keeping a consistent brand identity for an extended period of time will strengthen relationship between corporate brand identity and corporate brand image, which also puts emphasize on the dimension of time. Strengthening of that link will enhance long-term interaction between the client and the firm. Here, the focus should be more on the receiver (the client) and not the sender (the firm). Social processes become the core of the focus, and the key idea is to ensure that the meaning assigned to the brand by a
company is the same as the meaning receiver perceives through the brand image they form. The more employees from various departments are engaged in this process, the better the corporate brand image will be facilitated outside of the company. In such interaction, feedback plays a crucial role. Received feedback will tell the firm what sort of a corporate brand image the receiver has formed about them, and hence how well the message of their corporate brand identity has been understood. Efficient responses to feedback help to minimize discrepancies between brand identity and brand image. (Nandan, 2005)

As we can see, Nandan (2005) largely describes the same dynamics as presented by Hatch and Schultz (2002) and Rindell et al (2015). It seems that researchers agree when it comes to the importance of the link between corporate brand identity as well as corporate brand image, and they acknowledge the dynamic nature of this relationship. They also identify largely similar elements that affect it, and recognize importance that time has on this continuous process.

2.4 Dynamics in understanding the emerging perception: critical incidents and critical success factors

Critical incident is an episode that deviates from normality or customer's typical expectations (Gremler, 2004). According to Edvardsson and Strandvik (2000), critical incidents are incident perceived as remarkable by the customers, and they are to be remembered by them. Hence, such incidents are critical, since they may potentially trigger a change in the relationship between the client and the firm. Additionally, critical incidents can be used to explain relationship dissolution, relationship initiation, as well as changes in customer's perceptions about the firm. According to Roos (2002) criticality is defined based on the consequences an incident has, which oftentimes is a switch to another firm.

Critical incidents can be used to study episodes occurring in firm-client relationship (Gremler, 2004). An incident can be qualified as critical if it is mentioned spontaneously during for instance a short interview (Edvardsson and Strandvik, 2000). Critical incidents can be either positive or negative in nature (Gremler, 2004; Edvardsson and Strandvik, 2000). If being negative, they might have an embedded and hidden stress-factor to them due to e.g. unfulfilled expectations, which can pose risk for the existing relationship (Holmlund-Rytkönen and Strandvik, 2005). Negative critical
incidents can weaken even long-term relationships, but sometimes a negative incident can have a positive impact, especially in cases where the existing relationship is of high quality (Van Doorn and Verhoef, 2008).

However, the most important thing is that critical incidents come naturally to people’s minds, and are memorized so well that they can be recalled with ease (Edvardsson and Strandvik, 2000). Thus, if a person A throws a pen at person B’s face, it might be an abnormal and negative incident – however, it will not become critical unless person B still remembers it vividly after a month, or a year. Hence, not all remarkable incidents become critical. Consumers form an image of the brand based on the associations that they remember about it (Nandan, 2005), of which critical incidents are a part.

Edvardsson and Strandvik (2000) highlight importance of examining critical incidents within a certain time and a context. Critical incidents are affected by time dimension, which includes the history, present situation, future of the relationship, changes in the internal, and changes in the external context that surrounds the co-operation between the parties. Certain aspects related to time, such as length of the relationship, frequency of purchase, loyalty, customer satisfaction, trust, or commitment aid in understanding of customer’s perceptions and their behaviour. Impact of the different incidents may also vary depending on the time, or on the customer. Roos (2002) acknowledges that the context surrounding a critical incident influences the level of its criticality, and extends its scope.

Whether a critical incident is positive or negative, it is beneficial for the entire organisation to learn from it (Rickards and Moger, 1999:7-11), for instance through feedback received from the client, and the reflections that employees take back to the company, as seen in the model by Rindell et al (2015). As Edvardsson and Strandvik (2000) point out, there is a rising need to take into account the surrounding context and to put more emphasize on the relationship between the parties when exploring critical incidents, instead of looking only at the critical episodes alone. When relationship is put into focus, entire understanding about the client increases. Mainela and Ulkuniemi (2013) point to examining personal interaction between the firms on a relationship level.

Rockart (1979:85) defined critical success factors as “the limited number of areas in which results, if they are satisfactory, will ensure successful competitive performance
for the organisation. They are the few key areas where ‘things must go right’ for the business to flourish”. In literature, critical success factors are usually connected to performance studies, as well as project management (Mishra et al, 2011; Ram, Corkindale and Wu, 2013). In this study, critical success factors are defined as factors that have a significant impact on the relationship between the firm and their client. Such factors can help to achieve customer satisfaction, and to meet customer expectations. In this study critical success factors are seen as otherwise similar to critical incidents in their nature, nevertheless they are called factors since they describe certain features, aspects, things or qualities, instead of concentrating on occurred episodes. They are however highly connected to them. Critical success factors are an important concept to explore when trying to identify the most important parameters for the success of a project (Mishra et al, 2011). Achieving success in a project is of high importance, especially for the case company, which fully relies on project-based work.

“Changes in business relationships are often the result of a longer and more complex process” (Edvardsson and Strandvik, 2009:326), which suggests that it might well be the sum of actions taken over time that matters. Edvardsson and Strandvik (2009) elaborate that in such a case, critical incidents only work as a part of the equation, instead of constituting for the bigger picture. A single episode might not always be worth exploring. The scope widens to include time dimension and the surrounding context in an even more fundamental way. Recent study by Edvardsson, Kowalkowski, Strandvik and Voima (2014) discusses a possibility of a domino effect, of which critical incidents are also a part, and that can have an impact even beyond the existing client-firm relationship.

2.5 Dream teams, a promotor of effective customer operations and customer satisfaction

Dream teams carry many different names, depending on the angle from which they are examined. As a matter of fact, a term dream team is a relatively demagogical expression, mostly used in popular-press articles (such as The Time, Fortune Magazine, Financial Times, or Harvard Business review), and not scholarly journals. On the other hand, more scientific authors tend to refer to them as high performance teams (Castka et al, 2001), term that clearly emphasizes the underlying phenomena – a team that shows high levels of performance.
Commonly, a purpose of teamwork is defined as performance (Castka et al, 2001). A high performance team is a team of people that shows superior performance in their work and acts systematically, technically, and with purpose, while remaining focused on social and human aspects (Kur, 1996). Fisher and Thomas (1996) describe dream teams as a group of people who work together in order to achieve a common objective, and who are successful at this practice. They elaborate further that teams are very profound, since it is impossible to accomplish anything that is of significance without being helped by other people.

Teams are, according to vast amount of theory, “capable of outstanding performance and are the primary unit of performance for increasing number of organizations. Nevertheless, high performance teams are a rarity” (Castka et al, 2001:123). Fisher and Thomas (1996) agree, stating that even though it is a difficult task to create a dream team, it is still possible. Whitten (2014) points out that a dream team must continuously seek to improve the skills, processes, and procedures that it practices in order to keep up with their outstanding performance.

If I think about a dream team, I think there can never be such a thing. And if such a dream team was to exist at some point, then it would not be a dream team anymore. One should always strive to become better, at all times, and it is not possible to achieve complete perfection. (Employee 1)

And then again, dream teams can even be called personal relationships in business relations when exploring concepts taken from relationship marketing (Lian and Laing, 2007). Overall, dream teams may have many different names, but all of them have a relatively similar core: a high performance team that is able to satisfy customers needs.

Rickards and Moger (1999:7-11) list seven factors according to which a dream team can be defined: strong platform of understanding, shared vision, creative climate, ownership of ideas, resilience on setbacks, network activators, and ability to learn from experience. Strong platform of understanding and shared vision are closely aligned together. Team has a shared responsibility for something, and this responsibility should be converted into a common vision that will drive the team in their work. When enabled, creative climate can fuel successful and innovative change. Ownership of ideas describes that even though the dream team holds the shared vision, individuals within it should be able to take credit for smaller bits of the action. Resilience to setbacks in
itself is relatively self-explanatory. Network activators can also be called networking experts, which refers to the ability of interacting with others, within or outside of the team. Ability to learn makes it possible to improve in the future.

Dreams teams also have a strong sense of personal commitment (Katzenbach and Smith, 1993). But most importantly, the personnel of a company is also its most important audience, instead of customers; because if company’s own employees cannot be trained to believe in the company and what it stands for, then it will be close to impossible to try to achieve any successful client interaction, or make your clients believe in what you do (Olins, 1991). In project-based firms such as the case company, intensive interaction between the teams and the client exists (Skaates, Tikkanen and Lindblom, 2012). It partially results from the fact that all customers have their specific requirements, which need to be explored, in order to be able to execute the project, and most projects tend to be of unique nature (ibid).

Today’s society is increasingly interconnected, which means that even employees hold multiple roles simultaneously. They are connected to their employer not only through their professional activities, but they are even their customers, investors, members of a local community, possibly have an activist role, and through their personal network they take the knowledge that they have about internal processes outside of the office, increasing organizational exposure. (Hatch and Schultz, 2002)

Employees that are part of certain business relationships represent their respective firms in that relationship (Halinen and Törnroos, 1998). If a firm is represented by its corporate brand identity, then it can be claimed that employees and therefore teams express the corporate identity to the outer world. At the same time, they are a channel through which the company obtains feedback and reflections expressed by the client. Hence, teams minimize the gap described by Rindell et al (2015). A following model emerges:
Based on this model, interaction between the dream team and the client becomes important, because it is suddenly responsible not only for carrying out the designated work, but also for a more hidden task of expressing the brand image, and reflecting the feedback that is formed on the basis of perceived brand identity. By developing and using this model, this study provides an opportunity to explore in a real-life setting, how such dynamics work and what is their consequence.

### 2.6 Key terms

This section will briefly summarize the key terms relevant for this study in a table.
Table 1  Key terms used in this study

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TERM</th>
<th>DESCRIPTION</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Corporate brand identity</td>
<td>How the firm wants to identify itself among its publics, and originates from the company's differentiated offering. (Margulies, 1977)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mix of features and values that are chosen by a company to represent it, its products, as well as its corporate culture. (Blombäck and Ramirez-Pasillas, 2012)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Can be viewed through the perspective of a brand concept, which is based on the consumer needs that a brand can satisfy. (Nandan, 2005)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Diverse concept with many multidisciplinary roots, and it is a highly complex project development. (Balmer, 2001)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Corporate brand image</td>
<td>Perception held by different stakeholders and publics about the company, and it encompasses the beliefs that they have about the brand (Nandan, 2005; Margulies, 1977)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Set of views that the outsiders (and not the people within the firm itself) have on the organization and its corporate brand identity. (Hatch and Schultz, 2002)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The instant image that comes to mind when thinking of an organisation. (Balmer, 2001)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Brand image is a notion of a brand constructed by a consumer. Nandan (2005)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Critical incidents</td>
<td>Critical incidents are incident perceived to be remarkable by the customers and are to be remembered by them. (Edvardsson and Strandvik, 2000)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Critical success factors</td>
<td>“The limited number of areas in which results, if they are satisfactory, will ensure successful competitive performance for the organisation. They are the few key areas where ‘things must go right’ for the business to flourish”. (Rockart, 1979:85)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td>On the other hand, more scientific authors tend to refer to them as ‘high performance teams’. (Castka et al, 2001)</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Can even be called ‘personal relationships in business relations’ when exploring concepts taken from relationship marketing (Lian and Laing, 2007)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
2.7 Chapter summary

This chapter presented relevant theoretical framework. First, the notions of corporate brand identity and corporate brand image were explored. Corporate brand identity encompasses different characteristics that company communicates to the outer world. Balmer (2001) has established a test, with which corporate identity can be examined using five different types, which in an ideal situation will all be closely aligned together for a longer period in time. Rickards and Moger (1999:7-11) list seven factors according to which a dream team can be defined.

Corporate brand image is the perception others form about the corporate brand identity. This cannot be fully controlled, as the image formation includes a gap between the expressions send by the company and impressions received by the counterparty, as presented in the model by Rindell et al (2015). In this study, dream teams are seen as a substitute of the gap in the model, and hold a role of a facilitator. Thus, a new model emerges and is presented.

Even though name dream teams is used, in reality that term means high performance teams, or if simplified even further it functions as a synonymous for effective customer operations. Dynamics of understanding the emerging perceptions of corporate brand image are explained with critical incidents and critical success factors, which are incidents that customers perceive to be remarkable enough that they can change the dynamics of entire relationship to the company, or critical success factors.

Customer’s perceptions can directly be linked to the corporate brand image that the client holds. Since in this study teams are the point of contact between the firm and the client, and they are the mediators of expressions as well as messengers that take back the feedback, they play important and active role where critical incidents or factors emerge. It is therefore important to uncover them as well as how the employees handle them, since they can affect corporate brand on both sides. Additionally, relationships exist between the different firm-client representatives. These relationships are formed and evolve during their lifetime, putting emphasize on the effect of time.
3 METHODOLOGY

This chapter will present methodology of the study. It will start with a short discussion about philosophy of science, after which research method will be presented, followed by a more detailed description of research design. Data collection process will also be discussed, followed by the method used for data analysis. Finally, the chapter will end with discussion over ethical aspects and trustworthiness of the study, as well as a short summary to highlight the most important aspects.

3.1 Philosophy of science

The philosophy of science that guided this study was mostly *grounded theory*. It is widely used in social sciences, and it looks for theories emerging from the conducted analysis, which in turn seeks to explain what has been observed. As for today, grounded theory is the most influential paradigm when it comes to social sciences. It has won a widespread acceptance on an international scale. Several reasons affect its highly respected position. First, grounded theory applies concepts that validate its trustworthiness. Second, it is also systematized, prescriptive, and contextually adaptable. Finally, it is considered to be rigorous enough due to data based theory generation and its aim for objectivity. Thus, grounded theory generates the theory not through logical deduction from priori assumptions, but instead the hypotheses and concepts it generates come from gathered data, and are systematically adapted throughout the course of the research. Thus, the findings generated by grounded theory will also be highly dependable on methods being used. (Patton, 2015:109-111)

This study seeks to understand a phenomenon, dream teams, as well as its meaning and nature; the lived experience that is generated. This approached is guided by *phenomenology*, which also concentrates on explaining the essence of lived experience for a person, or a group of people. Phenomenology typically uses in-depth interviews in order to uncover how respondents make sense of an experience. This is highly suitable for this study, since teams require engagement of more than one person, thus putting a shared experience in the spotlight. (Patton, 2015:115-118)

However, this case study wishes to also present what can be learned from the observed real-life setting. Frameworks that guide such theoretical thinking are *pragmatism* and
*generic qualitative inquiry.* At their core, they argue that something can be true only if it works. They aim for gaining an understanding of concrete, real-world issues, while seeking practical and useful insights. Pragmatists emphasize nature of experience, which is highly relevant in this study, as it puts under scrutiny the experience generated by dream teams. (Patton, 2015:152-156)

### 3.2 Research approach

Research approach defines how the research is designed in order to link the chosen method to the aim of the study (Saunders et al, 2009:124-128). In line with grounded theory, theory emerging from this study was build from collected data (Patton, 2015:109-111) using an inductive approach (Saunders et al, 2009:124-126). An inductive approach has no assumed theoretical position prior to data collection process, and it can also be called exploratory (ibid). The process of data collection was started with limited pre-understanding about the company being studied, which also supported the choice of an exploratory approach (Gummesson, 2000), since exploratory study is highly useful in gaining an understanding of a problem or case (Saunders et al, 2009:139-140).

This study aimed to uncover why dream teams within the company perform well in their work, as well as what can be identified as a reason to such high levels of team performance. At the same time, connection between the company’s corporate brand identity and the corporate brand image that a client holds is explored. A theory about critical incidents and factors is used as a part of theoretical framework.

### 3.3 Research design

There are different possibilities for designing a research. One of them is a case study, where a phenomenon is being empirically investigated within its real-life context (Saunders et al, 2009:145-147), and often aims to understand the dynamics that are present within a single setting, even though it may involve one or several cases (Eisenhardt, 1989). According to Yin (2003), there are four ways of carrying out a case study: single case, multiple case, holistic case, and embedded case. Case studies can be used for providing a description for a phenomenon, to test a theory, or to generate it (Eisenhardt, 1989). When striving to generate theory from a case study, data is selected
based on specified population, instead of being derived from theory or hypothesis, exactly like in this study (ibid).

Case studies can be viewed as having a complementary role in contribution to existing research, instead of producing new generalizations (Aastrup and Halldorsson, 2008; Saunders et al, 2009:145-147). In fact, case studies have been criticised for their ability to produce generalizations, since they are based on limited observations (Gummesson, 2000), or if able to provide a high quality generalization, it might turn out to be applicable only in very specific cases instead of an entire population (Eisenhardt, 1989). However, a well-constructed case study can challenge existing theory as well as generate new, future research questions, thus having a valuable impact (Saunders et al, 2009:145-147). Additionally, most qualitative researchers will be concerned with the sample representativeness, and not its size (Silverman, 2006:109-121).

This study is a case study, based on a single case. However, it includes several embedded cases, as it examines two sub-units within the organisation. These are the two different business units: division 1 and division 2. The study looks at dream teams within the company as well as their role as a facilitator of case company’s brand, and provides addition to the existing theory through filling the gap in the link between corporate brand identity and corporate brand image. Being purely qualitative and exploratory, this research is based on seven in-depth interviews.

### 3.4 Collection of data

Data necessary for this study was collected through interviewing. According to Silverman (2006:109-121), there are four different types of interviews: structured interview, semi-structured interview, open-ended interviews, as well as focus groups. Of these four, unstructured and open-ended interviews are most commonly used when conducting qualitative research, and such approach was also used in this study.

The interviews were conducted individually, and the questions presented were open-ended. The interviewer had a set of topics that were intended to be discussed during the interview. However, no structured of even semi-structured interview guide was made. Such choice of interview technique was made due to exploratory nature of the study. The intent was to let the respondent talk as freely as possible, in order to extract a
possibly high amount of information as well as to understand the respondent and the corporate culture they came from. The interviewer actively listened to the respondents during the interviews, and having in mind a broader aim of the research questions, ensured that the follow-up questions were of relevance. (Silverman, 2006:109-148)

The informal nature of the interviews was intended to establish trust with the interviewer. Since topics discussed were highly related to the professional life of the respondents, it was important to make them feel comfortable. Interviewer also aimed to stay as neutral as possible. Questions were generated spontaneously during the interview, and depending on the content probes were presented in order to deepen the answer, and give respondent cues about desired level of response. The information obtained varies slightly between the interviews due to their informal and spontaneous nature, although some patterns can be detected. (Patton, 2015:421-517)

3.4.1 Sampling

One way of data sampling, as described by Patton (2015:298-299), is through snowball method. In such case, one key informant has to be found, after which this informant makes a referral of another, suitable respondent. In this study, the respondents coming from the case company were first chosen and referred by the company’s human resources department. Six names were provided, of which five agreed to the interview. Additionally, two respondents from two different client organisations were referred to by their connections at the case company, and were at first contacted by case company’s employees that referred them. Both respondents came from companies that are long-term clients, and both agreed to be interviewed.

At the same time, the sample in this study is highly homogenous, as it only describes a certain subgroup of professionals. Additionally, all respondents were male. Due to limited resources and small amount of conducted interviews, all respondents represented a critical case, since they were all of special importance for the research topic. This also explains usage of snowball sampling, since it was of importance to choose the individuals with highest relevance. Thus, due to author’s limited pre-understanding about the company’s operations, human resources department was consulted. (Patton, 2015:283-284)
3.4.2 The interview process

Five employees from the company were interview, and two representatives of their clients. Respondents from the case company held various positions within the organisation. None of the people represented the lowest pile of hierarchy. They were therefore mostly in mid-management positions and they were all engaged in direct contact with the client, which made them important and suitable for this study.

The interviews were mostly carried out during in-person meetings with the respondents. For case company's employees, almost all meetings took place at the company's headquarters, with the exception of one interview that was conducted on one of its project sites. Client 1 was interviewed at his office premises. Due to force majeure, Client 2 was interview by phone, even though a meeting was originally scheduled. Respondents chose the place of the interview themselves. All respondents were interviewed in Finnish language, since it was their mother tongue. As correct environment is important for the quality and development of the research (Gummesson, 2000), the aim was to create a possibly naturalistic context for the respondents, since such setting is likely to trigger an automatic or unconscious behaviour, beneficial for an exploratory study like this (Hudson and Ozanne, 1988).

Interviews lasted between 37 minutes and 1 hour 28 minutes, and they were all conducted between June and September 2015. Hence later in this paper, no separate reference will be made to the interviews or the time when they were conducted, only the respondents will be specified. A maximum of two respondents were interviewed during one day, leaving researcher time to analyse and reflect on the gathered material before proceeding further with data collection.

Six of the interviews were recorded and later transcribed in order to prepare the material for analysis like Saunders et al (2009:485-488) suggest. During some of the interviews, additional notes were made while the interview was on-going. The one interview that has not been recorded is the interview conducted over the phone, during which extensive and detailed notes were made. All direct quotes presented in this study will be translations made from Finnish to English by the author, who is fluent in both languages. Hence, no separate claims about own translations will be made later on in this study. Only quotes were translated, not entire interviews.
3.5 Analysis of data

When conducting qualitative research, it is of interest to understand as well as interpret the meanings and experiences of the respondents that have been interviewed (Spiggle, 1994). According to Saunders et al (2009:489-490), qualitative data can be analysed in a deductive or an inductive way, where deductive approach uses certain data categories
and codes to assist with analysis, while inductive approach uses no such categories or codes as guidance. In a deductive approach, collected information is assigned to previously determined categories. This makes it possible to find data relevant for the aim of the study, as well as discover possible emerging patterns or relationships in the material. An inductive approach is mostly used for data collected through in-depth interviews, and concentrated on narratives and stories provided by the interviewees. They are accounts of experiences, and their meaning is likely to be promoted when analysing the data in its original form and aiming to create a coherent story from them, instead of dividing its pieces into categories. This study uses a combination of both deductive and inductive approach to analysing gathered data.

Being an exploratory case-study and using only in-depth interviews as data input, it is critical for this study to understand certain company specific phenomena like corporate culture, brand image or industry characteristics. This sort of data will be analysed inductively, since the objective is to ensure that this data is treated with regard to the social and organisational context of the interviewees (Saunders et al, 2009:480-525). However, some deductive analysis takes place. Categories are derived through obtained data, and they mostly aim to uncover similarities within it (ibid). This approach is used for uncovering features that separate the company from its competitors, to identify critical incidents in client relationships and factors that drive successful team performance, and to examine communicated corporate brand identity along with perceived corporate brand image.

In a deductive approach, after being categorized, the data was abstracted in order to build conceptual constructs that share a common feature, which can be achieved though comparison and looking for similarities in the gathered material. After such processing, the categories were further dimensionalised, and their attributes as well as characteristics were further explored. (Spiggle, 1994)

Following such further exploration, gathered data was summarized and structured, in order for key summarized observations to emerge (Saunders et al, 2009:480-525). In the end, the obtained data was integrated with the relevant theory (Spiggle, 1994), enabling conclusions and final analysis (Saunders et al, 2009:480-525).
3.6 Ethical aspects

During any research process, ethical pitfalls can take place. In qualitative inquiry, these pitfalls can include exploitation, deception, issues considering personal identity (for instance, if a respondent’s identity was to be revealed when such action is not desired, or if it was hidden when a respondent desired for their name to be made public), fraternizing with disliked groups, and participation in dubious bargains. (Silverman, 2006:315-335; Saunders et al, 2009:185-200)

In order to avoid such ethical issues, both companies as well as respondents who participated in this study are anonymous. In order to maintain anonymity and neutrality, certain descriptions or terms used in this study deviate from their real-life counterparts. This includes for instance professional employee titles, among others. Additionally, the respondents from both client companies stretched that their

| **Category 1** | Characteristics that separate the company from its competitors (respondents from the company) |
| **Category 2** | Characteristics that separate the company from its competitors (respondents from the clients) |
| **Category 3** | Critical incidents that affect client-firm relationships. |
| **Category 4** | Critical success factors that affect client-firm relationships. |
| **Category 5** | What is the communicated corporate brand identity? |
| **Category 6** | What is the viewed corporate brand image? |
responses are solely their personal opinions, and not the official statements on the behalf of the company.

Even though all interviews were recorded, transcribed, or notes were made, the gathered material will only be used in this particular study and is fully confidential. The obtained material will not be distributed to third parties. Before publishing, this study was proofread and approved by the case company.

3.7 Trustworthiness of the study

For every researcher, there is a need for establishing trustworthiness in the academic work being conducted (Spiggle, 1994), as well as ensuring that the research is of high quality (Saunders et al, 2009:480-525). There are various measures of assessing trustworthiness. For instance, it should be evaluated whether the methods used are appropriate for the chosen research question, ad whether there is a connection between existing research as well as chosen theory (Silverman, 2006:33-59). Additionally, every philosophy of research has its own criteria for establishment of trustworthiness (Wallendorf and Belk, 1989).

Wallendorf and Belk (1989) describe several measures according to which trustworthiness of a study can be evaluated, and these points will be used in an assessment of this research. Credibility is concerned with how the data was collected, how emerging interpretations were formed, as well as how the final results have been presented to the reader. Dependability examines, whether the same results would be obtained if a research were to be replicated with the same subjects and in the exactly same context.

As for this study, it is highly likely that the respondents would give similar answers, if they were asked the same questions, in the same setting, unless a major change occurs at the case company, or in their relationships with interviewed clients. However, since data was collected through informal in-depth interviews with no pre-set interview guide, the results obtained can slightly vary depending on the interviewer, their approach as well as personal skills (Patton, 2015).
Critical incidents are supposed to be the top-of-mind memories at the customer’s side (Edvardsson and Strandvik, 2000), and therefore the nature of this study suited their exploration well, since the information was extracted through informal interviews and with no pre-set assumptions or pre-defined set of questions, in a possibly naturalistic setting, in interviewees mother tongue. Hence, the interviewer was able to truly explore what came to respondents mind at first thought, thus enhancing credibility of the collected data and this study. Respondents were encouraged to talk freely and for as long as they pleased, increasing their comfort and likelihood to share.

For the purpose on this study, only one representative from each client firm was interviewed. Different information might have been obtained, if another employee was interviewed, but if interviewing the same person twice, it is likely that their answers would be consistent on both occasions. Interviewing only one person from each client firm was a consciously made delimitation that had a purpose of this study in scope, as chosen respondents had a close business relationship with the case company. They also represented very typical client cases.

Transferability determines, whether the finding of the study can be applied into another context (Wallendorf and Belk, 1989). Even though the sample used in this study is small and the results are not generalizable, it is neither the main point of this study. Its main aim is to provide valid insights into already existing theory and test it in practice, using the chosen case company. Besides, it is seldom the point of a work of this scope to generate any new theory. Generalizability is concerned with the same phenomena; whether findings of a study will be applicable in other research settings (Saunders et al, 2009). In this study, only one company is in focus. Therefore, conducting a similar study with the same research question within another organisation might yield different results.

Confirmability examines to which extent the finding in a study are determined by the respondents being interviewed, and to which extent are they affected by the researcher (including their biases, motivations, interests, and perspectives) (Wallendorf and Belk, 1989). This study uses one main source of data, the interviews. However, even the written corporate materials coming from the participating companies are examined, thus permitting certain level of data triangulation. This mostly concerns case company’s corporate brand identity. Before publishing, this paper was examined by the
case company due to confidentiality agreement, which can be seen as a confirmability audit that validates adequacy of the presented data.

*Integrity* looks at possible conflicts between the respondent and the researcher, since such issues might result in misinformation, lies, or even evasion (Wallendorf and Belk, 1989). No such problems emerged during this study, since trust was established between the parties, and researcher was highly engaged in the interview process. All gathered interview material is confidential and anonymous in order to protect both the companies engaged in this study, as well as the respondents that were interviewed.

### 3.8 Chapter summary

This study has its philosophical roots in grounded theory, phenomenology, pragmatism, and generic qualitative inquiry. It is inductive and exploratory, generating theory from gathered data. Spontaneous in-depth interviews with no use of interview guide were conducted; they were recorded at first, after which they were transcribed. One interview that was conducted over the phone was not recorded, and instead extensive notes were made.

The sample consisted of seven respondents, including five case company employees and two representatives of their clients. Four respondents worked with division 1, and three with division 2. Categorization is used to aid with data analysis. Ethical aspects and trustworthiness of this study have also been assessed, in compliance with practices of grounded theory. Even though certain issues emerge, most of them are caused by the delimitations consciously made by the researcher, and were thus made intentionally with purpose of this study in mind. Objectivity is a goal throughout the entire study. However, the sample size is small and might not be representative of the entire population.
4 RESULTS

In this section, results of the study will be revealed. At first, a more detailed description of case company’s as well as its client’s operational matrix will be presented, in order for the reader to gain understanding over the framework relevant for the obtained data. Afterwards findings linked to dream teams, corporate brand, critical incidents and critical success factors are presented. The obtained results will be connected to the theoretical framework discussed earlier in this paper.

4.1 Work hierarchy at the case company

In order for the reader to better understand the collected and discussed data, a clarification on case company’s employment hierarchy will be presented.

Among the interviewed respondents the highest position held was a District Manager. This person is responsible for a certain geographical region, and all operations within it. Next in the hierarchy is Project Manager, who is responsible for usually two to five different project sites, depending on current situation as well as the size of the sites. Both District Manager and Project Manager are also heavily responsible for new client acquisition. Project Manager is even responsible for contact with case company’s subcontractors. For every project site, a Project Manager has one Site Manager, who is responsible for only that particular site. They follow its day-to-day operations.

Every Site Manager has a certain amount of Supervisors, who in turn are responsible for carrying out different phases of the project. Usually, one Supervisor is responsible for on work phase, after which another steps in. Supervisors function as overseers to Blue Collar Workers.

For higher levels of hierarchy, it is rare for employees to change positions or companies (District Manager or Project Manager level). Every Project Manager has a certain amount of Site Managers that he usually works with, approximately five; however, they change depending on how many project sites a Project Manager currently has. It is the Project Managers responsibility to provide work for Site Managers, and thus if they do not have enough projects to employ all of them, Site Managers might temporarily work
for another Project Manager – or they might even stay with them on a more permanent basis.

Site Managers are also likely to remain in their positions, unless they wish to be promoted and become a Project Manager. However, not everyone wants to move up in the hierarchy, and case company has many employees who have remained as Site Manager or a Supervisor for a long time. These employees are of special value to the company:

*There are always those guys who are excellent at their job - those star employees - but they don’t want to be promoted. They are happy with where they are. These guys are the important part when it comes to the topic of dream teams, and the entire company. Why? Because they constantly school and groom new people that come into the organisation along the way, and since they are the stars, they have exquisite knowledge.* (Employee 4)

Moving downwards in the hierarchy, employee turnover increases. Every Site Manager, who is in charge of running daily operations on one project site, has a number of Supervisors he is responsible for. These people might change more frequently, either due to the fact that they are promoted, or they simply work for another project site at the moment. The biggest fluctuation occurs at the lowest level, among Blue Collar Workers, where shifts in workforce are frequent.

It is noteworthy that dream teams who work with division 1 work only with that business line within the company. Likewise, dream teams working with division 2 projects will not work with any projects that consider division 1. Thus, there is no employee rotation between these two departments.

A dream team at the case company would usually consist at least of a District Manager, Project Manager and a Site Manager. Additionally, Supervisors may be incorporated as a part of a dream team, however their role was mostly mentioned by Site Managers, to whom they are under direct supervision. There are also other in-house employees engaged in the projects that hold important roles, however for the purpose of simplification they will not be taken into account in this study.
Figure 5  Organization chart: work hierarchy at the case company.

4.2 Description of client company 1

The first client company is a large grocery chain. Since the company constantly seeks to grow its operations, they have continuous need for a provider of project development services, and they have an in-house department that handles such matters and possess specific industry expertise. They engage in wide range of projects of different size and nature.

4.3 Description of client company 2

The second client company is a part of the organisation of one of the biggest municipalities in Finland. They follow the targets set by the municipality, however, such aspects as production at reasonable prices, customer-oriented approach and sustainability can be found among their values. Since the company is a public procurement unit, all projects as well as contracts go through a tendering process.

According to Client 2, the company gives a lot of attention to the long lifetime of their projects. All of their projects are different from each other, since they are mostly located in different locations that pose very different demands. Often, their projects are
also placed among existing infrastructure. Hence, the projects are of a challenging nature. There is also scarce possibility of standardisation, due to high diversification of emerging needs. Therefore, the company requires not only superior quality from their partners, but also high levels of professionalism.

### 4.4 Operational matrix

In this part, work and relationship dynamics between the case company as well as their clients will be described.

#### 4.4.1 The case company

Certain differences exist between division 1 and division 2. In projects related to division 1, it is always an external client who places the order that needs to be executed. On the other hand, orders carried out by division 2 can be executed for either the case company itself (functioning as a client), or an external customer like in division 1.

According to Employee 2, the case company acquires new business mainly through two paths: tender offerings, or direct negotiations with the client. During a tender offering, several companies leave in their offers with the final, total price for the project. Oftentimes in such cases, it is the cheapest bidder that will win the project, however companies might also set other criteria that will be evaluated and will affect the final decision. On the contrary, when a contract is negotiated directly with the client, no tender process takes places. Clients who engage in direct negotiations usually have previous satisfactory experience with the company, or they are a business contact of a company’s employee, since such negotiations require greater amount of trust between the engaging parties.

Clients are in contact with several employees at the case company, and they can also vary depending on the division as well as nature of the project. Nevertheless, the aim is that the same dream team that started the project will work with it from the beginning until the end, even though other employees outside of the dream team (such as Blue Collar Workers) might come and go during the project.
4.4.2 Case company’s clients

At company’s clients, work hierarchy is simpler. The company names one person to be the main contact for a specific project, and they operate under the name of a Project Manager. However, most organizations do not possess the specific expertise that is needed for supervision of the project, since they need such services only on an occasional basis. Thus, a Project Manager can be a Marketing Manager or even a CFO, depending on the organization. Due to lack of professional expertise, such companies hire external consultants to help then carry out the project, supervise the employed partner and their progress of work, as well as help with contractual matters. Even though the company names a responsible Project Manager, it is the external consultant who works as a true contact person due to their professional expertise, and they take the information further to the client.

[...] At the client’s side, they often don’t have that expertise. Oftentimes, they place one order, and then they place another one after 20 years. And after 20 years, nobody who was engaged in the first project is probably working there anymore. (Employee 2)

If the client possesses in-house talent with relevant expertise, then a person with such knowledge would become a Project Manager. External consultants will be used even here, however, their role is mostly supportive and concentrates on performing work check-ups, instead of having a leading role. There is no need to facilitate the professional dialogue as in the previous case. All contact will be carried directly between the Project Manager and representative from the case company.

4.5 Critical incidents and critical success factors

There were several things that emerged during the interviews, and that can be viewed as critical for the case company and their clients. These were trust, honest communication and openness, documentation, time scheduling, problem solving, quality, price, personality, and warranty period. They were numerousely mentioned during interviews, and they were constantly reoccurring over time when discussing dream team behaviour, and their performance. They were all named spontaneously during interviews. Hence, they can be categorized as being critical.
In this study, critical incidents are related to the performance of the dream teams. However, few specific incidents were mentioned, and respondents mostly uncovered critical success factors that were desired or required always, no matter the nature of the project or team they worked with. They also seem to have a heavier weight on the course that the relationship between the client and the case firm took over time. Following sections will present the different factors.

4.5.1 Trust

Trust was repeatedly named by all of the respondents as an important aspect of firm-client relationship. It is also a wider concept that embeds several other critical success factors such as: honesty and openness, documentation, time management, and price and quality.

Trust aids in understanding of customer perceptions and therefore their behaviour (Edvardsson and Strandvik, 2000), and it determines the quality of the client-firm relationship (Child, 2001). It can be argued that if trust is established between the parties, case company would have better possibility to understand their clients’ perceptions and behaviour, making it possible to better understand the corporate brand image that they have formed as well as why they have formed it this way. Hence, this would aid dream teams in minimizing the gap between brand identity and brand image.

Previous interactions with customers have strong effect on the overall brand (Rindell et al, 2015) as well as singular customer relationships (Edvardsson and Strandvik, 2000), which is true for the case company. Respondents were consistent throughout the interviews that a crucial aspect of a successful and long-term co-operation was trust between the two firms engaging in a contract. According to Client 1, such trust is build throughout successful past co-operation and satisfactory past behaviour, and if no trust is achieved, there will simply be no future co-operation. This highlights the importance of time, also presented by Rindell et al (2015). As Client 1 points out, it happens in a straightforward way, as in Finland the tendency is to vote with your legs. You do not express verbally the fact that you will not be returning with another order, but simply go to the competitor the next time. Hence, the feedback is rather silent, but nevertheless obvious.
What can I say, we Finns will just vote with our legs, and simply never order from the same company anymore if we have a bad experience. It takes a long time before the trust can be built between the companies again. (Client 1)

Even though such feedback is silent and fully based on the client’s behaviour, it is also taken back to the case company by the dream teams. They are the ones who are (or are not) in contact with the client, and thus they will be the first ones to notice a change in the relationship.

Size and financial stability of a firm are also important in creation of trust, since large and successful firms are assumed to stick around, and thus to provide necessary care after a purchase has been made (Aaker, 2015). The case company can be described as such, since it has a well-established and measurable market share. It is also significant in size, thus minimizing worries about possible bankruptcy or market exit.

Everyone is familiar with the case company, it is an easy choice in that sense. No need to justify to anyone, why do we want such a company involved. Even in the management team, they know that when someone says case company’s name, it has a good reputation. (Client 1)

Based on response from Client 1, case company can be considered to have good reputation in the market.

4.5.2 Honesty and openness are keys to issue management and problem solving

Outcome of case company’s projects can seldom be planned with certainty. Usually there will always be some unexpected turns, and hence it is important to pay attention to how they are being handled.

The most important things are reporting, open communication, and if any problems occur, they need to be taken up for discussion immediately, instead of being patched up in secrecy. To include the customer in the dialogue, planning... It is very important that we know how things are going on, what is going on, and what is going to happen. (Client 1)

As Whitten (2014) writes, it is important to be honest about possible obstacles to a project progress and if any mistakes occur, a company should admit to it and take responsibility of it.
I guess trust emerges from openness. And from the fact that you really don't try to cover up anything. Especially the problems and the bad things. (Employee 1)

Necessity of service recovery mentioned by Edvardsson and Strandvik (2000), where importance of handling emerging issues is in focus, seems to be critical for case company's brand. During the interviews it was repeatedly mentioned that one of the core aspects positively affecting the customer relationship for case company was an instant, direct, and open communication when issues emerged during the project.

Especially case company's clients view this as a critical point in the relationship. They also mentioned that such quality was not only sought after by them, but also relatively rare to come across among the companies they worked with. Hence in this case, case company has proved to be an outstanding partner and has achieved a positive differentiation point when compared to its competitors or other (for instance, smaller in size) market actors.

Obviously there are also other companies in the market that have large turnovers, but with them I sometimes wonder, are they being truly honest and whether we will really receive the things that we paid for. I'm not always so sure about them, you don't know 100% whether the price includes everything, or will they send you additional bills. But until now, we have not had such issues with the case company. (Client 1)

Hence, honesty as well as openness turned out to be positive diversifying points for the case company. For Client 1, a crucial point for any sort of co-operation was good communication, handling of emerging problems, as well as changes in the project. For him, problem-solving skills were a critical factor that could either ensure a future co-operation, or make them never use services of a certain company again.

4.5.3 Documentation

Another aspect that was viewed as being at the core of a trustworthy relationship was thorough documentation. Documentation includes for instance clarifications over placed orders, time sheets for executed work hours, reports over the progress of work, and so on. This was of special focus whenever any changes were made to the original plans, or there was need for actions that were outside of the original contract or agreement. Oftentimes, changes also mean deviations in previously agreed costs. From
the client perspective, it helps to build trust towards a company if they are able to document such changes, as well as motivate them in a reasonable way.

*Documentation is the most important thing. That the team that is in charge knows what is going on. And that everything can be found on paper, that there is an order confirmation for everything, and so on. So if an issue emerges we can always get to the bottom of it, since we have everything documented black on white. And then of course that you do things according to what has been agreed, and always consult us before making any changes or adjustments. (Client 1)*

Preferably, all changes should be consulted and confirmed with the client before they are executed. However this does not always happen in practice, and can create stress between the firm and their client. It can even result in a critical incident:

*Often an end-user, for instance a chef, might visit the project site and request certain changes from the Site Manager, for instance wish for a different dishwasher. As a result, Site Manager orders the new dishwasher, without confirming it first. Such incidents should be minimized, since the client sometimes refuses to cover such costs that were not brought up for discussion first. This happens awfully often, and then we argue who is responsible to pay for this, since the Site Manager did not really have the authority to order that new expensive dishwasher. Every single change in price should first be consulted with the client. (Employee 2)*

It is interesting that despite the awareness that all changes should first be consulted with the client, that was not always the case.

Another kind of important documentation mentioned by Employee 2 was connected to work that had already been carried out. Before moving to another stage of the project, all work that has already been done must be documented in detail, for example with notes or photographs. This was used as a way of controlling work progress, quality of work, and whether the project was made in accordance to the original agreement. Client 1 was fond of implementing digital solutions, such as project banks. When the progress on the project site is being controlled, a photograph taken with a smart phone tells more than a thousand words as well as saves everyone’s working hours, he explained.

*It would be wonderful, if the documentation was the same on every project site, and it was unambiguous. So more standardization over there. Pictures are great. Digital solutions are up to date, along with usage of project banks. So everything is in order there, and is always accessible. That is the future. Mobile solutions will most likely be*
developed even in our industry. It is also an idea, to invest into digital solutions, instead of writing things on a piece of paper. A photo can do many things at once, and is much more than thousand words. (Client 1)

Technology simplifies teamwork and helps to make it more efficient (Weinstein, 2014). Additionally, e-solutions engage clients, suppliers and subcontractors into organizational processes, which in turn encourages them to think and behave like if they were members of the organization (for instance through alignment of personal values), and gives them a more intimate access to the firm and its corporate brand identity (Hatch and Schultz, 2002). Such access will likely minimize gap between brand identity and brand image.

4.5.4 Time Management

According to Employee 3, proper scheduling and time management are critical in order to achieve success throughout the project. Both skilful scheduling as well as time management ensure good financial results alongside good quality, hence keeping even the most demanding customers happy:

Number one thing is management of work schedules and timetables. It is such a big construct, but the whole package in build on its basis. And if it works, it automatically produces results, good results, and good quality. It starts with overall project site schedule. Then there is usually supply schedule, and on top of those two, usually a planning schedule is required. It gives guidelines, according to which different stages of the project are carried out, and that they are done according to the plans. Then there are timetables for each work stage, timetables for each sub-contractor, weekly schedules, and there of all that, a bigger picture emerges. That bigger picture and all of its parts need to be closely monitored and kept together. When they are all aligned, and things are rolling smoothly according to all those schedules and timetables, execution of the project is also smooth. Once again, the process is efficient, and produces good results and well as quality. (Employee 3)

Several other respondents mentioned time management as well. It seems that time management is truly a critical success factor for entire client-firm co-operation. Client 2 elaborated that he has co-operated with multiple teams from the case company, of which he especially enjoys working with those who show excellent planning and time management skills. To him they constituted dream teams, and presence of these qualities was valuable. To a noteworthy extent, it was even responsible for the success of the entire project, just as Employee 3 argues. In an environment where timetables
are managed well and projects go on smoothly, Client 2 said he can trust their partner and the co-operation is both seamless and easy, without unnecessary complications or surprises along the way. That made his work easier, and at the same time required him to spend less working hours on the project, leaving room for other important assignments. Client 1 praised the case company for their time management:

\[
\text{At least with me, case company has followed timetables during projects spot on. Things are ready according to when we have agreed they should be ready. We haven not had to fight over that. (Client 1)}
\]

Even though time management is a critical factor, case company and dream teams are good at executing it.

### 4.5.5 Price and quality

Price was often named as a deciding factor when choosing a business partner. Nevertheless, since the industry seems to be very price sensitive, there also seems to be little difference in price among different market players. Fair pricing had a positive impact on trust in the relationship. It seems to be an obvious factor in decision-making.

\[
\text{In the end, money has probably pretty important role. (Employee 5)}
\]

\[
\text{During tender offerings it is mostly the price that decides who gets the project. But if we engage in negotiations instead, it becomes more important what experiences the client has from previous, similar projects, with us or other market actors. Therefore it is really important, what sort of an experience the client's personnel have of us in all sorts of projects. (Employee 3)}
\]

\[
\text{Usually, despite what we actually say, it is the money that is the deciding factor for the client. And I am not saying, that we are always the cheapest one. (Employee 1)}
\]

Responsible behaviour among dream teams can also lead to better financial results, both for the case company as well as their clients. This was mostly connected to how emerging issues were managed on the project site:

\[
\text{When working on one stage of the project, it is maybe not planned that well beforehand. It is done, so that it could be done and over with, whatever the monetary cost. There is also time pressure. But I hope that we could look a little further, see a little earlier what was coming up in the future. And think through euros spent - if a certain stage is done this way, it will cost this much. But if it is done that way, it will}
\]
cost a different amount of money. We’re not very smooth at that yet, and hence we end up in situations, where we have to do something quickly, under pressure. (Employee 1)

Thus, bigger emphasize should be put on making cost-savvy decisions when looking for solutions to emerging problems.

Client 1 mentioned that they were satisfied with both the quality and the price level that case company offered. He also mentioned that none of those aspects different radically from other market players, even though they thought of case company’s quality as outstanding. Client 2 expressed similar thoughts, highlighting alike Client 1 that even though case company delivers outstanding quality at fair market prices the competition in the industry is tough, and therefore there is no big deviations between quality nor price when looking at case company’s closest competitors.

We always look at the total cost of the project, not only the one-off price that the company offers us. I mean there are always additional costs along the way. With the case company, we have always managed to come into a mutual agreement according extra costs, so we haven’t had to go to court with them yet [laughing]. So I mean, we do not have the need to take the cheapest offer. But of course it is the price that decides, especially if there are big differences between the different companies. But the case company has done well here, too. (Client 1)

Execution of good quality was also important in decision-making, and this was also a positive differentiating point for the company. Even though high level of quality has a positive impact on trust in the client-firm relationship, quality will be discussed more in depth later in this chapter, in section 4.6.1. Literature highlights importance of both price and quality when it comes to achieving success during a project, however, it also recognizes that these criteria are not the only ones that must be taken into account (Mishra et al, 2011). The many critical success factors listed in this chapter support that view.

4.5.6 Personality

Since case company’s business is heavily dependable on their human capital, it did not come as a surprise that personality was mentioned as a critical factor for successful dream team performance.

Overall, I would say that it is about the people. Somebody knows somebody somewhere, and that is how it all starts. (Employee 2)
It often culminates at the teams that are responsible for the project. And that is the reason for the continuous co-operation with many clients. (Employee 1)

I have noticed that especially when engaging in negotiations and not a tender offering, the client likes to choose a certain organisation. They want certain people that they already know. Sometimes even in tender offerings, only half the points might come from the price, and half from the 'quality', which usually in this particular case describes the people engaged in the project. So this shows that you can also make it with good employee and team references, especially if the client has a positive experience from them too. (Employee 1)

Client 1 mentioned such things as ability to adjust and be flexible, and ability to negotiate. He was pleased with the case company on both of these, and mentioned that case company has been a pleasant partner to have, since they have always managed to come to an agreement:

We have always managed to come to an agreement with the case company. And to agree upon such a solution, that we have not needed third parties to help us resolve our issues. There is flexibility on both our and the case company’s side. It is also one criterion when we choose who we do business with. (Client 1)

Good communication and negotiation skills, along with adjustability, are also characteristics that certain teams may or may not possess. Employee 4 described that flexibility, when it comes to for instance making changes into the project, varies between teams. This can create a very different experience for the client:

Flexibility varies a lot. Like, my team, we are really flexible. But then again, if we went truly by the book, I guess we did not really have to be flexible at all. (Employee 4)

It seems that here, dream teams are slightly deviating from the rules set by the case company. Judging by report from Employee 4, the company requires for the teams to act by the pre set rules, and certain forms of flexibility towards a customer can be a deviation from that. Nevertheless, this adjustability was appreciated among the clients and partially accounted for successful performance among dream teams.

4.5.7 Warranty period and maintenance

In the industry within which case company operates, clients are always given a certain warranty on the finalized projects. This warranty period, which can also be seen as a
form of service recovery or a post-purchase customer care, was of different importance depending on the department. For division 1 the warranty period was essential to the end-user. Even though the end user might have been different than the client depending on the project, they were the key, since they would be the final users.

In case the end-users were not satisfied, both the client who ordered the project as well as the case company would be affected negatively. Maintenance emerging from such projects account for a significant cost. To keep the end-user happy, department responsible for warranty often agrees to take care of even such things that are not included in the warranty itself. This is done also in order to preserve the positive word of mouth about the case company. As Employee 4 mentioned, bad news spread quicker than the good ones and for every inferior project, one needs to do ten superior ones.

Today, everyone has a possibility to gather information about a company with ease through Internet or other digital sources, without ever actually interacting with the company (Nandan, 2005). This increases importance of positive feedback. Brand image of a company can be formed even without previous contact with the firm, and based solely on the word of mouth (First and Tomic, 2011).

*If we create this kind of reputation that we sell one thing, but then go and do another, slowly but surely the word of mouth will spread. And the bad news spread hundred times faster than the good ones!* (Employee 4)

On the other hand, warranty period and its importance was not that essential to clients doing business with division 2, even though it was still necessary to have. Projects carried out by division 2 also experience different amount of stress due to different means of usage, when compared to projects from division 1. Costs emerging from warranty period were significantly smaller, and could be even three to four times lower for division 2 than division 1:

*We are not even close to the expenditures that division 1 has when it comes to warranty period. And I am sure, that it is not because of the fact that we make better quality. Division 1 simply has more demanding clients than we do. Also, division 1 often receives complaints even about the things that are not necessarily included in the warranty. But I think that they still go and fix even those issues, so the money also goes there. The warranty costs for division 1 are probably three or four times higher when compared to us, it’s a substantial difference.* (Employee 2)
Thus, teams working with division 1 might have to pay attention to different aspects than teams working with division 2, since warranty period is clearly of different significance among the two business lines. However, it still has an important role. The case company has a special department, which only deals with warranty repairs.

4.6 Corporate brand identity and corporate brand image

Dream teams work as a facilitator between the corporate brand identity and the corporate brand image that is going to be formed. They send certain signals that are of particular interest, since these signals reveal expressions of corporate identity as well as how firm wants to be seen by others or to differentiate from its competitors.

Figure 6  Role of dream teams in facilitating corporate brand identity.

4.6.1 Points of positive differentiation

The case company aims to differentiate from its competitors in several different ways. Employee 1 sees that the case company has a more client-oriented approach than its
competitors. They try to negotiate, and try to come to agreements that are best for both parties. Concern for clients is indeed an important milestone for corporate brand identity to cover, as it enhances customer loyalty (Aaker, 2004).

The case company has certain established work systems, according to which all projects are carried out. This way, case company wants to ensure that the quality of their work is consistent among the different projects. It increased trust among the clients, and creates positive image about the entire company, not only specific teams within it. An emphasis on the company as a whole, both to employees as well as to other publics, strengthens corporate brand identity (Margulies, 1977).

We have well-established systems according to which we execute our work. We have a lot of paperwork, and check-ups. We aim for the products and people to be consistent in quality, so it does not vary much. So, when customer places an order, they approximately know what they will be getting. (Employee 5)

According to Employee 2, the case company wishes to stand out by delivering better quality, and by investing more in development of the projects. However, he also suspected that their competitors are trying to stand out with these aspects as well, and was unsure how the client perceives that.

The quality [that we do] is so good, that there is no possibility to do any better. (Employee 2)

In this study, quality was defined as following:

Quality means that the product is what the client has ordered, and that it is delivered on the time that they have ordered it. (Employee 5)

Quality is the ability to fulfil clients’ needs. The client gets what they have ordered. (Employee 2)

It is important to identify, what the client’s needs are and what things are important for them. And then during the project strongly commit to those things that client finds as important, and aim to fulfil them. (Employee 3)

Client 2 explained he values that the case company’s work is of great quality, and the firm managed to achieve a place among his personal top two companies to choose between. Since the company he works for is a part of a municipality, they cannot engage in direct project negotiations but must always use a tender offering process
instead, as they are subject to public procurement law. However, even though Client 2 was satisfied with the quality that the case company delivers, he also mentioned that differences between case company and their competitors are not radical when considering this parameter. Hence, Employee 2 was right in his doubt about their competitors also trying to stand out through superior quality:

_They do good quality, however the competition in the market is tough, and there is no significant difference on the quality between them and their competitors. (Client 2)_

Employee 2 suspected that one aspect why their clients choose them over competitors is case company’s positive approach to work safety. During his interview, Client 2 put special emphasis on case company’s work safety conditions, and he was very satisfied with them. He believed safe working environment induces smooth execution of an entire project. Big discrepancies seem to be present between the different project development firms, and Client 2 pointed out that the gap is especially big when comparing to companies that are smaller in size, since they tend to have a lot of issues when considering work safety:

_As for standing out among competitors, the case company has been taking proper care of work safety, and there is a big difference, especially when comparing to smaller market actors. (Client 2)_

However, personality and chemistry between the people were mentioned numerously. Employee 1 elaborated he believes it is in the end chemistry between the people that affects the relationship with the client most. As Aaker (2004:9) highlights, “people and organizations prefer to do business with those they respect”. In many industries, alike the one in focus during this study, relationships provide a valid perspective to understanding the perceptions as well as behaviour of the customer (Edvardsson and Strandvik, 2000). Client 1 was fond of the fact that from a client’s perspective, employees at the case company are easily approachable:

_You need to be capable of having a nice small talk, and to engage people in the idea as well as action that it requires! Besides, they always have something positive to say about their firm. People tend to stay long over there, and they take the business forward. Both things are really important, and increase trust. It is so easy for me when I already have a number in my phone, and can just ‘call a friend’. In a sense, they have really reached beyond the surface, thanks to the fact that you already know people who work there. I think it is a huge advantage. (Client 1)_
Most of the employees at the case company have worked there for a long time. Among respondents the longest in-house career was 19 years. This shows that employees are dedicated to their employer and their work. As mentioned by Katzenbach and Smith (1993), dedication is one aspect positively affecting team performance.

4.6.2 Project sites

Employee 4 elaborated on his view of what makes up for case company’s brand. According to him, there are two most important things that need special attention. First comes the overall look and management of company’s project sites. Until a project is finished, it is the project site that will be considered as an image of the case company, and not the picture of a finished design that was provided to clients. Hence, the sites should be kept well organised and presentable, as well as safe. Additionally, the surroundings of the site should be well informed about the progress of the work, especially if any disruptions are to be expected such as noise, smell, or for instance a street closure.

*How our firm looks as a company to the public is how our project sites look. What else could it look like? This office? Probably 3% of all people in Finland know, that this is our headquarters, and hence this office can only affect an image of our company among our partner representatives, who actually visit it. (Employee 4)*

Client 1 agrees with Employee 4, despite the fact that they work with different divisions and have never co-operated with each other.

*At the case company, they have strict rules according work safety and maintaining the project site. It’s important to us as well, even from the advertising and marketing point of view. If our project site is here, and then it looks all messy and disorganized, it doesn’t project a good image about us either. We always have to think about the bigger picture. Ensure that our publicity is favourable, which means that even our partners have to maintain good public image. Their own, and ours, too. (Client 1)*

4.6.3 Impact on division 1

As a second feature that affects public’s view of the case company, Employee 4, who works solely with division 1, mentioned customer care after the project has been finished. When a project is advertised, certain promises are also being made, and these promises need to be fulfilled when the project is completed. Otherwise clients will be
dissatisfied, and that fuels negative publicity, which has a negative impact on case company's brand. It also creates a feeling that they promise one thing but do another, without taking responsibility. Aaker (2004) supports this idea, as he underlines that firms must deliver on their promises in order to sustain reliability and motivate to positive word of mouth. Being able to deliver on such client’s needs that a brand has promised can also be viewed as building company’s brand identity, through development of its concept (Nandan, 2005).

Important part is hence the warranty period, as well as repairs. Therefore, case company has a separate business unit that handles only such repairs. It has been developed to be possibly centralized and efficient in order to increase customer satisfaction. Clients are given contact information, where from all incoming notices are distributed and followed-up on. This ensures that all complaints are acted upon within a reasonable time spectrum. Employee 4 also suggested that in order to meet client expectations better, case company could document in more detail what exactly has been promised to the clients, as well as ensure that both parties have aligned expectations. Indeed, customer expectations should be carefully investigated and taken into consideration in order to avoid customer dissatisfaction (Ojasalo, 2001). When client expectations are not met, relationship might experience stress (Holmlund-Rytkönen and Strandvik, 2005). Employee 4 also thinks that better alignment in expectations would decrease the amount of maintenance during warranty period, and hence cut costs.

*What should be improved is what is promised to the customer. It must be documented clearly and ensured that both parties understand it. This relates also to the warranty after the release, as well as to the time that is there in between. (Employee 4)*

Due to economical downturn that followed the 2007-2008 financial crises, Employee 4 admits some changes have taken place, mainly on the front of customer service. He sees that it has become better, especially when considering the lower hierarchy of employees, since they have become more customer-oriented during recent years. Margins have gone down, and as a company they must ensure good sales results.

*Especially in this recession, if I have to search after something positive, so it has forced the companies in our industry to improve customer service. And by customer service, I mean the people on the project site, and not the professional marketing guys that sit in our headquarters. (Employee 4)*
Even though Employee 4 was satisfied with improvement in customer service, he believes continuous efforts should be made to ensure it is on high level throughout the entire company, and he believes it also helps to build strong brand image among the public.

4.6.4 Power of time dimension

It became clear during the data collection process that the importance of time dimension as mentioned by the model developed in this study and such authors as Rindell et al (2015), Hatch and Schultz (2002), or Edvardsson and Strandvik (2000) among others, is also true in a real life setting. Time was mentioned repeatedly, mostly in the form of the length of employment or length of the relationship. Clearly, both have a strong impact on the relationship between the case company and their clients.

*We have such a long history with the case company, that it helps me in my own work a lot. You know, you have those people that you can just call anytime.* (Client 1)

Employee 3 emphasized that if people know each other, team member’s areas of expertise can be put to better use, hence making better use of their professional potential. When a person’s strengths are utilized in such a way, entire team becomes more efficient, which in turn has a positive impact on the financial result of both parties of the deal.

*One of the fundamental problems in the project development industry is the big rotation of people. When a project is done, everyone is placed to another, new project, a little bit randomly, depending on what is available at that moment, or what tenders we have won. Luckily, I have mostly had the opportunity to work with the same core group of people.* (Employee 3)

Even here, efficiency among team members can easily result in better financial results, just like looking for cost-effective solutions to emerging issues.

4.7 Chapter summary

Respondents from the case company as well as those representing their clients were very much aligned when it came to defining key aspects of successful dream team performance. Responses were also similar when case company’s brand was considered,
and both sides had similar perceptions about it. Thus, corporate brand identity was highly similar to the corporate brand image, which means that dream teams are highly successful when facilitating the identity to the outer world, and then again feedback back to the case company, since the case company seems to be operating like its clients want it to. Some critical incidents were mentioned during interviews, however focus was mostly at critical success factors such as trust, honesty, openness, ability to solve issues, time management, price, quality, personality, and warranty period.

The case company wants to be seen as a well-established market player focusing on delivering high quality work with a strong customer-oriented focus. They put a lot of emphasize on work safety, which is often highlighted in their corporate communication, both internal as well as external. Case company's employees mentioned that the company wants to establish long-term relationships, where both parties trust each other and can work closely on possibly many fronts. Such operational matrix is financially beneficial for both sides. Presence of trust between the case company and their clients was affected by such things as honesty and openness, good skills within management of emerging issues, good time management, and thorough documentation, along with fair price and satisfactory quality. Case company's clients agreed with all of the above, and the case company was among their top preferred partners to co-operate with.

Needless to say, current situation is very satisfactory. Better use of digital solutions was suggested as one possible future improvement. Case company should remember to focus on customer service among employees lower in the hierarchy. Case company should continue to offer high quality services at market price, since their clients are very price-sensitive. However, more attention should be directed towards making decisions that are not only good quick fixes, but are also cost-effective.
5 DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

This chapter discusses the findings of this study, as well as presents conclusions. It also includes theoretical as well as managerial implications, and makes suggestions for future research. After this chapter, which is the final part of this study, there will be a short summary in Swedish that covers the entire paper.

5.1 Dream teams and their role as a facilitator of a corporate brand

Even though dream teams are a rarity to come across (Castka et al, 2001), several dream teams seem to exist at the case company, emphasizing that they have working manners that satisfy company’s customers and their needs.

Several aspects mentioned by Rickards and Moger (1999:7-11) were present among dream teams in the case company: ability to learn, strong platform of understanding, shared vision, network activators, and resilience on setbacks. As pictured in the developed model, dream teams take the feedback back to the case company. If such feedback is delivered successfully, it will enhance company’s ability to learn. Strong platform of understanding along with shared vision will both be affected by corporate brand identity. Since the identity was clearly communicated to the customers and few discrepancies existed between brand identity and created brand image, it can be concluded that case company’s corporate brand identity is strong and clear in its message, which stands behind strong common understanding and shared vision.

Network activators are clearly present, and even though team effort was a main concern of this study, clients seemed to have their preferred contact people among teams, one or several. Additionally, the case company has lately become better at customer service at all levels, which enhances ability of networking and increases level of team performance. Dream teams also showed resilience on setbacks. They were good at managing the emerging issues in a way that satisfied case company’s customers and at finding solutions that could quickly solve the problem, even though they were not always the most cost-effective ones. Since the projects case company engages into are of a very diverse nature, problem solving requires a lot of flexibility.
It remains unclear to what extent the remaining two factors described by Rickards and Moger (1999:7-11), creative climate and ownership of ideas, are present. Case company has a standardized way of working, which was motivated by for instance ability to provide consistent quality. There seems to be little room for creativity in such setting, which nevertheless did not seem to have any negative impact on performance of dream teams. It could be sensed that strong mutual respect exists among team members.

As a matter of fact, standardization of procedures might be one of the keys to success achieved by the dream teams. As Edvardsson and Strandvik (2009) write, changes in relationship between the firm and their clients often occur over a longer period of time. If dream teams continuously act in the same manner producing the same outstanding results, and fulfil expectations on the critical success factors uncovered in this study, it might as well be that such consistency over a longer period of time is a part of what makes them so successful at what they do.

If looking from the perspective of Balmer's (2001) AC²ID Test, based on the gathered data the actual identity appears to be close with communicated identity (where dream teams are the messenger), and conceived identity, since perceived image among clients was very much aligned with the one communicated by dream teams. Desired identity among managers included certain suggestions for future development, nevertheless its fundamentals were also close to actual, communicated and conceived identity. Finally, ideal identity was not really at the scope of this study, since concern was mostly on the present time instead of future. Nevertheless some respondents touched upon this notion as well, and mostly made suggestions that are discussed in section 5.5, managerial implications. The five factors were highly consistent with each other, just like Balmer (2001) suggests they should in order to achieve success.

Overall, there was a good fit between what case company and its employees perceived to be company's corporate brand identity, and what their clients perceived as their corporate brand image. Relationships between clients and teams appear to be strong, and little discrepancies existed. For instance, case company saw itself as providing superior quality. However, respondents mentioned that most likely their competitors are also highlighting this aspect, which was confirmed by the clients. They still saw case company's quality as being on high level, however they emphasized that there is little difference between the quality delivered by the different project development firms on the market that are direct competitors to the case company.
Following quotes according work safety are one of many examples, where the company thinks alike with the client:

*The case company has been strongly taking forward the matters considering work safety. It is good that they have clear, written occupational guidance.* (Client 1)

*As for standing out among competitors, the case company has been taking proper care of work safety, and there is a big difference, especially when comparing to smaller market actors.* (Client 2)

*We have a very positive approach towards work safety, and I believe it separates us from competitors in some cases, as well as helps the customer to choose.* (Employee 2)

Due to high level of similarity in the responses provided both by the case company as well as their clients, a conclusion can be drawn that dream teams within the case company are highly efficient when expressing forward company’s brand identity, as well as when reflecting back the received feedback. Case company clearly does what the client wants and in the way that they want it, at least to a large extent. Dream teams’ performance fulfilled clients’ expectations according listed critical success factors. Skilful management of arising issues minimized risk for the factors to have a critical impact of the relationship.

In this case, efficiency of dream teams as a facilitator is mostly their ability to forward the designated messages in a form that possibly accurately reflects what the sender of the message meant. This minimizes not only the existing gap, but also the possibility of differences in interpretation between brand identity and brand image. This points to the conclusion that teams within the case company have a good understanding of both the company they work for (their identity), as well as the clients that they service (what they desire, and what their perceived brand image is).

### 5.2 The winning concept

Certain concept of success, which also stands behind successful performance of dream teams at the case company, has emerged during data analysis. It will be summarized below.
Importance of identifying a problem possibly quickly during the process is non-negotiable. However, dream teams should be thinking about solutions that are not only good quick fixes, but are also cost-effective. Such approach benefits both case company, as well as its clients. Case company should put more emphasize on how the financial resources are being used during the project. It is of course important to react quickly and fix emerging issues effectively, but financial aspects should not be forgotten and should be as important.

At the same time, cost-efficient thinking needs to be combined with reliable scheduling. Timetables need to be adjusted immediately as problems or changes emerge.

*If some stage cannot be carried out according to the existing plans, changes need to be made immediately, so that the harmony between different stages prevails instead of falling down like dominos. When corrections are done straight away, there is no need for doing things half-heartedly or in a hurry. Throughout the years, it also affects on our relationship with sub-contractors. If they know that we can manage out sites properly, they do not have to factor for costs caused by work disruptions in their offers. That saves both our clients and us valuable financial resources.* (Employee 3)

Simultaneously, the client needs to be notified about the current situation, as well as what impact the changed circumstances have on the entire project. This includes delays in the timetable, changes into previously agreed budget, or other significant matters.

Clearly, performance among teams is enhanced when the people in them are already familiar with each other. If people know each other, team member’s areas of expertise can be put to better use, hence making better use of their professional potential. When a person’s strengths are utilized in such a way, entire team becomes more efficient, which in turn has a positive impact on the financial result of both parties of the deal.

Katzenbach and Smith (1993) mentioned personal commitment to have a positive impact on team performance. For case company, there seems to be high levels of commitment. Employees tend to have long careers within the company, which tells that they are committed to working for them and are satisfied with their jobs. Such personal satisfaction will have direct impact on dream team performance. Commitment has to be present at the individual level first, in order for the entire team to be committed.
Employees should always carry in mind to act in a customer-oriented way, no matter where in the employment hierarchy they are. Continuous efforts should be made to ensure that everyone acts in as customer-friendly way as possible. Even case company’s internal staff journal included an article titled “Listening to customers is a key to success”. The case company clearly strives to have a customer sensitive approach as a part of their brand identity.

Projects sites should be kept organized and possibly neat, since they function as a representation of the case company and the client whom they are carrying the work for to the outsiders. Case company’s staff journal included an article on this topic as well, where they talk about importance of a clean and safe project site. Once again, this seems to be something that case company wants to have embedded into their corporate brand identity, and that has successfully been included in the corporate brand image that their clients have. Clients were satisfied with the look of the project sites.

Last but not least, case company is well known for their positive approach towards work safety, and active efforts in promoting it. This was communicated by case company’s employees, as well as recognized and valued by their clients. They even mentioned that case company stands out on matters concerning work safety compared to other market players.

5.3 How to measure successful performance

Today, wisdom taught in all business schools is that the main objective of a corporation is to maximize shareholder value. However, as we can also see from the results gathered in this study, money is important (which is visible through described price sensitivity), but it is not everything, which can be seen from the list of factors that affect the client-firm relationship including trust, honesty, or openness. Performance and its success can be measured through other criteria than price-earnings ratio, too.

Especially when considering questions related to intangible assets such as brands, it might be difficult to put certain number on them, or measure their performance in percentages or financial ratios.
To ask for the bottom line is, in this case, the wrong questions. Perceptions that the outsiders hold, which can also be regarded as corporate brand image, affect the entire company, along with its financial performance and abilities for future development. And since these perceptions are formed through corporate brand identity, many more factors than numbers are present. (Margulies, 1977)

This study uncovers a set of critical success factors that can enhance dream team performance. Price was only one of the mentioned aspects, and respondents talked a lot about intangible qualities such as trust, honesty, openness, and ability to rely on each other in firm-client relationship. Employee competences were also mentioned as a measure and an indicator of quality.

It is difficult to measure how these affect the bottom line in the financial terms individually, nevertheless they were all essential in ensuring cash flow into the company. Lack of these qualities among teams would likely mean lack of new business, which can be directly translated into lack of future income. This study shows that measures of successful performance should be evaluated critically, and that financials might not be the best ones in all cases.

### 5.4 Theoretical implications

Overall, findings of this case study clearly point out certain aspects and conditions for case company’s activities that need to be present in order for dream teams to achieve good results, successfully communicate company’s corporate brand identity, help in formation of an adequate corporate brand image, and keep clients happy in accordance to the brand image they have about the case company. Dream team actions were well in balance with the client expectations, which gives a very satisfactory image about the case company. Presented critical success factors add to the existing literature on the topic. No significant critical incidents were uncovered.

This study contributes with a new model that can be used to examine role of teams as facilitators between corporate brand identity and corporate brand image. Alternatively, the model can be modified through substituting dream teams with another concept that affects the interplay between brand identity and brand image. The model can also be examined in parts instead of being looked at as a whole, for instance by putting only
one stream of interaction under scrutiny, such as reflections or expressions. The model can even be used for other areas of science than marketing.

5.5 Managerial implications

Due to the explorative and practical nature of this study, it is natural for it to provide certain managerial implications.

Unfortunately, even most savvy courses or universities cannot teach such characteristics as honesty, which mostly comes with personality. Hence, an important implication for human resources departments is to invest in only recruiting people who fit into the corporate brand. As Nandan (2005) points out, improved human resources management can have a positive effect on the entire company, including its corporate brand.

Competences and qualifications are of course mandatory to have, nevertheless emphasize should also be put on personal characteristics of the new recruits. Also, it is profitable from the point of view of dream teams and corporate brand to invest in people who are motivated to work for you, and are good at team work. It is important to make sure that new employees are a good fit even personality-wise, which cannot really be judged by their CV. Such employees are likely to have on average longer careers within a firm, and continuous employment was mentioned as a valuable aspect of client-firm relationship, since it made the company easy to approach. Clients also tend to have trust in the people they have worked with before, and who are alike with them.

Managers might want to pay attention to employee satisfaction, and aim to keep them within the company for longer periods of time through responding to their personal needs, such as willingness to be promoted, or maybe even willingness to stay at their current position instead of moving higher in the hierarchy. If employees have long-term in-house careers, even when content of teams might vary, people will be familiar with each other. This way their personal strengths, weaknesses and characteristics can be explored best, aiding in formation of successful dream teams. Such familiarity with other team members helps to increase efficiency and quality of overall work performance.
Respondents from the case company mentioned that recently, a lot of attention had been put on developing company’s project management skills. They want to aim for acquiring clients through negotiations, instead of having to go through tendering processes. On the other hand, their clients mentioned that they would like for the case company to develop further within this field, especially when it comes to management in projects where the case company is responsible for everything from planning to execution. This is hence a valuable suggestion. Client 1 discussed use of digital solutions, which he thought would make work on projects more efficient and easier. He suggested that case company could invest resources in developing new, standardized and digital means of reporting.

When contacting the case company with interview inquiries, almost all employees showed extremely positive attitude as well as short response time. Only one employee was not reachable, while others were very easy to approach. Being available and maintaining smooth and efficient communication gives positive image about the entire company, as well as helps the counterparty to feel important and valued. It is important to put emphasize on the value of professional and fast communication.

### 5.6 Future research

An interesting notion to explore would be a case study emphasizing how much the lowest employee hierarchy is being affected by the corporate brand identity, and whether they stand up to the norms that it sets. It would be interesting to see how strong their role is in facilitating the brand identity to the outer world, alike the role of dream teams explored in this study.

Respondents interviewed in this case study held positions mostly within mid-management, and therefore there were no representatives from the lowest employee hierarchy. This was a conscious restriction, since the lowest hierarchy of employees in this case is mostly sub-contracted from case company’s partners, nevertheless would be of interest in another setting where even lowest hierarchy of employees is employed in-house.

It would be interesting to explore role of critical incidents in more detail, in a similar theoretical setting. This could be done by using the model generated in this study. This
study uncovered mostly critical success factors, nevertheless critical incidents are also important for corporate brand and client relationships. Theory on critical incidents could benefit from such case study.

Gathered data raises one question. All respondents from the case company showed not only good team performance, but also strong individual performance. They were all talented within their area of responsibility. Is it because of that personal talent that performance of the teams where these individuals are placed is extraordinary, or because there are several highly skilled individuals? Or are these extraordinary results achieved through a synergistic group dynamic? Fisher and Thomas (1996) discuss that same dilemma when writing about dream teams. It would therefore be interesting to further explore, what determines a dream team. Is it because of the individual employees in the dream team, or is the co-operation between the different members? It would also be interesting to explore in depth and on a larger scale, what sort of individuals do dream teams usually consist of.

5.7 Final words

This study contributed to the existing research by providing connection between theory and real-life business setting, in a B2B context. A model picturing interplay between corporate brand identity and corporate brand image was developed. Additionally, an extensive list of critical success factors was uncovered. Even though these factors are specific for the case company, there is a possibility of their application elsewhere, too.

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SVENSK SAMMANFATTNING

INLEDNING


Team främjar ett företags varumärkesidentitet i den yttre världen; genom sitt beteende och sina professionella insatser kommunicerar de företagets varumärke till dess kunder (Blombäck och Ramirez-Pasillas, 2012). Därför minskar de gapet, som presenterats av Rindell et al. (2015), som finns mellan varumärkesidentitet och varumärkesimage. Denna studie undersöker drömteam som förmedlare mellan varumärkesidentitet och varumärkesimage, och som fyller gapet.
Om gapet mellan varumärkesidentitet och varumärkesimage minskas med åtgärder vidtagna av drömteam kommer de framväxande uppfattningarna på båda sidor av relationen också att påverkas av de kritiska incidenter eller kritiska faktorer som uppstår inom en viss kund–företag-relatio. Således är detta ämne av stort intresse.

**Problemområde**


**Fallföretaget**

Fallföretag i denna studie är ett byggbolag. Denna studie fokuserar på bolagets verksamhet på den finska marknaden. Med relevans för denna studie kan företaget delas in i två affärsenheter som i denna studie kallas division 1 och division 2. Divisionerna är separerade från varandra eftersom de affärsområden de verkar inom är väldigt olika, och därmed även påverkar frågan om drömteam på olika sätt. I projekt
med anknytning till division 1 är det alltid en extern kund som beställer ett projekt. Å andra sidan kan order som utförs av division 2 antingen beställas av företaget självt (fungerar som en kund), eller en extern kund som i division 1.

Syfte och forskningsfrågor

Syftet med denna studie är att undersöka sådana drömteam inom fallföretaget vars prestationer anses vara mycket tillfredsställande eller över genomsnittet, vilket gör dem till högpresterande team. Denna studie undersöker varför drömteam inom fallföretaget presterar bra i sitt arbete, och vad som kan identifieras som en anledning till den höga nivån av teamets prestationer.

1. Vilka faktorer är ansvariga för den höga prestationen bland drömteam?

Drömteams roll som främjare av företagets varumärkesidentitet undersöks. Det är också av intresse att undersöka om varumärkesimagin hos kunderna är densamma som varumärkesidentiteten som företaget önskar kommunicera.

2. Stämmer företagets varumärkesidentitet som främjas av drömteam med den varumärkesimage som kunderna har?

Även kritiska händelser samt kritiska faktorer utforskas, och studien syftar till att avslöja vad de innebär för fallföretaget samt deras kunder, och i fall båda två eller bara en av dem existerar.

3. Vilka är de kritiska händelser eller faktorer?

Avgränsningar

Denna studie genomfördes som en fallstudie för fallföretaget. Därför har allt material, information och empirisk forskning fokus på fallföretaget, dess kunder och respektive bransch samt industrin. Presenterade resultat, slutsatser, förslag och konsekvenser kan variera, om ett annat företag inom en annan bransch undersöktes (Patton, 2015).

En del insamlade data kommer från intervjuer med fallföretagets kunder. Dessa respondenter representerar endast sina personliga åsikter, uppfattningar, idéer och erfarenheter, och därför bör deras svar inte ses eller behandlas som officiella företagsuttalanden.
Studien bygger till stor del på den teoretiska ramen inom disciplinen marknadsföring. Varumärkesidentitet samt varumärkesimage innehåller dock många frågor som berör andra vetenskapsområden, till exempel företagskommunikation. Syftet med denna forskning kunde därför ge olika svar, om det undersöktes utgående från ett annat forskningsområde.

**TEORI**

**Företagets varumärkesidentitet**


**Företagets varumärkesimage**


**Samspel mellan varumärkesidentitet och varumärkesimage**

Modell, Rindell et al. (2015)

Kritiska händelser och kritiska faktorer

Kritiska händelser uppfattas som sådana anmärkningsvärda incidenter som en kund kan lätt komma ihåg. Sådana händelser är kritiska, eftersom de kan leda till en förändring i förhållandet mellan kunden och företaget. Dessutom kan kritiska
händelser användas till att förklara avslutningen eller början av en relation, samt förändringar i kundens uppfattning om företaget. (Edvardsson och Strandvik, 2000)


Kritiska faktorer är viktiga för projektledningen. De är viktiga att utforska när man försöker identifiera de viktigaste parametrarna ansvariga för projektets framgång. Att nå framgång i ett projekt är av stor betydelse, särskilt i de fall bolaget förlitar sig helt på projektbaserat arbete. (Mishra et al., 2011).

Drömteam, främjare av effektiv kundverksamhet

Drömteam bär många olika namn, beroende på vilken vinkel de undersöks ifrån. I själva verket är begreppet "drömteam" ett relativt populärt uttryck, och det används mest i tidningsartiklar (t.ex. Financial Times eller Harvard Business Review), och inte i vetenskapliga tidskrifter. Å andra sidan hänvisar mer vetenskapliga författare till "högpresterande team" (Castka et al., 2001), ett uttryck som tydligt betonar det underliggande fenomenet - ett team som visar hög prestationsförmåga.


Team uttrycker och främjar varumärkesidentitet i den yttre världen. Samtidigt är de en kanal genom vilken bolaget erhåller feedback och reflektioner som de får från sina kunder. Därför minskar team gapet som beskrivs av Rindell et al. (2015). Följande modell uppstår:
METOD

Vetenskapssteori


Forskningsmetod

I linje med grundad teori, byggs teorin i denna studie från insamlade data (Patton, 2015) med hjälp av en induktiv metod (Saunders et al., 2009). Ett induktivt tillvägagångssätt har inga teoretiska antaganden före datainsamlingen, och kan också

Modifierad modell baserad på Rindell et al. (2015)
kallas explorativ (ibid). Processen för insamling av data inleddes med begränsad förståelse om fallföretaget, vilket också stödde valet av en induktiv strategi (Gummesson, 2000), eftersom en explorativ studie är mycket användbar för att få en förståelse av ett problem eller enstaka fall (Saunders et al., 2009).

**Forskningsdesign**

Det finns många olika sätt att strukturerar sin forskning, av vilket ett sätt är en fallstudie, där ett fenomen undersöks inom sitt verkliga sammanhang (Saunders et al., 2009). Fallstudier kan ses ha en kompletterande roll i bidraget till befintlig forskning, i stället för att ta fram nya generaliseringar (Aastrup och Halldorsson, 2008; Saunders et al., 2009). Däremot kan en väl uppbyggd fallstudie utmana existerande teori samt generera nya, framtida forskningsfrågor och därmed få en värdefull effekt (Saunders et al., 2009).

Denna studie är en fallstudie som omfattar endast ett fall: fallföretaget. Studien inkluderar däremot flera inbäddade fall eftersom den undersöker två underenheter inom organisationen. Dessa är division 1 och division 2. Eftersom denna studie är fullständigt kvalitativ och utforskande är denna forskning baserad på sju djupintervjuer.

**Datainsamling**


Analys av data


Etiska aspekter

Under varje forskningsprocess finns det risk för oetiska fallgropar. I kvalitativ undersökning kan dessa fallgropar omfatta exploatering, bedrägeri, frågor som berör personens identitet (till exempel om en respondentens identitet avslöjas när en sådan åtgärd inte är önskvärd, eller om den var dold trots att en uppgiftslämnare önskade vara offentlig), umgänge med föraktade grupper, eller om tveksamma slutsatser dras. (Silverman, 2006)

För att undvika sådana oetiska fallgropar är allt insamlad material anonymt och konfidentiellt. Trots att alla intervjuer spelades in och transkriberades, kommer deras innehåll endast användas i denna studie. Det erhållna materialet kommer inte att distribueras till tredje partier.

Trovärdighet


När det gäller denna studie, är det mycket troligt att respondenterna skulle ge liknande svar om de frågades samma frågor i samma miljö, om inte en stor förändring sker inom fallföretaget eller i deras relationer med intervjuade kunder. Eftersom data samlades in genom informella djupintervjuer utan intervjuguide, kan de erhållna resultaten variera lite beroende på intervjuaren, deras strategi samt personliga färdigheter (Patton, 2015). Även om antalet respondenter som används i denna studie är litet och resultaten inte är
generaliserbara, är det inte det viktigaste målet med denna studie. Dess främsta syfte är att ge giltiga insikter till redan existerande teori och testa den i praktiken. Denna studie använder som data intervjuer, men även skriftligt material från de deltagande företagen granskas, vilket möjliggör viss nivå av triangulering. Förtroendet upprättades mellan parterna under intervjuerna.

RESULTAT

Kritiska incidenter och kritiska faktorer

För fallföretaget är kritiska händelser relaterade till teamprestation. Dock var det mest olika kritiska faktorer som respondenterna talade om. Följande aspekter lyftes fram i intervjuerna:

Förtroende. En viktig aspekt av ett framgångsrikt och långsiktigt samarbete var förtroendet mellan fallföretaget och dess kunder. Förtroende byggs genom tidigare, positiva upplevelser, och tillfredsställande tidigare beteende. Nedanstående aspekter, även om de är viktiga självständigt, kan anses påverka förtroende i en bredare skala:


– **Dokumentation.** Dokumentation innebär till exempel nya materialbeställningar, tidrapporter för utförda arbetstimmar och så vidare.

– **Tidtabellernas hållbarhet.** Ordentlig planering är avgörande för att nå framgång genom hela projektet.

– **Pris, kvalitet och personlighet.**

Garantitid spelade också viktig roll. I branschen inom vilket fallföretaget befinner sig har kunden alltid en viss garanti på avslutade projekt. Denna garantiperiod var av varierande betydelse beroende på division, men hade ändå en kritisk och viktig roll.

Varumärkesidentitet och varumärkesimage

Fallföretag strävar efter att ha ett kundorienterat förhållningssätt till sina kunder. Fallföretaget har vissa etablerade arbetssystem, enligt vilket alla projekt genomförs.
så sätt vill fallföretag säkerställa att kvaliteten på deras arbete är konsekvent bland de olika projekten, och därför inte beroende av visst team. Fallföretaget vill sticka ut genom att leverera bättre kvalitet och genom att investera mer i projektutvecklingen. De har även en positiv attityd till arbetssäkerheten.

För övrigt gav fallföretagets anställda och respondenten från kundföretaget mycket lika svar. Kunderna identifierade samma aspekter som fallföretaget, och det blev snabbt klart att kundernas varumärkesimage var nära varumärkesidentiteten hos fallföretaget.

ANALYS OCH DISKUSSION

Att hävda varumärket mot att leva varumärket.

Allmänt sett var svaren från fallföretagets anställda väldigt lika svaren som deras kunder gav. Uppfattningarna om varumärkesidentitet låg nära det som kunderna uppfattade som varumärkesimage, och få skillnader fanns. Till exempel tyckte fallföretaget att deras kvalitet är på en hög nivå, vilket deras kunder var eniga om. På samma sätt tyckte fallföretaget att deras arbetssäkerhet var utomordentlig, vilket nämndes av båda två kundrespondenter. Eftersom erhållna svar var så lika, kan en slutsats dras att drömteam är mycket effektiva främjare av varumärkesidentitet, samt att de är duktiga att ta tillbaka den mottagna feedbacken. Fallföretaget gör tydligt vad kunden vill ha, och på det sätt som det vill ha det.

Det vinnande konceptet


Teoretiska implikationer, implikationer för ledningen och förslag för framtida forskning
Resultaten av denna fallstudie pekar tydligt på vissa former och villkor för fallföretagets verksamhet som måste vara närvarande för att de anställda ska uppnå goda resultat, kommunicera varumärkesidentitet på ett effektivt sätt, och hålla kunderna nöjda i enlighet med den varumärkesimage de har om fallföretaget. Drömteam och deras beteende var i balans med kundernas förväntningar, vilket ger en mycket tillfredsställande bild av fallföretaget.

Även de bästa skolorna kan tyvärr inte lära människor sådana egenskaper som ärlighet, som oftast kommer ifrån personens personlighet. Därför är det viktigt för personalavdelningar att investera i och endast rekrytera sådana personer som passar in i företaget, samt är i balans med dess varumärkesidentitet. Som Nandan (2005) påpekar har en förbättrad personalförvaltning en positiv effekt på hela företaget samt dess varumärke.

En intressant idé att utforska vore en fallstudie som skulle betona hur mycket anställda inom den lägsta hierarkin påverkas av företagets varumärkesidentitet, och huruvida de lever upp till de normer som den ställer. Dessutom skulle det vara intressant att se hur stark deras roll är angående förmedlingen av varumärkesidentitet till tredje parter, såsom drömteamens roll som utforskas i denna studie. Alternativt kunde det vara intressant att undersöka i större skala vem drömteam består av.
REFERENCES


