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Recruitment challenges – A study of how consulting firms practice their recruitment

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements of the Royal Docks School of Business and Law, University of East London for the degree of

MSc International Business Management

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Abstract

This study shows the results of in-depth interviews based on how elite consulting companies carry out their recruitment process. Interviews were conducted with six different companies, the participants being HR managers or other recruiting staff. The findings were then analysed to see how consulting firms in the Oslo area utilise screening methods, and employer branding to remain competitive in the market. The results from these methods provide evidence that screening via social media, and the company's ability to create an organisational identity through employer branding, have an effect on employee choice.

The purpose of the study was to test existing research related to the topics of recruitment, screening and employer branding in a new context. The study can help increase understanding of how to use social media in the selection process and thus improve the quality of this screening tool, as well as how companies should market themselves to attract desirable candidates. Furthermore, it can result in better quality of the recruitment process within the companies and have a positive effect on the recruitment in a very competitive market for the most suitable graduates.

When reviewing existing theory, a research gap was identified related to the effect of social media in the Norwegian context. By filling this research gap, the researcher hopes that companies can benefit from this study and gain a broader understanding of the impact social media and employer branding have on the selection process.

Acknowledgements

Finally, it is good to note that this task is no longer an infinitely long process, but a finished product. The work on the master's thesis has been challenging, rewarding, and educational, and there are several I would like to thank in this regard.

A very big thank you to my informants who, in a very busy day, took the time to be interviewed on this exciting and relevant topic. Their openness and interest has given the task a depth it would never have received without their involvement. If there are any misinterpretations, I take full responsibility.

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INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

One of the most important elements of a successful organisation is skilled employees. Thus, more and more companies in today's labour market are struggling to attract the best workforce. A constantly moving business sector also sets conditions for organisations. In order to be competitive, they must utilise the human competence found in their businesses.

This assignment will be to critically evaluate the recruitment process of the leading consultant companies in the Oslo area, and how they recruit graduate consultants. HR directors and other recruiters plays a critical role in the participating organisations in this study. They have been given a lot of responsibility, both for the employees, the company's results, and to build the company's future with employees.

The research will thus focus on a phenomenon called employer branding, which is simply about building a brand of a workplace. A strong employer brand helps to increase the attractiveness of a workplace and contributes to how long employees stay with an employer (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004). With this, we can say that a strong employer brand helps to create a connection between employees and the organisation. Employer branding is a process that touches on two perspectives. First, employer branding is used to attract and recruit talent, secondly, employer branding is used to retain these talents. According to Theurer et al. (2016), research on employer branding often focuses on what factors are needed to make a business attractive to potential employees, and not what is attractive to existing employees. In line with the research, this is also reflected in the business world, where top managers and HR focus largely on how to attract the right and best candidates, and not how to retain the good employees. Companies that focus solely on this one perspective in their work on employer branding may see it lead to problems of varying degrees.

The research will also focus on how the companies involved are practicing screening of their candidates, which is a method the company can use to obtain information about the job applicant (Salop & Salop, 1976). An increasingly digitalised everyday life is creating new ways for companies to obtain the necessary information about candidates, such as social media (see appendix 3). Social media is used for a variety of purposes, whether it is to get in touch with people, maintain contact with people or, for example, for awareness raising and branding (Marler & Perry, 2016). On the other hand, candidates also use social media to make themselves visible in the labour market. In Norway, some companies have already chosen to use the phenomenon, but the concept is still very new and there is little experience at present.

The purpose of this assignment is to shed light on what we know today about recruitment, staffing and the attachment of expertise in consulting companies, as well as to contribute with empirical and new theories that can raise awareness about the consulting industry's approach to recruitment. The task will therefore be a contribution to the research area recruitment, where there will be a focus on screening and employer branding. There is little theory and empirical evidence on how consulting firms in Norway approach the challenges associated with recruitment, staffing and the attachment of expertise. The theoretical basis for the thesis is therefore largely based on international articles and textbooks.

It has been proven how important recruitment is to the companies' progress, and how it helped create competitive advantage (Rutter et al. 2016). It is probably true that technological advancement has facilitated some of the information work for recruiters and HR executives. However, technology has failed to safeguard the human aspect of units that have been led by skilled recruiters. Since it in the future will be important to maintain good and strong competence in the organisation, the motivation of the employees will therefore be a central theme. This research is going to highlight the need for careful and competent recruitment processes. In order for the consulting companies to survive in a strong competitive market, they depend on the human resource that exists in the business. Furthermore, it assumes that the employees thrive to do the best possible job. It will thus be crucial that organisations strive to find the most qualified candidates for their consultant positions.

1.2 Research question

In Norway, there is not only fierce competition for talents, but also fierce competition for a greater diversity of graduates (see appendix 4). As a result, more and more companies are using employer branding and screening strategies to attract and retain the attractive workforce.

The study is narrowed down to the consulting industry in this master thesis to explore how they work with the recruitment process to retain skilled experienced consultants in the organisation, as well as attracting the best candidates. To answer this, the researcher need to investigate what creates a good connection between employee and organisation, how companies distinguish bad from good candidates through screening methods, and how employer branding can be used to reinforce the various aspects of connection. This leads to the problem of the task which reads as follows:

How can consulting companies attract and select the top diversified number of graduates?

To answer the main question, the researcher need to deduce some sub-questions:

1. What are the main challenges in consulting firms' recruitment practices?
Here, the study want to identify how the organisation practices their recruitment process and provide me with an overview.

2. How do they conduct their screening of candidates?

Here the study want to investigate the different channels that the respective companies use to provide the necessary information about the candidates.

3. How do they attract desirable workforce through employer branding?

Here, the purpose is to critically evaluate how organisations can reinforce the various aspects of affiliation, and how they can attract a greater diversity of graduates.

1.3 Outline of the task

Chapter two presents a more comprehensive presentation of the most critical phases of the recruitment process, such as employer branding and screening as a concept, then various theories in job satisfaction and motivation, reputation and organisational identity. Various aspects within these themes answer what can create a good and positive connection between employee and organisation. Chapter three is a methodology chapter where a qualitative approach to study is used. Here the researcher present the presentation of cases, documents, qualitative interview, selection, analysis of data as well as the validity, reliability and ethical reflection of the thesis associated with the study. In Chapter Four, the researcher analyses the empirical findings and link this to the theory presented in Chapter Two. Furthermore, the study chooses to present a conclusion in chapter five where the researcher answer the main problem and present reflections on theory, method and practice. Before the researcher will make recommendations to those involved and other companies in the consulting industry.

Chapter 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

This chapter will present the theoretical framework that guides the further analysis, interpretation and discussion. The theoretical perspectives that have been selected to elucidate the challenges in the research is employer branding and screening. The theoretical choices taken in a task can provide opportunities and set limitations. Probably other writers within the various disciplines could have been selected, and the task could have been given a completely different design. Nevertheless, it is considered that the chosen theoretical approaches can complement, supplement, and challenge each other appropriately in terms of analysis and interpretation of the empirical data material. Finally, a joint theoretical framework is presented, to illustrate the connection between these, and their significance in light of the study's research questions.

2.2 Recruitment process in consulting firms

In the consulting industry, and generally in the daily language, it is common to distinguish between recruitment and selection. The difference is that selection is primarily about selecting the candidate or candidates that best suits the job description, of which recruitment is about getting the right people to apply for the job, and thus contributing to making the selection possible (Leisink & Steijin, 2008).

Ashley and Empson (2016) seeks to break down the recruitment process in elite companies by employing a structured job interview, case interview, tests and assessment centre. The most common type of interview is a structured competency-based interview, where everyone who is called in pretty much gets the same questions. The companies usually use between two and four people (Ashley and Empson, 2016). The next step which is common in the recruitment process is to include various forms of case assignments (Ashley and Empson, 2016). When employers choose to use a case on graduates, it is because it gives a competent applicant with no relevant experience a good opportunity to show up. This is identified as an essential part in the process of hiring a graduate consultant (Bulger et al. 2016).
However, the use of ability- and personality tests helps employer to form an impression of the applicant's personal characteristics and/or abilities and skills. When it comes to tests, they are used in recruitment to survey job seekers in areas that they believe are important for job satisfaction and performance (Ashley and Empson, 2016). Significantly, the most common forms of occupational psychological testing include proficiency tests (Bulger et al. 2016). Finally, the assessment centre is a term that is used when employers invite multiple candidates at once, and mapping these candidates with several different recruitment methods (Ashley and Empson, 2016). In this way, the employer gets a broader picture of the candidate, while at the same time the candidate is shown several pages of himself.

2.2.1 Recruitment challenges

The employer wants to attract enough applicants so that the options are greater, and this is known to be the beginning of the recruitment process. How well the recruitment process will work depends on how attractive the organisation appears to the job seeker and the intentions it has (Ma & Allen, 2009). The attraction around an organisation is influenced by how the company stands for its surroundings and how skilled they are to attract a diversity of job seekers. The symbolic properties are particularly crucial in employer branding as many companies' only opportunity to differentiate themselves from their competitors is to profile themselves to what can never be copied – the organisation's identity, culture and values (Backhaus and Tikoo, 2004).

There are currently different recruitment methods that will be beneficial when announcing positions. There is a distinction between formal and informal sources. The use of recruitment firms, universities, job fairs and job advertisements in newspapers is to be referred to as formal sources, while the use of friends and acquaintances is referred to as informal (Sameen, 2016). Previous research emphasises that job seekers make decisions based on their own values, personality, needs and preferences, but what the candidates are also affected by is the organisation's recruitment activities (Saks & Ashforth, 1997). On the other hand, consulting firms often differentiate themselves from regular companies as they rarely announce positions from time to time. Instead they allow people to apply for positions all through the year, which indicates that they are always looking for qualified employees.

Employers have to a greater extent become dependent on finding the right selection tool to get the best possible match between job seeker, specific hobs and working environment (Manroop et al. 2013). The most common selection tool in the recruitment industry is to conduct a job interview. Manroop et al. (2013) chooses to mention interview as a social interaction on the basis that the candidates are judged according to how they manage to answer the questions that are asked. Most often, there is a great battle for attractive jobs which means that many candidates will experience refusal of their application. This is to be regarded as a stressful and deterrent experience for some job seekers (Hall et al. 2009). However, because of the development of screening methods, consulting firms can efficiently exclude non-qualified or interesting job seekers before the interview process even start (Donelly and Gamsu, 2019). Screening is part of the principal-agent theory, and the need for screening arises from asymmetric information leading to a more difficult selection (DeVaro, 2016).

Lately there has been an increasing focus on using the internet in the recruitment process (Muthuveloo et al. 2017). Today, companies want to make HR tasks more effective in saving expenses and resources. Human resources are of great value to any company, but especially to consulting firms as the human resources are the foundation and biggest asset of their business (Zeenny, 2017). One way to build more value will be by using technology. It will then create a distribution channel related to HR processes that will pass on information to employees and line managers (Foster 2010). A study by Strohmeier et al. (2009) confirms that E-HRM today is a common practice in European companies.

2.3 Screening

The possibly most vital part of the recruitment process that have changed with E-HRM, is the way consulting firms practice their screening (DeVaro, 2016). Obtaining credible information is important. Employees are not identical, they vary according to productivity, learning ability and expected employment time. The company wants to hire to candidates who are most productive, easiest to train and least likely to quit their job (Salop & Salop, 1976). However, this is where the company gets a dilemma, because acquiring information about these parameters can be expensive. If the company had asked the jobseeker directly about this, the answer might not be honest. This is because the worst applicants often see the need to exaggerate their qualifications, and because of that, companies must think of alternative ways of evaluating its future employees (Law et al. 2016). Screening is one of such methods.

Traditionally, economists have argued that due to the appropriateness of a market context, too few resources will be used to obtain information. According to Stiglitz (1975), this is not the case with information obtained through screening processes. “Individuals who can be characterised as “more

productive" are thus able to achieve a higher salary, partly at the expense of others. Therefore, information found by screening has important effects on income distribution" (Stiglitz, 1975, p. 283). It is therefore appropriate for the companies to screen the job seekers from an economic perspective, and to gain a competitive advantage by finding the most productive candidates. This therefore shows that screening has a productivity return, but it also tends to increase inequalities (DeVaro, 2016).
That said, how can the highly competitive consulting firms use the technical capabilities to execute an optimised screening process?

2.3.1 E-HRM

The consulting firms, as well as the rest of the world, has trough the last decade experienced a technological change in their recruitment processes. E-HRM, according to Voermans et al. (2007) are defined as "an administrative support for the HR function using internet technology" (Voermans & Van Veldhoven, 2007, p. 887). Factors in determining the adaption of E-HRM are based on how the company organises the work, the size of the company and the application of HRM (Strohmeier & Kabst, 2009). A company consists of employees and it will be important that everyone wants to use E-HRM as a tool. To put it another way, the consulting firms can make use of the physical technology to better their screening process and employer branding, which is going to be discussed more thoroughly. But in order for consulting firms to optimise their use of physical technology, they need individuals that are capable of making use of the technology to execute organisational tasks (Marler & Parry, 2016).

E-HRM is used in traditional HRM activities done from day to day. Examples of these activities are the recruitment and selection process, training of employees, and other activities within personnel that will be able to add value to the company (Parry, 2011). Web-based recruitment methods and assessments will help organisations process a large number of applicants, as well as help save money and time (Anderson, 2003). When using web-based recruitment methods, information will be available to all employees at any time regardless of where the person is. But does the use of more E-HRM capabilities result in greater involvement in HR personnel in recruitment and selection decisions?

An E-HRM value model constructed by Steven Foster (2010) points out that value can only be created based on one possible way out of three. The first will be to reduce operational HR costs. These are the day-to-day costs associated with the HR department, which can help create E-HRM value by reducing the indirect costs. Secondly, value can be created through HRM and productivity. Increasing productivity will free up time so that HR employees can assist further decisions (Muthuveloo et al. 2017). Technological tools will be able to create reorganisation in the HR staff, which will result in a new structure and other ways of working. There is evidence according to Foster (2010) that "E-HRM is linked to a higher level of productivity and performance" (Foster, 2010, p. 3) Latest possible value creation is related to the company's strategic ability to use technology. Technology can enhance the company's reputation, for example, using web recruitment, and improve HR processes so that employees become more satisfied (Foster, 2010). Above all, it seems that the correlation between individuals and E-HRM capabilities will result in greater involvement from personnel in the recruitment and selection process within the consulting firms.

E-HRM can thus help to reduce costs and simplify recruitment and selection processes. In addition, E-HRM helps simplify the screening process as applicants with unwanted qualification automatically drop out using technological tools.

2.3.2 Modern screening units

The screening units do not perfectly sort the candidates and properties. There are a number of screening units that can be put to use, including references, grades, education, previous work experience, race, gender and appearance (Salop & Salop, 1976). But with all the possibilities the technology brings in today's screening process, it is common to also make use of social media as a screening unit. This has created divided opinions among experts in the field. Consulting firms must be aware of the ethical concerns that arise when they are using social media for employment proposes, as well as they need to consider the existing legal framework and guidelines (Melanthiou, 2015). The practice of employee screening trough social media can naturally have an impact on the decision of hiring a job seeker or not, while the legal implications can easily arise with the wrong use of information. On the one hand, the companies can favour the use of social network screening through the concerns about impression management, discrimination, data protection and security (Jeske and Shultz, 2015). On the other hand, the companies must take the risk of making judgements on the applicant's personal qualities trough a social media (Stoughton, 2015). Another key thing to remember is that job seekers these days have the possibility to review the company's recruitment practice, which could improve or aggravate the impression applicants have of the company (DeVaro, 2016). This is something that must be considered as a risk for consulting companies that make use of social network screening, as job seekers may feel that their privacy is being invaded, which can lead to a lower organisational attraction. Moreover, in a highly competitive industry, such as the consulting industry, organisational attraction is a major key (Madera et al. 2016).

One of the results from Stiglitz's (1975) research showed that "whether there is "too much" or "too little" screening in a competing economy depends on several assumptions related to; screening technology, how well-informed the individuals are related to their own abilities, the content of the production process, and whether screening is primarily hierarchical or "job matching"" (Stiglitz, 1975, p. 299). Salop & Salop's (1976) research on the other hand, showed that when expenditure vary across companies, self-selection can result in a better match between the company's needs and the employee's qualifications. Self-selection is described as "a price system that causes the job seeker to reveal truthful information about himself through his market behaviour" "Salop & Salop, 1976, p. 620). The research therefore shows that a match between the company's needs and the employee's qualification depends on both signalling, from the job seeker's side, and screening from the employer.

2.4 Employer branding

Increasingly, consulting firms use branding principles within HR to attract qualified employees and to ensure that current employees are engaged in corporate culture and strategy (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004). Employer branding is based on a perception that human capital gives value to the business, and that investment in human capital can give the business improved results. Resource-based view supports the mentioned argumentation, and Barney (1991) suggests that characteristics of the company's resources can contribute to significant competitive advantages. In short, implementing an employer brand strategy can help the consulting firms to grow and become more profitable (Rutter et al. 2016). But what is employer brand, and how does the company's reputation affect your recruitment?

Backhaus and Tikoo (2004) suggest that employer branding is: "the differentiation of a firm's characteristics as an employer from those of its competitors. The employment brand highlights the unique aspects of the employment offerings or environment" (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004). Backhaus and Tikoo's (2004) definition correspond to the greatest extent with the perspective of the task's problem and case, as they adopt a procedural approach to the concept. Their definition will therefore form the basis of the further discussion. Effective employer branding raises your business from being one of many similar employers, to becoming the employer the greatest talent wants to work for (Sameen, 2016). Awareness about the company, recognition and possibility of career development in the company results in the company becoming more attractive in the labour market and opening up for the most qualified job seekers to show interest (Mosley, 2015). Therefore, in an increasingly competitive labour market, companies must invest more in developing their reputation in order to attract, engage and retain talent.

The more attractive your workplace is considered to be by job seekers, the easier it will be to find the right candidates who will not only be able to solve the job in the best possible way, but which will also fit best into your business (Theurer et al., 2016). According to Brindle (2016), job seekers choose their employer mainly based on location (47%), the possibility of career development in the company (23%), and the image the applicant has by the company (16%). This research reinforces the arguments of company attraction by Mosley (2015), by emphasising the possibility of career development in the company.

Figure 2. 1 Choosing your employer (David Brindle, The Guardian, 2016)

In an Employer Branding survey from CareerArc (2015) found that 75% of job seekers take a company's employer brand into consideration before they apply for the job (see appendix 2). 58% of millennials even say that they would be willing to accept a lower income if they could work for a company with the same values as them (Recruit Systems, 2017).

The best candidates are in search of jobs in companies they can recognise in. Take the Millennium Generation for example: These people who were born between 1980 and 1995 want to work in companies that have a clear purpose and can identify a need and solve this need with passion and strong values.

In a market where jobseekers are increasingly demanding about the companies they want to work for, it is essential that as a recruiter one should build up a corporate culture that attracts the people you want to reach. Be clear about the company's values, goals and ambitions. Talk highly about why you work with what you do and what difference you make with your solutions (Theurer et al., 2016).

2.4.1 Diversifying the company profile

Consulting firms are already proven to be an attractive workplace for university graduates, which indicates that they are already implementing a successful employer branding strategy (Zeenny et al. 2017). However, the question should not be how the consulting firms are going to attract more of the same type of graduates, but instead it should be on how they can diversify the profile of the organisation.

According to the report on employer branding from Conference Board (2001), organisations have found that employer branding leads to competitive advantages, helps employees to internalise the company's values and assists in retaining employees.
Understanding your employees' needs and desires and taking steps to work towards achieving this will provide you with more loyal and satisfied employees – leading to more motivated employees who will do their utmost to solve the job in the best way possible (Boundarouk et al., 2012). Employees who are motivated will also be proud to work for a company with a strong brand. It is simply impossible to build up a strong employer brand if the company's employees do not feel particularly good or do not feel that they are getting what they were promised (Shahzad et al. 2011). Before you manage to build the company's reputation, you must therefore work for a

working environment where the employees thrive and can be developed – and where good performances is celebrated and skilled people are getting credit (Sameen, 2016). Employer branding will therefore help you build a good reputation both externally and within companies (Shahzad et al. 2011). Having said that, a challenge will still be to make graduates with different academic backgrounds to look at the consulting firms as an attractive workplace.

Often promising candidates who turn out not to fit perfectly for one position can work well in another position the companies announce at a later date (Sameen, 2016). By gathering such candidates in a network, keeping in touch with them and continuing to make a good impression, you can always have strong candidates (Jonsen, 2019). This could be a start in solving the problem of diversity in the consulting firms company profile. If the company is known to be an attractive workplace and current employees are happy, then you will be able to build a large diversified network of potential candidates based on referrals only (Shahzad et al. 2011). The chance is therefore greater that find the right candidates for your company.

2.6 Conclusion

Much has been done in the areas of recruitment and selection of employees in recent years (Leisink & Steijin, 2008; Ma & Allen, 2009), and the internet is well represented in the research (Voermans et al. 2007). The use of social media when it comes to employee selection is to a small extent covered by the research (Melanthiou, 2015; Jeske and Shultz, 2015), especially when it comes to consulting companies in Norway. A lot of research has been done on job interviews etc., but little on the actual process of how E-HRM has changed the way consulting firms practice their screening and employer branding.

Scientific articles on screening and employer branding in the Norwegian context have been researched very little. The research has not found any articles on how consulting firms practice their screening or employer branding, and what kind of challenges that rises during their recruitment process. Nor is it clear how consulting firms in Norway use social media when hiring.

Based on the current body of knowledge, the question is how consulting companies can attract and select the top diversified number of graduates?

The research will further present the method chapter. This describes, among other things, which methods were chosen for data collection in order to be able to answer the research questions in an appropriate manner. Both the interview and the experiment guide were based on the theory presented in this chapter.

Chapter 3

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

This chapter is presenting the research methodology used to answer the research questions, which focus on the theoretical perspectives chosen to shed light on the challenges within E-HRM, employer branding and screening.

The chapter includes research design, data collection, data analysis, and the validity and reliability of the study. Here, the research will give a theoretical presentation, but also argue for the choice of method. Since several research designs can achieve the same objectives in a study, the design is chosen according to how well suited it is to answering the research question (Zikmund et al. 2013).

Before the research decide which research design to use, it must be decided whether the study is qualitative or quantitative. The main element that distinguishes between these two types of collection methods is the different degree of structuring, as well as the categorisation of the properties. A qualitative approach searches for meaningful contexts in its chosen research element to achieve a clearer overall picture (Brannen, 2017). Furthermore, it is also important for researchers to understand the informant’s point of view in order to be able to transform the viewpoint into useful information (Zikmund et al. 2013).

Qualitative approach	Quantitative approach
Study soft reality	Study hard reality
Opinion links	Causality
Going into depth	Provides superficial information
Comprehensive understanding	Limited understanding
Proximity to those studied (Participant ideal)	Distance to those studied (Spectator ideal)

Table 3. 1 Differences in quantitative and qualitative approach (Brannen, 2017)

Although there are differences between the methods, Brannen (2017) think that these methods should not be viewed as contradictory directions, but as a range of possibilities that can be used individually or in combination with each other. What one must consider when choosing a method that is expediency. Thus, one must consider which data and approach are most appropriate for answering the research questions (Brannen, 2017).

To gain the necessary insight the choice fell on qualitative research interview. This type of research is intended to understand the world as seen by the informants or the interviewers, where the focus is on their personal involvements and experiences of the world over scientific explanations (Willis, 2018). Using a qualitative method allows researchers to get a more comprehensive answer that will help researchers to draw an approximate conclusion on the research question. It is therefore crucial that there are open questions that allow for thoughts and feelings about the topic. This contributes to a more comprehensive picture. When it comes to using a quantitative method, researchers will be able to deal with a large amount of informants and the answers will provide superficial information, but based on previous research it will help researchers reach a final conclusion.

3.2 Research design

The choice of research design depends on several factors, and especially on what the purpose of the research is. Any research work is characterised by unconscious and conscious blockages (Kelly et al. 2017). It is important for the research to become aware of some of these blockages because they control the entire research process. Perhaps the most important forms of blocking are related to what are called paradigms, and in this case positivist and interpretivist (Kelly et al. 2017). It is demonstrated by the researcher in table 3.2 a differentiation between positivist- and interpretivist paradigms based on Thanh and Thanh (2015), and Kelly et al. (2017).

Positivist paradigm	Interpretivist paradigm
The research is aimed at making descriptions and finding legalities (the relationship between variables).	Research is informed about finding an inner interpretation of the world, how they understand and evaluate their own situation

The thinking is guided by specific theories and hypotheses.	Distinct and comprehensive studies
Well-defined and limited studies.	The researcher's attention is less focused and can "flow" more widely.
The research concentrates on generalisations and abstraction.	Research concentrates on the specific, but also attempts on generalizations.
Within this direction, one can only comment on what is – and not on what it should look like.	Less concerned with distinguishing between the stock exchange and the stock exchange. Subjectivity is recognised in this direction.
Assume that there is an objective and stable world outside the observer. The social word "is" and functions as the natural physical environment. Society is seen as an object that can be measured and weighed.	The world around does not have a given structure, but must be interpreted.
The researcher tries to use a consistently rational, verbal and logical approach to the object they are investigating. All terms used in the research are defined so that	A pre-understanding that often cannot be expressed in words or is not fully evidence – unspoken knowledge – plays and important role.

measurement methods are carefully specified.	
Statistical and mathematical techniques for qualitative data collection are central.	Data is often non-quantitative
The researcher is objective; he tries to keep a distance between himself and the object he is investigating; takes the role of external observer.	Both distance and participation; Scientists are a participant who will experience what he studies from the inside.
Distinguishes between science and personal experience.	The researcher accepts that he is influenced by both science and personal experience; he uses his personality as an instrument.
The researcher tries to be emotionally neutral and clearly distinguished between reason and assumptions.	The researcher allows both assumptions and reasons to control sinus treatment.

Table 3. 2 Differences between positivist and interpretivist paradigm (Researchers table).

While positivism has an assumption that knowledge is objective and can be codified, interpretivist has an assumption that there is no real truth and that information can be interpreted on several levels (Thanh and Thanh, 2015). Unlike positivism which is based on deductive-hypothesis testing and quantitative methods, then interpretivist relies on inductive studies and qualitative methods such as interviewing and interpreting texts, which is why the research approach is located in the interpretivist paradigm (Kelly et al. 2017).

3.3 Method for data collection

The study is based on the use of qualitative research interview to gain an in-depth understanding of the topic. One can argue that the broadest understanding is achieved through unstructured interviews where the informant gets to talk freely (Willis, 2018). Nevertheless, the research found it most appropriate to use a so-called semi-structured interview. It is chosen to base the research on interviews with qualified employees in the chosen consulting firms, rather than questionnaires as they would not provide the necessary information for the purpose of the assignment. This is because the assignment wants to investigate the recruitment process from the highly competitive companies' point of view.

It was prepared an interview guide with some predefined questions (see appendix 1). The order questions were asked, were adjusted where it was natural. The data collected through semi-structured in-depth interviews was with HR directors and recruiters of consulting firms in Oslo during the period May to September 2019. Semi-structured in-depth interviews may be appropriate for exploratory research (Saunders et al. 2019), because they are structured with "weak" boundaries. This means that the informant is encouraged to tell about his/her experience of situations without strict control from the interviewer's side. The interview guide (see appendix 1) was developed based on the theoretical framework and conversation with the key informant, and was primarily used as a checklist to ensure that all relevant questions were answered. The interviews were transcribed in their entirety.

3.3.1 Ethical considerations

Contact with the companies was primarily made in the form of e-mail. Here, it stated the problem area and the purpose of the task. The informants were promised full anonymity, and that the data collected from the interviews would be treated confidentially. The names of the informants and the companies therefore do not appear in this task. Sensitive information is also not published in this thesis, and the information analysed is only the one concerning recruitment, attracting and selection methods, and topics related to them. The interviews were recorded with a cell phone. The audio files were deleted after the transcribed interviews were stored on a password protected computer. The recorded interviews will also be deleted no later than one year after the assignment is submitted.

Data collection trough in-depth interviews raises several considerations (Willis, 2018). Initially, the interviews were not designed in a way that requires obtaining sensitive information. In cases where sensitive information was released, this was the informant's choice. The informants were initially informed of the right to withdraw from the interview and that their participation was voluntary. In addition, they were informed of the time frame for the interview, which was stated between 30-60 minutes. The researcher got in good contact with all the informants who participated, and in no way came into conflict with these before or during the interview process. No one chose to withdraw from the interviews.

3.3.2 Interview

According to Yin (2009), interview is one of the most important sources of case study information. Semi-structured in-depth interviews were chosen as a method because it gives the interviewer the opportunity to examine something carefully, while giving the informant the opportunity to explain or build on their answers (Saunders et al. 2019). This can lead to discussions about areas that the interviewer had not considered before the interview, but which may be significant for the understanding of the relevant research area. The interviews are therefore a "guided" conversation rather than a structured questioning (Yin, 2009). This approach seems to be the most appropriate for the data collection for this task, because it answered questions related to the issue, while allowing for the opportunity for new insights and information on the problem area.

As mentioned above, an interview guide (see appendix 1) was designed based on tendencies from theory and from the conversation with the key informant. This means that it was set up a list of topics the study wanted to cover and formulated the questions accordingly. According to Saunders et al. (2019) one should start the interview with general questions to "break the ice". Then it went from the general to the more specific. A first draft was used for the interview with the key informant, and then something modified in relation to the information that emerged from this. The modified interview guide was then used for the in-depth interviews. This made it possible to keep the focus on the problem area, while at the same time the open structure of the question places made it possible to obtain information about the informant's own experience.

The interviews were carried out at the informants' workplace, or over the phone. The duration was between 30-60 minutes. Notes were taken during the interviews and they were transcribed continuously. Immediate transcription is essential to get a comprehensive overview of all information that comes consuming and most of the interviews had to be reviewed twice to ensure that all information was properly written down (Willis, 2018). This is necessary because as a researcher one should not only be interested in what the informant says, but also the way it is said (Saunders et al. 2019). The transcribed interviews were then stored electronically. To keep the informants' anonymity, the individual transcripts are coded with different terms.

3.4 Analysis

Collection of qualitative data could lead to challenges for the analysis. The fact that the material which have been collected is characterised by the fact that it is complicated and not standardised, will mean that it may be necessary to summarise, categorise and restructure it. This is to prepare the material for a meaningful analysis (Saunders et al. 2019).

Analysing the interview material was a comprehensive and continuous process. The analysis of the data material started already during the interviews, as it was regularly summarised what the respondents had said. This was done both to make sure that it was understood what the respondent had intended and to stimulate the respondent to provide an overview of that we had covered.

The analysis of the data from the interviews was analysed by data reduction, categorisation and finally by structuring and finding patterns. It started by making a summary of each interview after the transcription was completed. Such a summary is appropriate for shortening the document to include the key points (Saunders et al. 2019). Then the data was categorised into appropriate categories. In some cases, the research ended up choosing material that did not help answer the problem. In other cases, it ended up that categories were merged because it was considered to affect the same theme. One objection to categorising the data material is that on detaches parts of the material from their original context. It can thus prevent one from seeing the overall perspective and one can miss important information (Saunders et al. 2019). Each interview led to a lot of work, and had to be heard several times. However, the number of interviews was reasonable, so it was easier to remember every single interview almost to the detail. This meant that each interview was thoroughly processed and fresh in memory.

So, it was easier to keep an overall impression, even though the interviews were broken up. The respondents were given different colour codes to keep the data separate. Otherwise, the original document were used to find the connection if something was unclear. It was necessary to have a thorough preparation to draw conclusions from.

3.5 Reliability and validity

It is important to have a critical approach to the work and reflect on the quality of the research. Yin (2009) mentions three tests commonly used to establish the quality of empirical exploratory case study research. These are construction validity, external validity and reliability.

Construction validity means that the researcher must develop a satisfactory operational set of goals, so that the starting point for data collection is not based on subjective assessments (Nardi, 2018). This is ensured in the research because of the various companies, which works as several sources of evidence. In addition to the fact that the interviews are conducted with a key informant to evaluate and validate the questions that are the basis of the data collection.

External validity involves assessing the area within which the study can be generalised (Nardi, 2018). The study does not involve researching a simple organisation, as well as it doesn't have the opportunity to follow the organisation over time. On the other hand, the research address several consulting companies. Each company then becomes a case. One of the advantages of multiple cases is that it enables comparison of the different cases, as well as establishing similarities between them (Saunders et al. 2019). One limitation of case studies is to generalise the findings to the population of consulting companies, because of the capacity to collect data from a limited number of informants. This is partly solved by the fact that the sample consists of companies with various magnitude, and thus represents a wider selection. Yin (2009) suggests that multiple case studies are preferred over single case studies, because the findings can be generalised to a greater extent.

While quantitative methods are often based on statistical generalisation, case studies rely on analytical generalisation. Statistical generalisation means that the researcher attempts to generalise a particular set of results to a broader theory using a replication logic (Yin, 2009). So, throughout the interviews one should predict equal results, but also predict contradictory results for predictable reasons.

All of the cases are consulting firms, and in this way they are the same. They present differences by being companies of global and local magnitude, and will therefore be able to predict contradictory results. The goal of the reliability discussion is to judge whether the findings in the investigation had become the same if another researcher had repeated the study. You apply with this to minimise errors and bias (Yin, 2009). In order to satisfy the requirement for reliability, it is therefore important that you throughout the process are careful to document the steps you take and justify the choices you make. This will be done by transcribing the interviews shortly after they are done. This is especially important during the interview process, which is the basis for the data material and thus the subsequent analysis.

Chapter 4

DATA ANALYSIS

This chapter will link the results of the interviews to issues and findings from the literature. The purpose of this chapter is to present the results that will relate to the problems and findings in the literature, as well as to describe the connections between theory and empirical data. The researcher used the key findings to answer the research question and to achieve the objectives of the study. The objectives were to identify the challenges consulting firms face in their recruitment process, how they conduct their screening, and how employer branding can reinforce the different aspects of affiliation. This chapter provides the presentation of the qualitative data gathered from the respondents.

4.1 Interview

The result obtained will be based on the answers from the in-depth interview from both the HR manager and other employees in charge of recruitment, although it was desirable to have the interviews with both HR manager and another employee who works with recruitment daily (see table 4.1). The companies where the interviews have been conducted with both desirable employees, has provided a basis for comparison.
The findings are organised in the same main themes as the interview guide (see appendix 1). The research chooses to start with recruitment process,

then screening methods, and finally employer branding and selection. As mentioned, only the answers that help answer the research question that is presented. In addition, quotes that help confirm the analysis will only be presented once, although they may help to substantiate and prove several explanations.

Company	HR Manager	Other employee
Company 1	X	X
Company 2	X	
Company 3		X
Company 4	X	X
Company 5	X	
Company 6		X

Table 4. 1 Overview of interview objects

4.1.1 Opening questions

As explained in the methodology chapter, it was desirable to open the interviews with some questions that helped to soften the mood (Willis, 2018). Which was intended to give the interview objects an opportunity to answer freely on relatively open questions such as what the interviewee consider to be the most important part of the recruitment department, and what kind of expertise the different employees have. The purpose of asking about the various variables was to gain a greater understanding of what the interviewee thinks about the recruitment process in their own company.

Variables	Findings

	HR Manager	Other employee
Gender	- 2 females - 2 males	- 1 female - 3 males
Job title	- HR Manager - HR Director	- HR consultant - HR advisor - Senior recruitment consultant
Expertise	- Psychology - Experience - Analytical thinking	- HR graduates - Analytical thinking

Table 4. 2 Overview of interviewees

The findings in the above table shows the variety of interview objects. Several of the interviews reveal differences, but also special similarities in their personal thoughts about the expertise needed to succeed as an employee in the recruitment process in their companies. As shown in the table, there is an obvious link between the expertise that the interviewees hold, but which they also believe is very important to succeed in a job of recruitment in a consulting firm, namely analytical thinking. In accordance with education, a wide range of previous experience is also desirable. Several of the HR managers interviewed have many years of experience in HR, and the findings indicate that this is emphasised to a greater extent than specified education. The reason that experience can count more than education is basically that if you have worked for a long time, you become proficient at excluding unrelated information, as well as reading people and their body language (see chapter 2.2). This is confirmed by Company 1, where everyone in charge of recruitment has experience from this before.

"(...) we have been doing this for a long time, so we feel that we are quite good at extracting the information that is important to us".

The statement from Company 1 is supported by HR manager in Company 4.

"(...) one becomes very good at reading people and body language, but it usually takes a couple of years before you start mastering it".

4.1.2 Recruitment methods

All interviewees were asked to explain how the recruitment process is taking place in the company in question, and the summary of the results is shown in table 4.3.

Company	**First Interview**	**Second interview**	**Third interview**	**Group interview**	**Case**	**Tests**
Company 1	X	X		X	X	
Company 2	X	X	X	X	X	X
Company 3	X	X		X	X	X

Company 4	X	X			X	
Company 5	X	X	X	X	X	X
Company 6	X	X	X		X	

Table 4. 3 Recruitment process

From the table, it is clear that all companies consistently run first and second interviews in the recruitment process to form an impression of the candidate in question. Three of the companies also use a third round of interviews, as this will give the company a better basis for decision if one is left with several good candidates and have doubts about who to hire (DeVaro, 2016). It is important to point out that for every step of the process, applicants will be eliminated which will help narrow it down to a manageable proportion of applicants.

"So those who are hired are at least through three interviews" (Company 6).

"I see that when we divide it into two interviews, it is often just that we divide what we should ask for on two different days" (Company 3).

When it comes to conducting the interview, several companies use a structured interview as a first-time interview so that they can more easily compare the responses of different candidates. The interviews identify a clear pattern in the way consulting firms choose to use a template on how the interview should be conducted, and in addition the questions are asked in such a way that the candidate opens (Sameen, 2016). As they get further into the process, some of the companies normally go into more an unstructured chat so they can become better acquainted with the candidate.

"In the first interview we use an interview template that we have, and we try to ask the candidates the same sort of question. This is what in the subject of recruitment is called structured interview" (HR manager, Company 2).

"Then we implement it in a fairly structured way for which we have a template" (HR manager, Company 1).

"And when forced, we go into a little more unstructured talk, because we may want to become better known simply" (HR manager, company 5).

In relation to recruitment of graduate consultants, the findings supported by previous research indicate that group interviewing is the best recruitment method (Rutter et al. 2016). In principle, there are many applicants for this type of work, and to give all applicants an opportunity to come for an interview, group interview is highly applicable. This gives interviewees the opportunity to observe how the candidates work in a social setting as opposed to a typical one-on-one interview.

"We call all the graduate applicants for an interview, and it goes by in groups of 30-40 pieces at a time, where they work for usually about three hours (…)

It's actually a three hour course they get. There are a number of things like audition, some cases, group assignments and performances, so we see how they make contact with other people and stuff" (Company 1).

"We have used it in relation to graduate recruitment in the large, where many people who are going into the same type of position, but otherwise it is used little" (Company 3).

"To test newly graduates, where there is often many at once, then we have had group interviews to examine how they work in teams" (HR manager, company 2).

The diversity of companies prioritises being more present during the interview process (see chapter 2.2). One will then direct the interview, while the other will act more as an observer, as it will contribute to a broader basis for decision-making. On the other hand, it is pointed out that there are no specific guidelines for how many should be present in such a process, but that it is the type of position that determines. At local offices, where there is no specified HR department, there are always two pieces that carry out the interviews, where one has more experience that the other. The reason for this is that experience can make it easier to interpret people and read their reactions during the interview (Ashley and Empson, 2016).

"No, we are never alone. We are happy to be at least two" (HR Manager, Company 4).

"(…) The other interviewer may have an observational role, because it makes him able to evaluate how we run the interview. We always have a lot of discussion when we're done" (HR manager, company 2).

"There is always a minimum of two people, and there is always someone who is quite experienced" (HR manager, company 5).

The table indicates that all companies use cases to a greater or lesser extent to evaluate the graduate consultant applicants. The use depends on the position and level at which it is recruited. Several of the companies confirm that cases are mainly used to map the graduates' skillset. The purpose of the case is to give the candidates an opportunity to show their academic and analytical skills, as well as how they handle stressful situations (Bulger et al. 2016). Case preparation varies between companies. Some send out the case in advance, while others choose to start the interview be handing out a case to be presented within 15-20 minutes.

"Then we run a case, there are certainly many opinions about it, but at least it gives the candidate an opportunity to show themselves in a good way in regards to professional and analytical characteristics, and how they cope with a bit of such pressure and stress situation (…)" (HR manager, company 4).

“Yes, but the case is mostly done in connection with the manager, and specialist recruitment, and in special cases if the customer wants it” (Company 3).

The use of various tests, such as personality, ability and skill tests, is repeated at four of the companies. Like the case, the use of tests varies with type of position (Ashley and Empson, 2016). Among the companies that use this method there are different procedures. Some send out the test tool beforehand, others do this during the interview. A common factor for all is that the candidates are matched up to the desired competence, and this thus forms the basis further in the process. That said, the use of proficiency tests emphasised by Bulger et al. (2016) is just mentioned as significant by two of the participating companies. It is however emphasised by all companies that it can be difficult to form a real impression of the person when using the test, so it is important not to look blindly at the results. A test tells little about the candidate, and the companies thus use these as a supplement to other recruitment methods.

“(...) this goes on personality tests and some ability tests if we want to. We have English tests, we have reasoning, we have financial and analytical, so we have a variety of tests” (HR manager, Company 2).

"Sometimes we also have tests that we run the candidates on, depending on what the client wants and type of position of course" (HR manager, Company 5).

"There is some difference because in a normal employee recruitment we do not use personality tests or analysis. We do this at the managerial and specialist level" (Company, 3).

From the table, it is clear that all companies choose to employ several recruitment methods. This will help ensure that the company finds the candidate that is most relevant according to the job description (Ashley and Empson, 2016). The HR managers and other relevant employees that were interviewed are responsible for hiring mainly consultants in their own company, and therefore use all the different recruitment methods, but adapt the use as needed. It is then natural that companies, even though being in the same industry, use different recruitment procedures as shown in Table 4.3.

4.1.2.1 Summary

The research shows that first- and second-time interviews are the most attractive recruitment method among the interviewed companies, which correspond with the findings in chapter 2.2. The use of case and tests is seen as a supplementary tool, in addition to the traditional interview. Ashley and Empson (2016) mentions an assessment centre as one of the most common and important parts of the recruitment process, something you may relate to a group interview. The findings consider a group interview to be the favourable part in the process of recruiting graduate consultants, as the companies do not have the resources to conduct one-on-one interviews with all relevant candidates.

All companies use several recruitment methods, some more than others. It is a time-consuming process, but important investment for the company because it is expensive to fail and relatively difficult to recruit new employees. It is therefore more important to use the right screening tools to obtain sufficient information about the job seeker.

4.1.3 Screening methods

When the deadline to apply for a vacancy has expired, the company is left with many applicants. It is now a question of finding the right candidate according to the job description, and all companies screen the candidates according to the requirements that apply to the position. How the relevant companies screen the candidates is listed in the table below (table 4.4).

Company	**Application and resume**	**References**	**Check of conduct credit etc.**	**Network**	**Social media**
Company 1	X	X	X	X	X
Company 2	X		X	X	X

Company 3	X	X	X	X	
Company 4	X	X	X		
Company 5	X	X	X		X
Company 6	X		X		X

Table 4. 4 Overview of screening tools

The most commonly used screening tool is application text and CV. The CV provides information on previous experience, positions and educational background, of which application text contains additional information about the applicant, such as personal characteristics. Through these two sources of information, the company has the opportunity to form an impression of the candidate before any interview process starts (Donelly and Gamsu, 2019). Most companies use only electronic applications and CVs that are registered in a database, and because of the new General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) it must go through a portal (see chapter 2.3.1). This makes it easier to screen the candidates against the desired qualifications, as well as it simplifies the handling of the applicant pool. The findings show that desired qualifications vary from company to company depending on the position to be filled. However, most companies focus on both professional competence and personal characteristics, where the professional part can be replaced with relevant work experience. In company 2, it is incredibly important for the candidates to have good academic results to show that they are academically proficient and have the ability to learn quickly. The overall impression of the candidate is important, but good academic competence is emphasised highly. Unlike company 2, where academic results are important, it has less relevance in company 6. Here, there is a high focus on absenteeism, especially in connection with seasonal work, and whether the candidate fits into the environment. Qualifications are considered, but they never look at exam papers. The remaining companies have a fairly equal emphasis on desired personal characteristics and competence.

"Then you have a kind of guide internally for what to look for. After all, you are concerned about academic results, you are concerned about the quality of the application as such, experience, study abroad, work next to your studies, etc." (HR Manager, Company 2).

"We look for qualifications, but that doesn't mean that we base their qualifications by looking at their exam papers and stuff, to put it that way" (Company 6).

"The use of an electronic CV and application has to do with handling and the search pool. It is very much easier and also with the idea of communication flow" (Company 3).

"When people write, create CVs and application text, there are many who have read up on what should be there, so I feel that people write very standardised" (HR Manager, Company 5)

Most interviewees, like company 5, expressed their concern on the application texts that tends to be standardised because many job applicants have read up on what should be there, based on job posting. Thus, the companies cannot be sure that the information provided in the application is true (Law et al. 2016). However, the majority of the firms interviewed felt comfortable in their abilities to distinguish candidates who shows genuine interest or not, despite receiving a high number of generalised applications. The companies therefore believe that their organisational attraction can contribute to minimise the number of standardised applications (Law et al. 2016).

Four out of six companies specify that reference check is an important screening tool. In order to check a reference, one must have come a long way in the interview process, and this tool is used after a possible first interview. A reference serves as a further quality check of the candidate concerned, to ensure that the impression from the interview is correct (DeVaro, 2016). The findings display that it is desirable for the employer that the candidate provide at least two references, as they may risk a subjective description of the job applicant using only one reference. Furthermore, several companies prefer different types of references, such as a colleague and a superior. This provides an opportunity for companies to obtain additional information about the candidate, but from multiple angles (Muthuveloo, 2017). In addition, some companies contact references that have not been provided by the candidate. This is because job seekers tend to provide references that will only provide a positive image of the candidate, thus creating a false impression of the person.

"Reference checks can be very biased, as you would normally not list a reference unless they are likely to have got good things to say about you, so they need to be taken with a pinch of salt" (HR Manager, Company 2).

"(..) it's very ok to get different references. Maybe both a former employer or a colleague, and a subordinate possibly, slightly different angles" (HR manager, Company 1).

"Or that we use someone we know they know, or who have worked with them in the past" (Company, 3).

The overview of screening tools shows that checks of conduct, credit etc. is a natural prerequisite to be allowed to work in the consulting industry (Parry, 2011). According to company 6, a certificate of good conduct is checked in accordance with, among other things, educational positions, but you are not entitled to check this if you are going to hire laundry help. While creditworthiness is checked in relation to candidates who are going into financial positions. It is confirmed by company 4 that it is not desirable for a customer advisor who has debt collection requirements to give financial advice to others. Honesty is highly valued in company 5. If HR managers find that the candidate is punished for financial fraud, there will be a breach of this trust and the candidate will not be hired.

“In some positions, we check the certificate of conduct and these things. We also do this in day care, educational professions where it is important (...) it can also be economical, that we check the creditworthiness of people who are going into financial positions” (Company 6).

“If we get a counsellor who is in debt collection with a lot of unpaid claims, then of course it makes it difficult. How and why would you manage to advise other people, when you can’t manage your own finances?” (HR manager, Company 4).

"(...) we have been on the verge of hiring people and then we have been told that they have been punished for things like financial fraud, so it is actually quite important to investigate" (HR Manager, Company 5).

Networks are used both according to reference use, but also before the announcement of a position if relevant candidates are within the network (Jeske and Shultz, 2015). It is important to point out that even if the relevant candidate is found before an announcement takes place, it is the same recruitment processes that are carried out.

"Before we announce a position we usually want to know if there is anybody within the company that know anyone suitable for the job" (HR manager, company 1).

"(...) there is always someone who knows someone, so much you can find out that way" (HR manager, Company 2).

"We can also use our network, and colleagues here, I can hear with other offices if they have someone who can match (...)" (Company 3).

The participants also discussed the use of social media as a growing trend (see chapter 2.3.2). The findings show that half of the interviewed companies use social media to screen job seekers. Here, mainly personal information, such as private pictures, is taken into consideration. However, the companies should be careful when taking the risk of making judgements on the applicant's personal qualities trough a social media (Stoughton, 2015), something the interview with company 4 emphasise.

"I may take a look at Facebook, often because of the picture" (Company 1).

"We are very careful in the use of social media, as this can create a false impression on the candidate" (HR manager, company 4).

It is clear in Table 4.4 that the only similarity between the companies is the use of CV and application, and the assumption of good quality and credit. Through these two sources of information, the company gets an initial impression of the candidate and, on the basis of this, can screen out stale candidates who do not fulfil the desired qualifications (Salop & Salop, 1976). This is the fundamental step in the screening process, and based on the findings from the interviews it indicates that it has almost become a mandatory part of the selection process. There is little to indicate that there are clear guidelines on which screening methods are most optimal, and the use of networks, testimonials, references and social media varies from company to company. All companies agree that screening job seekers is an indispensable process, as obtaining information about the candidate is essential in the form of successful employment (Strohmeier & Kabst 2009). If you do not get enough information through one screening method, the company chooses to supplement with more.

4.1.3.1 Summary

CV, application and reference are the most common screening methods among the interviewed companies. These methods give companies access to both academic results and personal qualities. It is clear that networking is one of the least used screening tools, but can be an important source of information and retrieval of relevant candidates. Here, social media will also be an important resource in connection with information search, as this gives companies access to private and personal information about the candidate. Social media is available to most people, making it an easy search channel for businesses, but also for job seekers.

4.1.4 Employer branding

The messages that the consulting companies convey to different target groups in the recruitment process were found to vary to a greater extent than the characteristics of the recruitment practice itself. The informants characterised their businesses as a complex organisation with many different departments and divisions, making it challenging to choose which main messages are important to convey, and which target groups it is desirable to focus on. However, the relevant companies have given a roughly estimate on the current employees' academic background (see figure 4.1), which gives us an estimate on their previous target groups.

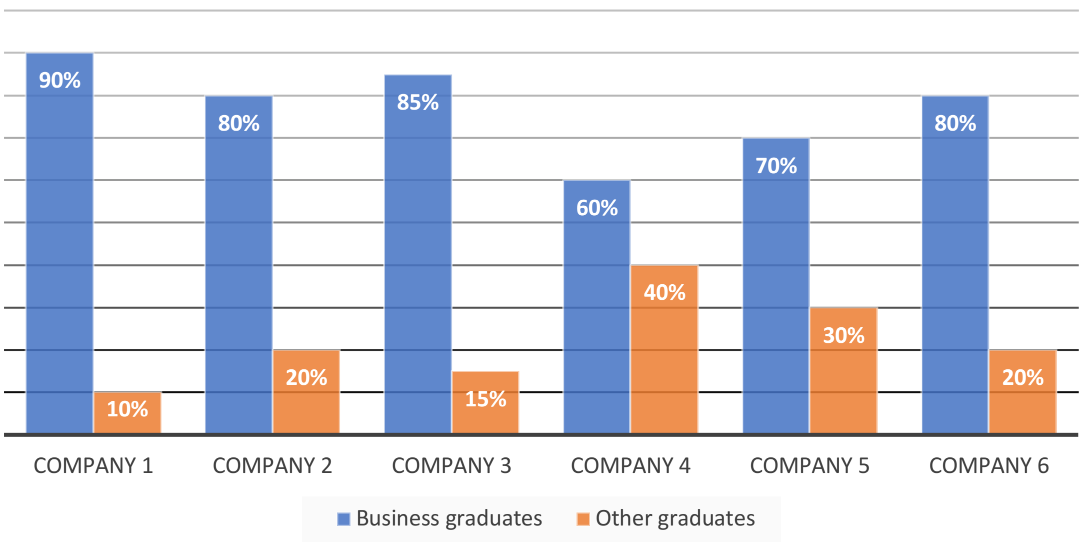

Figure 4. 1 Employee background

The informants agreed that employer branding is a key and critical tool in their company, but that there is a great need for increased focus and resources in this area. The participating companies were unanimous in the discussion about the importance of being able to communicate the corporate identity to graduate consultants, as the competition between the companies is so high. This corresponds with Mosley (2015) research which emphasises the importance of candidates being engaged in the culture and strategy of the corporates. The participants were nevertheless divided in the opinions of how productive they were in today's work with employer branding, where their capacity was the biggest challenge. This may indicate a trend in some of the companies where they prioritise or underestimate the importance of employer branding.

"We have half a job working with student activities, contact with colleges, etc., but it is administrative work and participation (...)we do not have a clear strategy " (HR Manager, Company 4).

“More people is needed because employer branding is large, comprehensive, and it requires more than just one person to work with it. It is to a much greater extent a strategic coordinator role» (Hr Manager, Company 2.)

"We are among the fastest growing consultancy companies in Norway. Many of the companies in Norway that are at almost- size with us has a very strong team that only works with employer branding. (...) We have a great job to do there” (Company 6).

There was great agreement among the informants that job seekers often have a completely wrong impression of their companies and what they are actually working with. This indicates a clear improvement potential in the field that Backhaus and Tikoo (2004) consider to be essential in the challenge consulting companies face in attracting graduates who can meet the needs that arise in the market in the future. The companies' marketing focuses a great deal on financial advice, but the informants expressed the importance of being able to convey a message that the consulting companies are as open to other types of graduates, such as people with an academic background in IT, cyber security and psychology.

"Graduates have a completely wrong picture of what we as a company do. That we create exciting technical solutions and things like that, they thought we had outsourced to a technology company. So, we as a company have a long way to go and a great job to do, to get the right message out to the market about what we do (HR Manager, Company 1).

The majority of consulting firms surveyed collaborate with universities and receive data on how students and young professionals rate their companies as employers, how they relate to other companies, and what criteria are important to them when choosing an employer (Theurer et al. 2016). There were somewhat different opinions among the informants in relation to how the data from the universities are used in the recruitment work with regard to what is communicated in job advertisements and interviews. It was emphasised that this data can be used actively to create an identity to be communicated to potential new employees. However, the companies had different opinions on the different channels that is best suited to reach out to the different target groups (see figure 4.2).

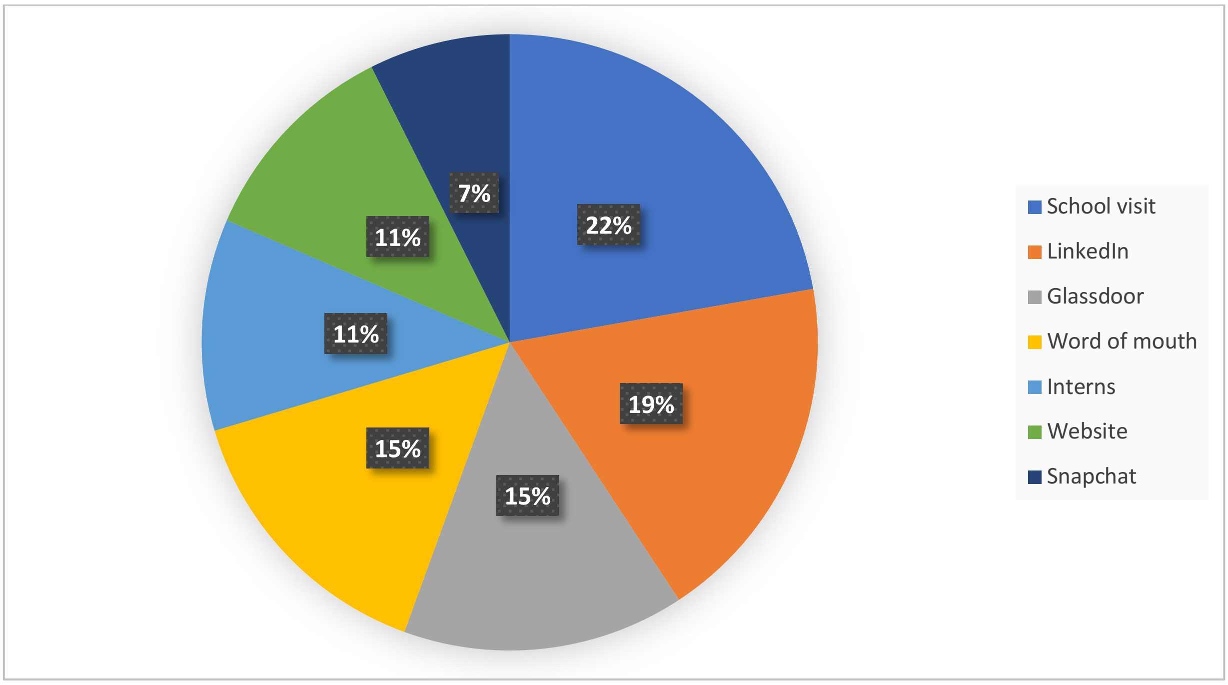

Figure 4. 2 Employer branding channels

During the interviews with every single informant, it was emphasised that their work with employer branding is about attracting a greater variety of graduates (see chapter 2.4.1). To create a greater variation in the academic background of employees. This will mean having to take advantage of new channels and market themselves in, such as social media.

"We work a lot with industries and towards universities. Employer branding is closely linked to this work. We want to develop the recruitment base, those who will choose education and those who will educate themselves in the way ahead" (Company 3).

"We need to try identify future challenges, and therefore create a greater variety of employees. We see social media as a platform to reach out to a greater diversity of students" (HR manager, company 5).

The last statement indicates the informant's assumption that their work with employer branding is mainly aimed at a desire for greater diversity (Johnsen 2019). So, the research chose to dig deeper into the questions, where the other HR managers now where asked what their employer branding goals are. This was to map how the companies now referenced work that is mainly about reaching out to newly graduated medicine students, IT students, psychology students etc. Unlike the majority of newly graduated economists they already have as employees.

"When people think about consulting, they think about finance. But we want to be an attractive place to work for more than just economy graduates, we are also interested in people who have studied medicine, psychology etc. So, diversifying our image is the biggest challenge for the employer branding, as it does not matter what kind of background you come from as you could still become a wonderful consultant "(HR manager, Company 1).

"If we start getting people in from different academic backgrounds, it will act as a pioneer for future applicants, as the environments are often large. We want to raise awareness. When we are on school visits, some programmes think that they do not fit in with us" (HR Manager, company 2).

Apart from the informants' analysis of their internal data, it can be understood that more work can be done with strategic mapping and analysis of the organisation's identity with the aim of disseminating this to potential employees. The informants explain that regular employee surveys are conducted, and that the data from them were of a positive nature. Nevertheless, the informants described that data from the employee survey was not suitable for profiling the company, as it is either confidential information or little informative and somewhat pretentious in a branding context (Boundarouk et al. 2012). The challenge of the complexity of the organisation proved to be at least as valid in terms of mapping and disseminating the organisation's identity and culture, as in relation to target groups. Significantly, every informant identified their biggest challenge to diversifying their employer brand.

4.1.4.1 Summary

The findings identify similarities in the channels the companies choose to use in both the screening and employer branding process. School visits and the use of various social media are proving to be the most used channels to reach the target groups. These channels help the consultancy firms to establish a personal relationship with current- and possible candidates at an early stage of the recruitment process (see appendix 3). Which channels the companies choose to use will be a key factor on whether they will succeed in their desire to attract a greater diversity of applicants.

4.2 Summary

This chapter presents the empirical findings that emerged in the interviews with HR directors and other employees working on recruitment for consulting firms. To summarise, it was found that the company's recruitment function, with the role and competence of the recruitment advisers, as well as the well-established practice, facilitates a professional and efficient recruitment process. The screening companies conducts creates an assurance that the candidates they interview, are largely capable of stepping into the role they wish to fill.

The company's direct marketing is used as a form of employer branding, where the message of position and organisation is attempted to diversify, which makes the whole process more complex.

The HR executives say that their company does not have a simple, clean profile above all target groups, which was also reflected in the interviews of the remaining employees. The dissemination about the organisation's strategy, values and vision and the position's work tasks are integrated into the laid down recruitment processes. Communicating messages about people, organisation and development is not something that seems downplayed, which can be an important factor in their desire to attract a broad diversity of applicants. The lack of analytical mapping of the company's identity can be decisive in this regard. After all, it seemed that the companies' depth, rather than diversity, in professional competence appeared as a unique feature of the organisation in all the interviews.

Chapter 5

CONCLUSION

This thesis is based on the belief that the recruitment process for consulting companies is of great importance for the competitive advantage of businesses. The struggle for talented workforce places new demands on the recruitment function of businesses, and it should be of great interest to organisations to seek more knowledge about how they screen candidates and how to practice their employer branding, which can serve as a useful tool in meeting today's employees. The study initially asked:

How can consulting companies attract and select the top diversified number of graduates?

In the light of this, the following questions were initially asked: *What are the main challenges in consulting firms' recruitment practices, how do they conduct their screening of candidates, and how can employer branding reinforce the different aspects of affiliation?*

In order to answer the main problem, several sub-questions have been initiated related to the analysis of empirical data and theory in the field, where all the findings together answers the main questions. To respond to how employer branding processes should be angled to reinforce a diversity of job seekers to the consulting firms that participated, the research first looked at how current employer branding processes are being worked in the companies. All companies state that they will work towards both external and internal target groups (DeVaro, 2016). However, Theurer et al. (2016) points out that employer branding processes are aimed at employees, which in principle is an overlooked problem in research, business literature and most companies. Although there is a strategic overall plan that explicitly states that the consulting firms work with both employees and potential employees, it seems that some companies have not been given this too much consideration, as they explained their employer branding processes during the entire interviews. However, according to the findings, top management is aware that they can be better at directing employer branding processes more towards employees, and in this case, more towards target groups such as psychology and IT graduates, to make the organisation an attractive workplace. Conscious work with employer branding aimed at employees, experienced psychologists and IT staff will touch on various aspects that can strengthen the employee's connection to each consulting company.

The research has been narrowed down to concern the leading consulting firms' offices in Oslo. It was nevertheless desirable to get in touch with companies of different sizes, which the findings display. The research shows interesting facts about the similarities between the companies. However, it acknowledges the limitations of the task. Finally, the task is limited by the fact that the organisations were built in a divisional way. It is obvious to think that the research would have achieved other results if the organisations had been structured differently. Informants from the same industry, but across national boundaries, and different organisational structures, would give many startling answers. However, with limited time available, as well as the number of informants, the validity of the study would probably have dropped substantially. It can therefore be seen as an advantage to the study that it confined itself to large organisations from the private business sector. To strengthen the basis of comparison, it was appropriate that the informants and their companies had some commonalities. Still, the study should emphasise that there is a likelihood that the recruitment process and work methodology will be different in other organisations, including due to size, leadership, sector placement, company culture and structure.

The analysed data display several different aspects and factors in the organisation that helped create a good and positive association between a greater diversity of graduates, but which are not, however, pursued under strategies for working with employer branding. This thus leads to the second sub-question where the aim was to analyse how the companies screen the candidates. Based on the literature, the research found that there was a research gap in terms of screening and use of modern methods, such as social media in a Norwegian context. In addition, no scientific articles were found that discuss how screening through social media affects the match between the job description and the person hired.

The uniqueness of the study is to ascertain how companies in Norway use this relatively new source of information, such as e.g. social media, in the selection process and what effect this source has on the match between person and position. In the analysis, it was confirmed that job interviewing is the most common recruitment method and CV, application, case and reference are the most commonly used screening tools. Against this backdrop, companies get information about job seekers' skills and personal characteristics. That said, the study has provided additional literature to the literature, including that case is a recruitment method used by all companies. All the companies saw more advantages than disadvantages in using case in the sense that it gave the companies an opportunity to get an impression of the candidate's ability to handle stressful situations. Case studies have not been discussed in previous research, at least not in the researchers' experience. According to the researchers' impression, the case should be used to a greater extent in an international context as it seems that the benefits are higher than the cost. However, many felt that this did not provide sufficient information and thus used information search on social media to get a more comprehensive picture of the job seeker. Furthermore, the results indicated that negative information found on social media affected more than positive information. The consequence of this is that the job seeker may lose the opportunity to attend a possible interview, and thus be excluded from further evaluation. For the company, however, the use of social media can contribute to a better match between person and job description.

In order to answer how consulting companies should attract and select the top diversified number of graduates, it is essential to refer to employer branding and screening of candidates that can reinforce the various aspects.

For example, it becomes important that HR is aware that work with employer branding will always include elements of the psychological contract, which affect employees' emotional attachment to the organisation. A focus on nurturing the psychological contract will thus be one of many aspects that strengthen the connection between the employee and the organisation. Another aspect that can be reinforced through employer branding strategies is the feeling of job satisfaction and motivation. Although the findings show that these aspects emerge to a very large extent, and that it indicates that there is harmony in the organisations based on what the interviewees conveyed in the interviews. In addition, we see that employer branding can strengthen the association of consultants by focusing on forming a good organisational culture and a good reputation both among the public and employees. A good culture will increase the working environment and well-being, which is an important aspect of affiliation and a good reputation helps to attract skilled employees but also to retain the good employees in times of decline.

Chapter 6

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings and analysis in this research, it would be beneficial for the involved consulting firms, as well as other companies, to take into consideration the following recommendations to better solve the challenges they face in the recruitment process.

- Not only are the candidates screened, but the job seeker also has the opportunity to screen the business. It is therefore important that companies are aware of this and update the social media, as well as the website frequently.
  Schnidman et al. (2017) list career websites and social media accounts among the best channels to build and measure your employer brand (see appendix 3). The research indicates that job applicants first and foremost visit the company's website to get an impression of the company, and then social media to get to know those who work there. The study also confirms the information from the participants that the biggest challenge for the coming years will be to obtain a diversified workforce in order to be competitive (see appendix 4). Therefore, the social media profiles should show what kind of projects the company is working on, and what social activities they do- even outside of working hours. The challenge is that most posts are about the business itself. This is certainly in line with the communication

strategy and brand guidelines, but a key premise for getting attention is to say something the target group is concerned about. Therefore, be less concerned with the strategy and more concerned with what the target group is looking for.
This is perhaps the quickest and easiest step you can take to build the company's reputation.

- Furthermore, the companies should have a clear communication plan in relation to informing about selection procedures, by including both what, how and why. Selection information proves to be the most cost-effective justice rule to optimise. It is related to the fairness of the job relevance rule, which is found to have the greatest effect on the experience of justice in rejected applicants, and can therefore be of great importance to the company's employer brand. Focus groups should be conducted in the various departments to identify what employees perceive as central, sustained and unique in the organisation. This can be decisive with a view to conveying true and sustainable messages to potential employees. If the goal is to consider the recruitment process as a communication channel to strengthen the company's employer brand, it is decisive to prepare a strategic plan and collective practice in relation to how data on the target group should be used actively in the search for a diversity of graduates.
- If the company is known to be an attractive workplace and current employees are satisfied, then it is possible to build a large network of potential candidates based solely on referrals from employees. The chances are therefore that they will find the right candidates for their

company. A good tool for this is LinkedIn where the barrier to connecting with others in a business perspective is lower than elsewhere. Often, promising candidates who do not fit perfectly in one position will be able to perform well in another position the company will be announcing at a later date. The recommendation is to gather such candidates in a network, keeping in touch with them and showing interest, so the company constantly have a "bank" of strong candidates.

6.1 Limitations of the study

Due to the limited time-frame allocated for the master thesis, the researcher must rely on conducting interviews with HR managers and companies, instead of analysing applicants point of view, to complete the work on time. Therefore, one cannot be sure that the findings reflect the thinking of those who apply for jobs, even though the research has tried to understand their role in the process. In addition, research has not analysed results related to participants' attitudes to contradictions due to this time limit.

Another weakness of the study is that the questions posed to the interview subjects were not tested beforehand at similar companies. Only the supervisor checked whether the questions provided answers to research questions and research questions.

In relation to the theoretical basis, there is very little theory that is directly linked to this exact study, and may have been taken out of context. Since previous research focuses on areas other than the consulting industry, such as health-related recruitment, they are thus not optimal for this study and may give erroneous results.

6.2 Suggestions for further study

Finally, in this concluding chapter, the study consider proposals for further research. The qualitative study has covered a range of companies that are limited both in terms of industry sectors and geographical area. It may therefore be that studies in other sectors or other geographical areas had resulted in other results.

Only a limited selection of companies was represented in the interviews, and the study could advantageously be conducted on a larger number of interview items, so that the findings could be more generalised. The researchers therefore recommend that this should be considered in further research. Additionally, the study should utilise the results the researchers did not have the opportunity to include in the study regarding attitudes to contradictions. Further research should therefore include a quantitative part to generalise findings to a greater extent. At the same time, in further research in the field, it may be advantageous to focus more deeply on the elements mentioned in this thesis.

One of the challenges in this study has been to specify the differences in companies' recruitment challenges, especially in the areas of screening and employer branding. It may therefore be appropriate to have used a more consistent distinction between these phases in the collection of data.

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LIST OF APPENDICES

Appendix 1: Interview guide

A: Role and competence

- What do you consider to be the most important work tasks in your recruitment department?
- What expertise do employees have who work with recruitment in your business?

B: Recruitment practice

- How does the recruitment process take place today, both internally and for applicants? (from the moment the position is announced, to employment) - 1,2,3 interview, case, group, etc.
- How do you choose candidates who get an interview? (What do you look for?)
- How do you work on identifying future competence and recruitment needs?
- Which part of the recruitment do you spend most resources on?
- Over the past 5-10 years, how have your recruitment work evolved?

C: Strategy

Screening

- How do you screen? (How to obtain candidate information)
- How do you check the candidates? (If the information the candidate publishes is legit)

- What information is most often missing about the candidate? (How to get this information)

Employer branding

- How do you as a business want to be perceived by potential employees?

a) What measures do you have to influence this?

- Is there a survey and/or analysis of what the employees experience as central and distinctive characteristics of you as an organisation?

a) If yes - how?

- Do you find that your organisation works purposefully to appear as an attractive and unique workplace?

a) If yes - deepen goals and action plan

b) If no - how would you say this affects your recruitment work?

General strategy

- Despite being a company that works with a very wide range of areas of expertise, would you say that you are using almost the same recruitment process regardless of the type of employee you are looking for?
- In what way can recruitment, in your opinion, help your business achieve its overall goals?
- How important is the reference check for you?
- What do you consider to be their biggest challenge in today's recruitment process?

- Are there any special, possibly others, challenges you expect to face in the near future?

D: Closing

- Are there any important factors in their recruitment work that have not been covered in this interview?

Appendix 2: Importance of employer branding

Source: CareerArc (2015)

Appendix 3: Employer branding through social media

Source: Schnidman et al. (2017).

Appendix 4: Recruitment trends

Source: Schnidman et al. (2017).

Appendix 5: Consent form

APPENDIX II

CONSENT FORM

(To be used if participants are 18 or over)

Programme of Study: MSc International Business Management

Dissertation or Project Title: Recruitment challenges – A study of how consulting firms practice their recruitment

Module Code: MK7227

Supervisor: Willa Garvin

i. I consent to the processing of my personal information for the purposes explained to me. I understand that such information will be treated in accordance with the terms of the Data Protection Act 1998'. (*Please tick in the case of questionnaires/interviews involving the collection of data falling under the Data Protection Act 1998 definition of '**sensitive personal data'***) ☐

ii. (*Please tick where **anonymous questionnaires** are used*) By taking part in this study I fully understand that 'Submission of a partially completed or fully completed questionnaire implies consent to participate in the study and that I will be unable to withdraw my data'. ☐

iii. I confirm that I have read the participant information sheet for the above study and I have been given a copy to keep. ☐

iv. I understand what the study is about and I have had the opportunity to discuss with the researcher and ask questions about the study. ☐

v. The procedures involved have been explained to me. I know what my part will be in the study and how the study may affect me. ☐

vi. I understand that my involvement in this study and particular data from this research will remain strictly confidential. Only researchers involved in the study will have access to the data. ☐

vii. It has been explained to me what will happen to the data once the study has been completed. ☐

viii. I understand that I have the right to stop taking part in the study at any time without reason or prejudice to myself. ☐

ix. I know who to contact if I have any questions/concerns about my participation and I have their contact details. ☐

x. I fully and freely consent to participate in the study. ☐

Please tick to agree

Participant's name:...

Participant's signature:...

Date:.........................

Researcher's Name:...

Researcher's Signature:...

Date:.........................

Appendix 6: Participant Informant Letter

Participant Information Letter

Programme of Study: MSc International Business Management

Dissertation or Project Title: Recruitment challenges – A study of how consulting firms practice their recruitment

Module Code: MK7227

Dear Participant,

You are being invited to take part in a research study. Before you decide whether to participate, it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully and ask us if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information. Take time to decide whether or not you wish to take part.

What is the purpose of the study?

This project will include research on the recruitment process in elite consulting firms. The aim is to study the reasons for why consulting firms is such an attractive workplace for university graduates, how they practice their recruitment process, and what challenges they face. The objectives of my research will be to examine how the participating consulting firms obtain credible information on their job seekers trough screening, and how they use branding principles within HR to attract qualified employees and to ensure that current employees are engaged in corporate culture and strategy.

The employees are the biggest assets any consulting firms have as they are the ones who represents the company, making their recruitment process more critical than in many other industries.
The outcome will hopefully be to get under the skin of a highly competitive industry and study how they keep their competitive edge through having a successful recruitment process. While the potential contribution to knowledge will be that my experience and knowledge as a master student will be enough to identify, and come with recommendations to how the mixture of recruitment processes can solve their challenges.

The main method that will be used in this research is interviews with the ones responsible or works with the recruitment process of the companies, mainly HR directors etc. The reason for choosing this method is obviously because this will give the most precise information to answer the research question, as I haven't found any valid research done on this subject before. Participants chosen for this research is specially chosen because of their essential role in their respective companies. The only form of personal data that are to be collected as a part of the research from the participants is their age, as it will be an indicator on level of experience the different participants will possess.

What will I have to do if I take part?

The method that will be used in this research is mainly interviews. The interviews will take place at the participant's workplace, or through the phone as some might not be at the office throughout the summer. The interviews will take between 30-60 minutes.

What are the possible disadvantages or risks of taking part?

If the participant should feel any discomfort or risk related to any of the questions that are being raised, then they should inform the researcher that they would like to advance to the next question. That said, there is no disadvantage or risk to participants by

Do I have to take part?

You are under no obligation to participate in this study. If you do decide to take part, you are free to withdraw at any time without giving a reason. If you do not take part or withdraw from the study at a later date, it will not disadvantage you. Except in the case of partially completed, anonymous on-line questionnaires, all data related to your responses will also be safely destroyed unless you state otherwise. Submission of a partially completed or fully completed questionnaire implies consent to participate in the study and you will be unable to withdraw your data.

What will happen to the information?

Your participation in this study and all information collected will be kept strictly confidential in accordance with the Data Protection Act (1998). Unless otherwise indicated, all personal information and data collected will be coded and anonymised so that you cannot be recognised from it. The collected data will be securely stored on a password protected computer and safely disposed of once the project/dissertation has been completed.

The results of this study will be reported as part of my degree programme and may be further disseminated for scientific benefit. The results will be available to you on request.

Who should I contact for further information or if I have any problems/concerns?

Student: Eirik Sundby (u1815883uel.ac.uk)
Supervisor: Wilma Garvin (w.garvin@uel.ac.uk)

If you have any queries regarding the conduct of the programme in which you are being asked to participate, please contact:
Catherine Hitchens, Ethics Integrity Manager, Graduate School, EB 1.43
University of East London, Docklands Campus, London E16 2RD
(Telephone: 020 8223 6683, Email: researchethics@uel.ac.uk)

Appendix 7: SREC- and Travel Overseas application and approval

School Research Ethics Committee Application Front Sheet

Field Name	Details to complete
Student Number(s)	U1815883
Programme	MSc International Business Management
Module Code	MK7227
Project Title	Recruitment challenges – A study of how consulting firms practice their recruitment
Project Supervisor/Tutor	Wilma Garvin
Please confirm that you completed the form based on your supervisor or tutor instructions and recommendations.	I confirm that I have completed the form based on my supervisors instructions and recommendations.
What form of primary data collection will your project involve?	Information about recruitment processes
Supervisor/Tutor Review Decision (**Not completed by the student**)	*Proceed with research; all parts of the application have been appropriately completed together with permissions from organisations and proposed interview questions.*
Supervisor/Tutor Review Comments and Amendments Required for Resubmission (If "Minor" or "Major", **Not completed by the student**)	

Application for School Research Ethics Approval

Before completing this form, applicants should read the School Research Ethics Committee Guidance Notes 2018-19. Sections A to F of this form should not exceed 3 pages using 11pt font size.

1. Applicant Details

Student Name: Eirik Sundby

Student ID No: U1815883

Title of Course: MSc International Business Management

Dissertation/Project Module Code: MK7227

Supervisor: Wilma Garvin

UEL Email address: u1815883@uel.ac.uk

2. Project Details

Dissertation/Project Title: Recruitment challenges – A study of how consulting firms practice their recruitment

Duration of Dissertation/Project:

From: May 2019 **to:** September 2019

Project Rationale: (Please provide a brief description of the project, including aims and objectives, rationale, and potential contribution to knowledge) **(Max. 200 words)**

This project will include research on the recruitment process in elite consulting firms. The aim is to study the reasons for why consulting firms is such an attractive workplace for university graduates, how they practice their recruitment process, and what challenges they face.
The objectives of my research will be to examine how the participating consulting firms obtain credible information on their job seekers trough screening, and how they use branding principles within HR to attract qualified employees and to ensure that current employees are engaged in corporate culture and strategy. The rationale is to get under the skin of a highly competitive industry and study how they keep their competitive edge through having a successful recruitment process. The potential contribution to knowledge will be that my experience and knowledge as a master student will be enough to identify, and come with recommendations to how the mixture of recruitment processes can solve their challenges.

Methodology: (Please provide a brief outline of the methodology and research methods to be used, attaching any interview schedules or questionnaires that are to be used. This must include a description of the expected sample/main participants and how this sample will be identified/participants will be selected. Also, you should include information about the precise location where the work will be carried out.) **(Max 150 words)**

The work will be carried out in Oslo, Norway. The reason for choosing to study the international companies' offices in Norway is that these are the ones I have been in contact with as I speak fluent Norwegian, and that it gives an international insight of the research.
The main method that will be used in this research is interviews with the ones responsible or works with the recruitment process of the companies, mainly HR directors etc. The reason for choosing this method is obviously because this will give the most precise information to answer the research question, as I haven't found any valid research done on this subject before. Participants chosen for this research is specially chosen because of their essential role in their respective companies.

3. Ethical Considerations: **(Please ensure you complete sections 3.1 to 3.8 and respond to each section, incomplete applications will be rejected)**

3.1 Informed Consent and Anonymity (Please provide details of how informed consent is to be obtained and anonymity of participants is to be protected).

The anonymity of my research objectives is highly important as the recruitment process they practice gives each firm a competitive edge. The involved firms will therefore be given made up names to secure that their information will not be abused.

3.2 Participant Confidentiality (In order to comply with the Data Protection Act 1998, please provide details of how you will ensure the confidentiality of participants' data, particularly where audio and/or visual data is to be collected).

The participants and all information collected in this study will be kept strictly confidential in accordance with the Data Protection Act 1998. All personal information and data collected will be coded and anonymised so that they cannot be recognised from it. The collected data will be securely stored on a password protected computer and safely disposed of once the dissertation has been completed. The same procedure will be the case if the participants accepts that the interviews will be recorded.

3.3 Will the project/dissertation involve minors (participants under 18 years old) or other ethically-sensitive methods/issues.

NO

If carrying out research with minors (although it is strongly advised that you do not) you must obtain parental consent and, where necessary, attach a DRB certificate (previously CRB). For further guidance please see: https://www.gov.uk/disclosure-barring-service-check/arranging-checks-as-an-employer).

3.4 Participant Withdrawal/De-Briefing protocol. Please describe briefly the protocol for participant withdrawal from the research and de-briefing of participants once the research is completed. (will participants/participant organisations be given an opportunity to ask questions at the end of the interview and/or request a copy of the final report?)

Participants will get the opportunity to ask questions about my research at the end of the interview. They will also receive a copy of the final report if that would be of interest, so they can see how their information has helped the assessment. Participants are under no obligation to participate in the study. If any participant would like to withdraw from the study, then they are free to that at any given time. If a participant do take part and withdraw from the study at a later date, then this will not lead to any disadvantage for the participant. Submission of a partially completed or fully completed questionnaire implies consent to participate in the study and the participant will be unable to withdraw their data.

3.5 Researcher/Participant Welfare. Will either the researcher or participants themselves be exposed to any risks or distress as a consequence of this research?

NO

If YES please provide details and complete a risk assessment form (see Appendices) (http://www.uel.ac.uk/hrservices/hs/generaliskassessments/

3.6 Will any inducement (e.g. monetary or 'in kind') be offered to participants?

NO

If YES please provide details.

3.7 Will the research involve access to 'commercially-sensitive' or 'restricted' databases?

NO

(You must ensure that you have the consent of any business/organisation, to access and publish excerpts from any records or information that is not normally available to the public)

If YES please provide details.

3.8 Will the research involve travel away from UEL/overseas travel

YES

If YES you will need to ensure that you have completed the Student "Permission to Travel" form available on Moodle. This form must be approved signed by the Head of School or Head of Department at the Royal Docks School of Business and Law. You may also be required to complete a separate risk assessment form, which is available here: https://uelac.sharepoint.com/staff/pages/risk-assessment.aspx

4. <u>Data security and disposal</u> (Please ensure you tick all relevant boxes, incomplete applications will be rejected)

In order that the research is conducted in an ethical manner and that all information remain confidential in line with the 1998 Data Protection Act, It is vital that participant confidentiality is respected and ensured. Assurances must be given to participants that personal details will be securely stored and remain anonymous.

Please confirm by ticking the relevant boxes:-

☒ Research data, codes and all identifying information to be kept in separate locked filing cabinets.

☒ Access to computer files to be restricted to the research team (normally researcher and supervisor) and accessible by password only.

☒There will be no transfer of data to or via a third party.

☒ All electronic data will undergo <u>secure disposal</u>.

☒ All hardcopy data will undergo <u>secure disposal</u>.

☒ In line with the Data Protection Act (1998), **personal data** shall not be kept for longer than is necessary for that purpose or those purposes for which it was collected. In the case of UG and PG dissertations or projects this is usually **1 year**, unless otherwise specified.

Please state how long **personal data** will be retained for: No longer than one year.

5. Other Documentation check-list:

Please include the following documents with your application – please tick ☐

Participant invitation/information letter	☒
Relevant Consent form(s)	☒
Assent Forms	☐

Where applicable:

Permission letter from host business/organisation	☒
Overseas Travel/Fieldwork Risk Assessment	☒
Interview schedule/Copy of questionnaire(s)	☒

Is ethical clearance required from any other ethics committee? **NO**

If YES, please state the name of the relevant committee(s)/organisation.

Declaration:

- I have read the School guidance notes about application for ethical approval. I am aware of my responsibilities and agree to abide by them.
- I agree to inform my project supervisor or module tutor and the School Research Ethics Committee of any changes to the proposed programme.
- I undertake to abide by accepted ethical principles and appropriate code(s) of practice in carrying out this research.

Student Name and ID No: Eirik Sundby

Student Signature: Eirik Sundby

Date: 24/06/2019

RFA

REQUEST FOR APPROVAL TO TRAVEL OVERSEAS – STUDENT TRAVEL ONLY

- This form must be completed in full by the travelling student and ALL authorisations obtained **BEFORE** any travel arrangements are confirmed.
- If your overseas travel involves a research study with human participants or human data you **must** obtain ethical approval from the appropriate University research ethics committee **BEFORE** travel. Please be advised you should not make any travel arrangements before ethical approval is granted.
- Forms must reach UEL Travel for VCG approval no later than **TWO weeks prior to travel.** This is to ensure that all travel undertaken by students is undertaken safely and in line with UEL Policies & Procedures and external advice.
- Once completed, the form must be retained for 2 years by your School in case it needs to be reviewed during audit.
- A copy of this form will be retained by UEL Travel once the trip has been approved by a member of VCG. This will ensure that you are adequately insured during your trip.
- Please use additional sheets if necessary

FAILURE TO COMPLETE THIS FORM WILL RESULT IN DELAY TO YOUR PROPOSED TRIP

Name	Eirik Sundby	**Date of birth**	17/10/96
School	University of East London	**Student number**	u1815883

DETAILS OF PROPOSED VISIT (Please state Country & Region & City)

Dates: From	1 / 07 / 2019	**To**	1/ 09 / 2019
Journey: From	UK, England, London	**To**	Norway, Oslo

Title of Programme/course you are studying: MSc International Business Management

Purpose of travel: *i.e. outline of dissertation/project/ research*

The purpose of the travel is to conduct interviews with employees who works with recruitment in the consulting industry. The research will put light on challenges the consulting industry face in their recruitment.

RISK ASSESSMENT

Please **attach** the risk rating breakdown for the country/countries you propose to travel to from this link: www.mylifeline.co.uk (click on 'sign in' & then 'register here' using policy #: 0015865161. Search 'Country Reports')

IF the country/countries that you are proposing to travel to are deemed as having a risk rating breakdown of high or medium **risk** by Red24 then it is necessary to complete the **full risk assessment on page 2 (Section 1)**

Travel for the purpose of postgraduate research fieldwork to countries/regions where Red24 advise against travel or categorise the area as being in a state of **Extreme risk** is not permitted. A list of these countries can be found here: http://portal.ianallantravel.com/uel/risk-assessment-by-country/

In addition, prior to travel, it is also recommended that you sign up for free text updates to your mobile – these will update you in the event there are any changes to the risk rating breakdown of the country you plan to travel to. You can do this by signing back into www.mylifeline.co.uk & selecting 'MyAlerts'.

Before you travel please ensure you have consulted the **UEL Fieldwork Policy**. This can be downloaded via the following link: http://www.uel.ac.uk/hrservices/documents/hshandbook/fieldwork_policy.pdf

Section 1

RISK ASSESSMENT FORM FOR OVERSEAS TRAVEL - COUNTRY

- You are required to undertake a risk assessment prior to travelling this is to ensure all travel by students is undertaken safely and in-line with UEL Policies & Procedures and external advice.
- Please register your details with the following website & search 'Country Reports': www.mylifeline.co.uk . (click on 'sign in' & then 'register here' using policy #: 0015865161.) For further information: FCO travel advice https://www.gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice
- You must then complete the grid below for each country you are travelling to. Further sheets can be found: https://www.uel.ac.uk/secure/financialservices/expenses/ (section 4)

Aonprotect website country overall rating H/M/L: L

Country	Risks identified – as per www.aonprotect-red24.com	Level of risk: Low (1) Med (2) High (3)	Mitigating activity for each risk:	Likely impact of mitigating activity: High (1) Med (2) Low (3)	Overall assessment of risk (column 3 x column 5): Low (1) Med (2/3/4) High (6/9)
Norway	Crime	1			
	Terrorism	1			
	Conflict	1			
	Political	1			
	Kidnap	1			
	Infrastructure	1			

RISK ASSESSMENT – ACTIVITIES (being undertaken by UEL Student)

Please detail the activities that you plan to undertake during your trip.
i.e. attending a conference/activities you will be undertaking as part of your research/interviews etc.

Activities to be undertaken	High risk	Medium risk	Low risk
Research	☐	☐	☒
Interviews	☐	☐	☒
	☐	☐	☐
	☐	☐	☐
	☐	☐	☐

Section 2

CHECKLIST FOR TRAVEL

		Pls Check
INSURANCE	Obtain a copy of the insurance cover & emergency assistance card from Facilities website (insurance pages) https://www.uel.ac.uk/insurance/travel/index.htm	☒
FINANCE	Ensure that you have sufficient funds to cover the trip and that you know what your limits are	☒
JOURNEY & ACCOMMODATION	Ensure that your Director of Studies has a copy of your exact flight & accommodation details for your trip.	☒
VISAS & PASSPORT	Check if a visa is required. **NOTE:** If the purpose of the visit is academic research, please consult the relevant country's embassy/consulate website. In many cases a specific research visa may be required and it may not be permissible to conduct your proposed study under a standard tourist visa.	☒
	If required, most can be obtained via Visa Express (020 7251 4822, www.visaexpress.co.uk) or directly with the relevant Embassy or High Commission. Some, e.g. Russian visas, are more complex to obtain and can take time.	☒
	Check that your passport is valid for at least six months after the date of your trip. (NB some countries require more than six months – check with Ian Allan or Visa Express)	☒
	In some countries you should keep your passport with you at all times (check with relevant High Commission or Embassy). If not, keep it in your hotel safe.	☒
VACCINATIONS	Check with your GP if any vaccinations or health precautions are required. Keep receipts of any costs. Find out if you need to show proof of vaccinations on arrival at your destination.	☒
HEALTH	Tick to confirm that you are not travelling against the advice of your doctor or dentist	☒
ITINERARY	Make sure your Director of Studies, has details of your itinerary and contact details while abroad	☒
IN CASE OF EMERGENCIES	Make sure that you have 24/7 contact details of: • British Council/British High Commission/local contacts/relevant Embassy • One person at the University (who you can contact evenings and weekends) in case of emergencies. Make contact with your line Director of Studies (email or text) on a daily basis	☒
COPY, SCAN & SEND	In case of loss, copy, scan and send copies of all key documents to yourself. These would include your passport, tickets, schedule, contact list and emergency numbers.	☒

DECLARATION OF STUDENT: I confirm the following:

- I have a valid passport and visa (if applicable) for country or countries of travel.
- My Supervisor has a copy of my full itinerary
- Appropriate arrangements for regular contact are in place with my Supervisor while I'm abroad
- I have completed the overseas travel checklist in full (Section 2, page 3)
- I have attached the risk rating breakdown for the country/countries I propose to travel to & am not travelling against FCO advice
- I have completed a thorough risk assessment of the country/countries I propose to travel to (medium & high risk countries only) and the activities I will be undertaking
- I will monitor the risks of the trip until the date of travel. If any changes are necessary I will resubmit an updated risk assessment to Supervisor/Dean for re-approval prior to travel
- I will follow the requirements set out in the Fieldwork Policy

Signed: Date: 18/6/19

DECLARATION OFSUPERVISOR: I confirm the following:

- I approve the proposed overseas trip based on the risk assessment undertaken & activities that the student will be undertaking in section 1 and the completed checklist. If travel is not approved the form must be sent to the Dean for review. If approved the form must be sent to UEL Travel who will action VCG approval
- I confirm that this trip is in direct relation to the students programme/course of study at UEL

Name of Supervisor:

Signed : Date:

DECLARATION OF DEAN OF SCHOOL: I confirm the following:

- I approve the proposed overseas trip based on the completed Risk Register and checklist and the activities that the student will be undertaking.

Signed : Date:

APPROVED BY A MEMBER OF THE VICE CHANCELLOR'S GROUP following the confirmation that:

- The Dean approves the overseas trip
- The Dean approves the completed Risk Register and checklist for this overseas trip and the activities that the student will be undertaking.

Signed: Date: