



The Path to Purpose: How the Covid-19 Crisis Made Us Rethink Talent Attraction

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Abstract

The Covid-19 crisis was a period of massive disruption at a global scale. Aside the obvious effects it has had upon the health of millions of people, it has also generated tidal waves which affected businesses in many different industries. Before the pandemic, talent attraction was a field that was already challenged by a shortage of top skilled-workers and the high competition between global employers to recruit top talent. The War for Talent was intensified by the Covid-19 global pandemic: employees around the world either lost their jobs or were forced to work under pressuring conditions. As we are coming out of these outstanding and bizarre last years, talent attraction experts must begin to embrace that what worked to lure candidates in, may no longer have the same desirable outcomes now. New strategies and practices must be designed and applied to gain advantage in the war for talent.

This study gives an insight into the impact of the Covid-19 crisis upon the talent attraction field and what implications this has had upon organizational attractiveness as perceived by talent. The research was carried out in a global healthcare company headquartered in Denmark, where the author has been involved in talent attraction work for a year during the Covid-19 period. Using own insights, as well as data gathered through interviewing talent attraction experts and talent hired during the crisis, the study seeks to present the main challenges the organization faced during and post the pandemic. These findings emerged based on the thematic analysis which was the chosen qualitative analysis method.

Top talent has more demands now than ever and is not afraid to communicate that to potential employers, as well as push them to up the ante when it comes to what they can offer. They require honesty and transparency when encountering brands and they check whether there is symmetry between the identity of an organization and its day-to-day practices. Salaries and pension packages are no longer enough for this new talent audience, who is now asking: what more can you do for me as my future employer? Talent nowadays seeks work in organizations that are purpose-driven, which provide them with opportunities for growth, and that are actively driving change for the development of their organizational members, through new and innovative practices. This thesis is a valuable read for any human resources scholar or talent attraction practitioner who wishes to understand how a journey on the path to finding purpose can be leveraged as strategical advantage in the war for talent.

The Path to Purpose: How the Covid-19 Crisis Made Us Rethink Talent Attraction

Introduction

One of the top priorities in the Human Resources department of an organization is how to attract and retain talent. As complex a mission as this was before, the Covid-19 crisis complicated things as operations were put on halt and many companies had to rethink their usual processes of attracting, recruiting, hiring, and retaining employees. What followed was a period of massive disruption: people worked from remote, home-based offices for two years, interviews had to be done online, prospective future employees had to be somehow engaged with to secure companies' talent pipeline, while leaders had to come up with new personnel practices to uphold organizational strength and drive value.

As vaccines rolled out and social distancing restrictions began to lift, organizational members started to slowly make their comeback to the physical offices. Can there be talk of simply coming back without taking a closer look at the impact that Covid-19 had upon not only operations, but also on employees' lived experiences, attitudes, drive to join and stay in an organization? In a recent article published by McKinsey & Company, authors De Smet, Dowling, Mugayar-Baldocchi & Schaninger (2022) explain that the competition for talent is higher than ever. Something has changed. Individuals all over the world are either leaving their companies to pursue other roles somewhere else or they are leaving the workforce altogether. Why are they leaving? The cited authors' belief is that employees are leaving because they have been working under extreme conditions for an extended period and have been unsuccessful at finding a proper work-life balance. For now, they are choosing life until they decide to come back.

What do in-demand workers want? How have the rules of the game changed and what sort of expectations does top talent have now before they say yes to a job offer from a traditional employer? What does it take to win the war for talent? In my research paper, my aim has been to find explanations and answers to all these questions. I gained insight into talent attraction

practices and challenges through extensive reading on the topic, but also by immersing myself in the field for almost a year. Before carrying the reader through the literature review and what I found to be the most salient academic research on the topic, I wish to set the stage by presenting the context of my study. The case and the literature review will help the reader understand the thought process that has led me to a problem formulation for the thesis.

Case: Joining a multinational healthcare organization in Denmark

In August 2021, as part of my master's degree educational programme, I was required to do an internship in an organization where I could put into practice academic knowledge acquired throughout my studies, as well as gain some hands-on work experience. I got the opportunity to join one of Denmark's largest organizations, which is a global healthcare company whose mission is to drive change in defeating diabetes and other chronic disease. The headquarters of the organization are in Copenhagen, Denmark, while the total of 48.000 employees are spread across different countries, in affiliate offices. The work of the organization consists of researching, developing, producing, marketing, and selling medicine in 168 countries.

I began my journey as an intern in the Global Talent Attraction team, whose work is to come up with strategies to attract top talent to the company and engage in outreach activities where they could encounter these profiles. Prior to the Covid-19 global pandemic, the outreach activities consisted primarily of campus visits, physical career fairs and other face-to-face activities such as panel discussions, symposiums, company visits and more. The set-up of these activities was simple: gather a team of current organizational members, send them to one of these events and have them talk to students, fresh graduates, or individuals who are looking for work, and explain to them what kind of work the organization does and how they can join it.

The Covid-19 global pandemic hit Denmark, as well, and in March 2020 organizational members had to comply with the social distancing rules and regulations imposed by the Danish government. The Global Talent Attraction team was not an exception and in a very short amount of time they had to come up with a plan to somehow continue activities and secure the organization's talent pipelines. With very little time and resources, they had to act strategically and find a modality to replace the very core of their operations, which is connecting and meeting people to attract and convince them to come work for the organization. When I joined the organization and the Global Talent Attraction team, the period of disruption and social

distancing was slowly something that the organizational members were emerging out of. Large gatherings were, however, still not allowed in Denmark, so the outreach activities and talent attraction operations were taking place online and people were working remotely, but some days at the office for business-critical purposes were allowed, with a limitation on how many people could be there. Months later, the social distancing restrictions were lifted in Denmark and the Global Talent Attraction team could go back to running business as usually.

Literature Review

The War for Talent

In the talent attraction field, both academics and professionals will have come across the locution “the war for talent” at least once. The term dates back to 1998 (Chambers, Foulon, Handfield-Jones, Hankin & Michales) and is meant to illustrate the intense competition between employers to manage talent: attracting, selecting, developing, and retaining it. The theme of talent management became increasingly popular around the early 21st century, when the mainstream professional management community began regarding it as an essential activity within organizational management (Scullion, Collings & Caligiuri, 2010). In 2015, in contemporary markets, global operations began to dominate, and talent management remained a key priority for CEOs (Groysberg & Connolly, 2015). Global Talent Management refers to the activities that an organization undertakes in order to attract, select, develop and retain the very best talent from all over the world (Collings, Mellahi, & Cascio, 2019; Scullion et al., 2010; Tarique & Schuler, 2009).

In this context, the reader is advised to think of talent, just as defined by Gallardo – Gallardo & Thunnissen (2016): upcoming and current employees, which are top performers, and which display abundant potential for additional career development. Predominantly, talent is defined in terms of what rare or critical skillsets employees can offer (Barriere, Owens & Pobereskin, 2018), as well as how well they fit with the organizational brand. The latter of the two elements is discernable by the high alignment between employees’ motivation, personal values, own purpose, vision and behavior and the organization (Eds. Cappelli & Keller, 2017; Keller & Meaney, 2017). Organizational performance and overall organizational success are both positively and directly influenced by talent (Andrianova, Maor, & Schaninger, 2018; Keller &

Meaney, 2017). In addition to that, talent provides a long-lasting competitive advantage in a global marketplace, where products and services are habitually imitated or even upgraded by competition (Bafaro, Ellsworth, & Ghandi, 2017; Keller & Meaney, 2017).

Talent nowadays is two things: precious and scarce. According to global surveys from just a couple of years ago, there is an all-time high talent shortage (Deloitte, 2019; Manpower Group, 2018), where over half of the global companies were unable to attract the talent they need (Manpower Group, 2020), and less than 10% could retain talent within the organization (Deloitte, 2019; Keller & Meaney, 2017).

I found particularly interesting a point made by Daniels et al. (2007) in a study in which they identified that while strategically finding and getting the skilled talent is indeed beneficial in the short run, in the long run that competitive advantage will dwindle. That, according to Daniels et al., is because the “A” performers, the skilled and desirable talent, will eventually be tempted to move to other, more attractive companies. Based on this, talent attraction reveals itself as constantly in motion, with organizations on a cyclic mission of fetching new talent and filling in the gaps when talent leaves.

It is evident that keeping the talent once attracted inside the organization, as well as harnessing it to its full potential, has become a focal point of many organizations nowadays, as the pressure has shifted from technology and capital, which once were the core targets in the traditional workforce (Srinivasan, 2011). More and more the attention started to shift towards the retention of talent and resources began increasingly pouring into the development of new strategies to do so. Even so, the field of talent attraction is widely unexplored, with new challenges arising, adding on to the Sisyphean task of getting to the bottom of where talent is, what it wants, how can it be kept and leveraged for maximum results (Srinivasan, 2011). Jenson, McMullen, & Stark (2007) also lend support to the claim that the war for talent is intensifying, as in their view, talent is the key element that augments organizational competitive advantage. There are many tools and strategies that organizations are either developing or coming up with to secure their talent pipelines. Employer branding is an organizational strategy employed to attract talent, although not directly considered a part of talent management.

Brand and Talent

One strategy that organizations greatly rely on to attract talent is employer branding. Mandhanya and Shah (2010, pp. 43-48) define employer branding as a long and targeted strategical pursuit which aims to regulate the awareness and perception of current or future employees regarding an organization. Strong and effective branding is what gives visibility to organizations, especially if the aim is to have a global presence and a wide outreach. It is the way in which organizations present themselves to the world and to potential employees, seeking to draw their attention and desire to apply for jobs. Looking past the basic elements such as company logo, taglines and mascots, employer branding also includes the management of an organization's policies, procedures, mission and vision, all of these shaping the so-called company culture. Employer branding tools are not merely used to lure new candidates in, but also to keep the current employees motivated and committed, as not acting in line with what organizations promise to stand for can risk the loss of talent (Mandhanya & Shah, 2010).

One key element that enables organizations to recruit new talent is organizational reputation. The general perception of the reputation of an organization has great implications for the organization's stakeholders such as investors, clients, and potential new employees, because reputation gives people information (Fombrun, 1996). This pushes organizations to think very carefully about the way they present themselves as an employer to the world and apply strategies to appear attractive. Gatewood et al. (1993) and Rynes (1991) also supported the importance of employer branding, revealing through their extensive studies that the perceived reputation of an organization highly influences its capability to attract top talent. Lloyd (2002) describes employer branding as the process of constructing the image of being a fantastic place to work and placing that image in the minds of potential future employees.

There is complexity at the cross between brand and talent. Human resources management literature indicates that organizations often fall short when using brand building practices to attract and retain talent (Banta & Watras, 2019; Eds. Cappeli & Keller, 2017; Theurer, Tumasjan, Welpe & Lievens, 2018). Nevertheless, the brand building as a tool to attract and retain talent is an area that is still widely unexplored (Behrends, Baur & Zierke, 2020; Moroko & Uncles, 2016). The study is particularly frustrated by the lack of clarity regarding branding during times of crises, which considering recent events such as, for example, the global pandemic crisis COVID-19, would be of interest to both talent attraction scholars and

practitioners, I assume. What stands out in employer branding literature, however, is the belief that global and universal practices cannot always be used as a one-size-fits-all solution. The literature proposes instead a closer inspection of the current context in which employer branding is constructed and presented, so that branding practices become adapted to meet the needs and demands of current and upcoming talent (Aaker & Joachimsthaler, 2012; Vaiman, Sparrow, Schuler & Collings, 2018). Whatever promises talent attraction makes when seeking out new employees, through employer branding, must materialize through internal branding efforts once the new employees are onboard and throughout their experience as part of the organization (Adrianova et al., 2018; Erkmen et al., 2017). In turn, talent within the organization needs to act as a support for the brand and bring it to life when it encounters different groups of stakeholders. This can much more easily be achieved if there is symmetry between employer branding and the actual work experience (Bafaro et al., 2017; Merrilees, 2017).

The Covid-19 Crisis and its Impact on Talent Attraction

If we look at talent attraction on an imaginary axis of time, right now companies are at a point where the demand for talent is high, while the supply is moving downwards, which consequently makes talent attraction a critical business priority (Bersin, 2019; Keller & Meaney, 2017). There are studies which have proven that the lack of a sturdy talent pipeline can impact an organization's ability to both grow and achieve its strategic targets (Beechler & Woodward, 2009; Pananond & Giroud, 2016; PwC, 2016). Thus, one of the greatest challenges that organizations are facing is how to manage a workforce that is continuously becoming more and more diversified, educated and globally mobile (Froese et al., 2020; Khilji, Tarique, & Schuler, 2015).

The talent attraction challenge has been intensified by the COVID-19 (Corona virus, SARS-CoV-2) pandemic. Since late 2020, this global pandemic has massively impacted both the level of employment and the way in which people work (Kocha, Plattfaut, & Kregel, 2021). In 2020, the International Monetary Fund (2020) foresaw the Gross Domestic Product shrinking by 3% more than during the 2008 financial crisis. Estimates, brought forward by the International Labor Organization (2020), showed that almost half of the global workforce is at risk of losing their jobs from the hundreds of thousands of companies struggling with bankruptcy. Aside this, another prevalent aspect brought by this outstanding period of social distancing has been the

surge in the amount of employees that have had to work from home (Venkatesh, 2020; Waizenegger, McKenna, Cai & Bendz, 2020), which has led to organizations to react to the COVID-19 pandemic by investing in digitalized processes (Dwivedi et al., 2020; He, Zhang, & Li, 2021; Iivari, Sharma, & Venta-Olkkonen, 2020). International mobility of talent coming from abroad has been affected by the pandemic. Employees suddenly had new factors to take into consideration when deciding where, when and for whom to work. Online alternatives to the typical workday opened new avenues to a more even work-life balance and to working remotely from anywhere. With that, new inequalities formed, bringing those who could not do their jobs online at a disadvantage compared to employees that do not typically have to be physically present at work to carry on with their duties.

Job attractiveness and non-financial rewards

To Admison (2007), financial rewards are no longer the chief elements guiding talent in choosing employers, with other elements coming into play, elements which traditionally were not regarded as important as they had no immediate financial value to the employee. Zani et al. (2011) found that non-tangible rewards such as recognition or praise started being used by managers as methods to increase employees' motivation.

Mak & Akhtar (2003) carried out a study out of which resulted that non-financial benefits give employers the opportunities to influence their rewards structure in order to manage employee behavior. In addition to that, a reward structure can also be used to deliver on the promises made in the branding and attraction phases. Opportunities to learn and develop are rewarding in terms of skills acquisition (Mak & Akhtar, 2003), whereas praise and recognition leads to an increase in employees' self-esteem (Chiang & Birtch, 2011). Based on Mak & Akhtar's research, it can be understood that certain rewards will have different motivational attributes given by employees and that a one-size-fits-all reward package is difficult to design in an increasingly multinational market.

The matter is complicated by the fact that different generations of workers have different demands and needs, which consequently makes them attribute different value to non-financial rewards. The generation known as Millennials are the workforce that dealt with the changing nature of the traditional family setup. New ways of parenting and rises in the divorce rates led this generation to place great value on a more even work-life balance, family, mentorship, and

recognition (Amundson, 2007). Organizations worldwide started showing interest in developing new strategies of attracting, motivating, and keeping Millennial talent, strategies which ultimately would align to the needs of this generation (Thompson & Gregory, 2012). In their studies, Thompson and Gregory (2012) found that the most significant elements that contribute to talent attraction and retention are a good work-life balance, recognition, relationships at work, and last but not least, doing work driven by purpose or meaning. This was something that Amundson (2007) also noticed, writing that employees were becoming more and more inclined to choose employers based on the alignment between their own values and the organizations', and rather less based on what financial benefits they could get out of it. Moreover, the author observed that this pushed organizations and hiring managers to rethink their strategies and make the fitting changes to gain competitive advantage in the attraction of talent. This necessity to change according to the new needs of talent led to the development of new rewards and employee benefits that would leverage the attraction of desirable candidates.

Summary of Literature Review and Problem Formulation

To Adrianova, Maor & Schaninger (2018) and Keller & Meaney (2017) it is evident that organizational performance and success are both highly influenced by talent. This point is further supported by Bafaro, Ellsworth & Ghandi (2017), who on top of that purport that talent also provides precious competitive advantage in a global market where products and services are continuously copied among competitors. Thus, retaining acquired talent is just as important. Attracting top talent is only half the job as skilled workers will navigate to other companies if better opportunities arise.

Mandhanya & Shah (2010) brought a great contribution to human resources literature through their research on employer branding. To them, employer branding is a strategy that companies use to regulate the perception of current and future employers regarding an organization. It is more than just a tagline and a logo: it is everything a company does, which shapes the organizational culture. Moreover, it should also not be merely a way to lure candidates in, but instead a way to keep current employees motivated and committed. Rynes (1991), Gatewood et al. (1993), Fombrun (1996) and Lloyd (2002), add on to employer branding literature, discovering that organizational reputation plays a huge role in the attraction of talent. Strong employee branding strategies are what helps build reputation and place the image of being a fantastic workplace in the minds of potential new employees.

An interesting viewpoint is brought forward by Khilji, Tarique & Schuler (2015) and further supported by Froese et al. (2020), who state that one of the biggest challenges that companies are now dealing with is how to manage a workforce that is increasingly becoming more diversified, educated, and globally mobile than ever. This is a challenge that has been intensified by the Covid-19 global pandemic. Many employees lost their jobs and had to seek opportunities in other fields and other companies, started working from home, and a digitalization of processes happened almost overnight. While remote work opened avenues of possibilities for talent around the world to join global employers, it also increased the competition between organizations. Talent started pushing companies to up the ante: what makes you stand out as an employer? Why should I choose you?

Mak & Akhtar (2003) and Admuson (2007) realized, pre-pandemic, that financial rewards are no longer the top factors that determine talent to choose one employer over another. Other non-financial benefits have the power to tip the balance in favor of organizations, benefits such as better relationships at work, opportunities to develop as a professional, as well as engaging in meaningful, purpose driven work, which is a point made also by Thompson and Gregory (2012). Admuson (2007) then, long before the tumultuous period of the Covid-19 global pandemic, realized that organizations and hiring managers must constantly rethink their strategies and make the fitting changes to gain competitive advantage in the attraction of talent. This begs the question:

How has the talent attraction field been challenged by the Covid-19 crisis in regard to organizational attractiveness as perceived by talent?

Additionally:

- How could new organizational initiatives support the achievement of talent attraction goals?
- What implications would that have on leadership?

Theoretical Framework

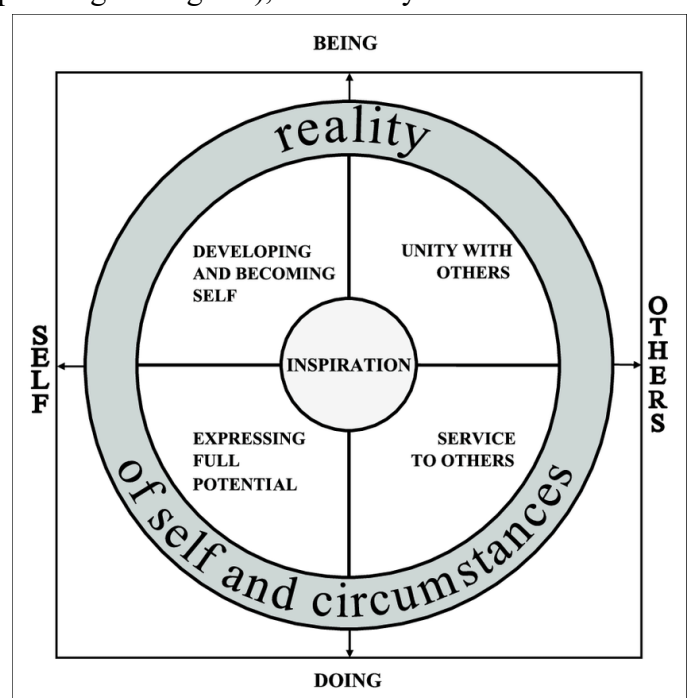
To be able to find these answers, aside the literature earlier reviewed, I will back my research with the theoretical framework of meaningful work and purpose-driven leadership. These two theoretical approaches were chosen by me as they can lead to valuable answers to my problem formulation and bring me, as both a scholar and a practitioner, closer to understanding what talent wants. The theories were chosen as a continuation to what was established in the literature review, which is that one of the main benefits that talent seeks to get out of employers nowadays is the opportunity to engage in meaningful and purpose-driven work.

Meaningful Work

To understand the factors that lead to experiencing one's work as meaningful, organizational behavior scholars put forward various theoretical contributions. Lips-Wiersma and Morris (2009) purport that meaningful work stems from four different sources: 1) developing and becoming self, 2) being united with others, 3) being of service to others, 4) expressing the self. (Figure 1). Of notable importance here is the conclusion drawn by the above-mentioned authors, which states that experiencing meaningful work is challenged by the need to be of service to the self and the need to be of service to others, as well as by the balance between being and doing (Lips-Wiersma & Morris, 2009; Lips-Wiersma & Wright, 2012). In turn, Steger and Dik (2010) suggest that meaning in one's work is found when employees succeed in making sense of their experience (i.e., who they are, their place in the organization), experience a sense of purpose (i.e., identify and pursue greater goals), and finally be of service to the greater good either indirectly or directly.

These theoretical models concerning meaningful work, however, are highly focused on the individual and his or her effort to give voice to the self or become of service. While the value in this cannot be negated, where the models fall short is including organizational factors which influence the individual at work.

Figure 1: Framework of Meaningful Work (Lips-Wiersma & Wright, 2012)



Meaningfulness could stem from employees' attempts to make sense of organizational-level influences such as the culture and leadership style at work.

Organizational Culture and Meaningful Work

Organizational culture, which Schein (2010) defines as a repeating sequence of assumptions, meanings, and values concerning daily practices in an organization, has an impact on how employees find meaning in the work they do (Pratt et al., 2013; Pratt & Ashforth, 2003). Cardador and Rupp (2011), inspired by the multiple needs model of organizational justice (Cropanzano, Bryne, Bobocel, & Rupp, 2001), suggest that workers in innovative (encourages personal initiative and fosters growth) and supportive (empowering employees, human-centered work environment) working environments are more inclined to perceive their work as having meaning than in other environments, as innovation and support are elements which help fulfill the needs for control, belonging, and a purposeful existence. Furthermore, Cardador and Rupp (2011) indicate that organizational culture could impact the feeling of work having meaning when: 1) organizational culture aspects are aligned and acted upon across different parts of the organization, 2) elements of an innovative and supportive work culture are consolidated, 3) when focus is drawn on the values and integrity of the organization.

Albrecht, Bakker, Gruman, Macey and Saks (2015) suggest that human resources practices that aim to sustain or increase employee engagement have a real impact on how employees experience meaningfulness in their work. However, Bailey et al. (2017) draw attention upon the fact that organizations can easily be perceived as inauthentic if such practices are not implemented with the intention to become part of the day-to-day practices in the organization. This, in turn, can lead to the corrosion of meaningfulness in one's work from organizational members' side.

Leadership and Meaningful Work

Studies indicate that employees are likely to experience meaningfulness in their work when they understand who they are and what their values are, when they have a good comprehension of the organization they work in and its overarching goals, and finally when they understand the fit between themselves and the organization (Chalofsky, 2003; Steger & Dik, 2010). A key element in this whole process is comprehending, as an employee, how the daily work is in tune

with personal values and how both are in line with the organization's overarching aspirations. This is particularly of interest in cases where employees work in departments or with tasks and projects which potentially seem far away from the organization's greater purpose (Carton, 2017; Steger & Dik, 2010). This is where leaders come into play, as they can enable this understanding in other organizational members.

Research shows that leaders can bring a notable contribution to employees' sense of work meaningfulness by helping them better understand the connection between their daily tasks and the organization's greater mission (Allan et al., 2007; Harris, Kacmar, & Zivnuska, 2007). Sosik and Godhshalk (2000) put together a conceptual model of meaning and charismatic leadership, stating that leaders' own meaning and purpose in life pave the way to a style of leading, which, in turn, workers use to construct meaning. Thereby, ideally, leaders should have a good grasp of what makes work meaningful to them and be able to clearly communicate this to followers (Steger & Dik, 2010). Those who indeed can find meaning in their work and are able to communicate it to their employees, as well as how the organization and different departments within it work towards the greater good, are more successful at supporting workers in experiencing meaningfulness at work and in work. Moreover, being able to do this will lower the risk of employees thinking that these attempts to finding meaning in one's work are merely attempts to manipulate and control their perception of both the work and the organization (Lips-Wiersma & Morris, 2009).

Further research proves that there are indeed leadership styles which can more easily lead to employees experience meaningful work, and by that increase engagement and likelihood of employee retention (Chen, Wang, & Lee, 2018; Demirtas, Hannah, Gok, Arslan, & Capar, 2017). To offer some examples from leadership styles that have been linked to meaningful work, I can refer to transformational leadership (Arnold, Turner, Barling, Kelloway, & McKee, 2007; Purvanova, Bono, & Dzieweczynski, 2006; Tummers & Knies, 2013), empowering leadership (Lee, Idris, & Delfabbro, 2017), and ethical leadership (Demirtas et al., 2017; Wang & Xu, 2017). Additional research, however, later indicates that the above-mentioned styles were limited when it came to supporting employees in experiencing meaningfulness (Bailey & Madden, 2016; Carton, 2017), the visions set by leaders who adopted those styles often being too broad and distant for employees, who ultimately had a hard time aligning their personal values and aspirations to the overarching goals of the companies they worked for.

Purpose-driven Leadership

In their research, Cardona et al. (2019) explore organizations driven by purpose and come forward with a theoretical framework for what they call Purpose-driven Leadership, hereby referred to as PDL. They note that in traditional leadership paradigms, articulating purpose is central to leadership behaviors (2019, p.58). Here, purpose is typically constructed at the top of an organization and then passed on to other areas of the organization, the aim here being to align all departments and employees around an overarching purpose. If in the past, according to Birkinshaw, J., Foss, N. J., & Lindenberg, S. (2014), this was the key to high performance, such is no longer the case now if organizations wish to create a common purpose.

Cardona et al. (2019) claim that purpose cannot simply be formed by top leadership and then passed on downwards to the rest of the company because purpose already exists, which is a paradigm shift in the traditional understanding of leadership. In that purpose cannot simply be articulated and told, but purpose is something which needs to be discovered by organizational members (p. 58). In fact, according to the researchers, in the PDL paradigm, the power to influence does not solely belong to those on top management positions, but to everyone in the company who shares the same organizational aspirations and through their work seek to make it come to life. Thus, it cannot be talk about mere employee alignment, but rather a genuine commitment from organizational members' side to fulfill their responsibilities with a sense of duty and honor, which stem only from an entirely internalized grasp of the shared purpose (p.58).

While traditional leadership theories have leaders focusing on “what” to do and “how” to do it, PDL is much more interested in “why” they do things the way they do. Each leader, who works from the PDL paradigm will have a different “why”, influenced by what he or she lives for and his or her deepest aspirations (Cardona et al., 2019, p. 62). A personal purpose reveals what an individual stands for and what makes that person unique.

In this way, a leader who seeks to lead with purpose at the forefront should not seek to develop new competencies or apply different techniques to model other leaders. What he or she should do instead, according to Cardona et al. (2019) is engage in a process of self-discovery and personal development, so that he or she can have a clear understanding of their own purpose and what makes their lives meaningful. Based on their research, Cardona et al. (2019) came up

with three key undertakings which PDL is based on: “first the discovery of personal purpose, second, helping others find their personal purpose; and finally, connecting personal to organizational purpose” (p.63). These three spheres are the same across all levels of the organization and they are not to be understood as a linear model, nor top-down, horizontal, or bottom-up, as the authors put it, but as rather a concentric process which acts in all directions (p.63). This can be seen in the figure below, as thought out by Cardona et al. (2019):

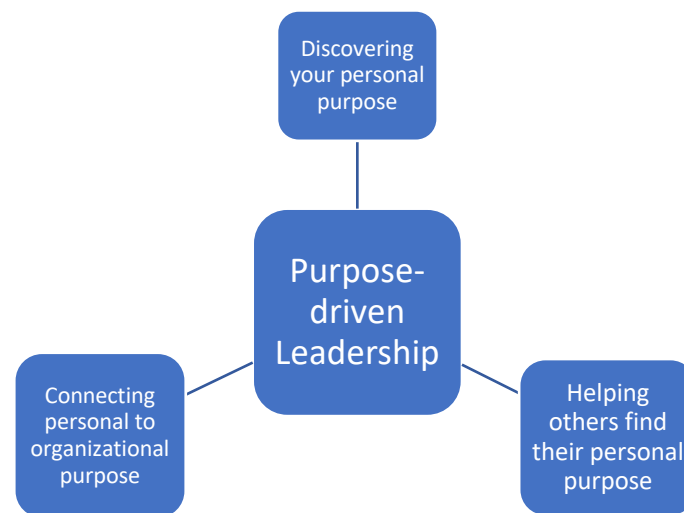


Figure 2: Fundamentals of purpose-driven leadership (PDL), Cardona et al. (2019)

Discovering One's Leadership Purpose

If we look at the top of the model above, one of the pillars of PDL is leaders discovering their very own personal purpose. This is important as before leading anyone, one must be capable of leading him/herself. One challenge that Cardona et al. (2019) write about is that the general perception is that leaders automatically know their personal purpose, that they are somehow naturally and undoubtably connected and in tune with it. To the authors this could not be further from the reality of individuals not being born with purpose imprinted. Quite on the contrary, their belief is that purpose is something that needs to be consciously unraveled. It is a process that requires consistent effort, through ongoing self-reflection so that when sure of it, that purpose can be reflected through their actions.

To Cardona et al. (2019) personal purpose is what energizes leaders to influence and support those around them. Discovering one's personal purpose is first of all understanding it. In that one ask oneself why one wishes to become a leader and lead others (George, B., McLean, A.,

& Craig, N., 2011). Leadership purpose stems from “the essence of who one is” (Craig, N., & Snook, S. (2014, pp.92, 104–111). Second of all, one must rediscover purpose in daily activities, as well as in everything that one does, and in the way he or she interacts with others (Michaelson, C., Pratt, M. G., Grant, A. M., & Dunn, C. P. (2014, pp.121, 77–90). Therefore, to Cardona et al. (2019) purpose transforms from destination to path, as although purpose gives meaning, it does not spare the individual from the effort of finding meaning in day-to-day activities (p.64). The ongoing process of identifying, being able to articulate, and rediscovering purpose in daily matters is what makes PDL different from the traditional approaches to leadership, Cardona et al. (2019), based on extensive research and empirical study among organizational leaders, believing it to be much more effective. Discovering and rediscovering personal purpose is what enables leadership potential in individuals, as one cannot be separated from the other (p. 65).

Helping Others to Discover Their Purpose

We are moving clockwise down the fundamental of PDL (Figure 2). Organizations which are purpose driven are a space where intimate relationships develop, as even though purpose is personal, it is not solitary. The process of (re)discovering one’s purpose is a personal journey, yet part of a collective one: “purpose is not a lonely, self-referential point, but rather has impact and transcends the purpose of others” (Cardona et al., 2019, p.65). How could a leader of a large organization do this if there are thousands of employees to be supported in this process? While one leader can guide and support a small group of individuals in discovering the personal purpose that makes them unique, this effect can multiply if these, in turn, teach other how to do the same with others in their sphere of influence.

What does that look like in practice? Supporting others in (re)discovering their purpose is a two-way street. From the one side the leader must communicate and share his or her purpose, while on the other side they must be ready to listen to others’ and embrace their purpose. Sharing is beneficial in that it helps shape one’s most inner aspirations as “you can’t get a clear picture of yourself without trusted colleagues to act as mirrors” (Craig, N., & Snook, S., 2014, pp.92, 104–11). Moreover, sharing keeps people accountable because in communicating it to others one extends the commitment while supporting others in discovering theirs. This is an approach that is very different to the traditional leadership styles, as it stems from personal contact instead of influencing through charisma or inspiring rhetoric (Cardona et al., 2019,

p.66). This is backed up by extensive research which has proven that purpose-driven leadership goes hand in hand with top management, line management, team leaders, heads of departments, and employees' "efforts to provide emotional and psychological strength to one another" (Carson, J. B., Tesluk, P. E., & Marrone, J. A., 2007, pp. 1217–1234). Further research shows that prerequisites to PDL are the trustworthy relationships that form as a result of these efforts to understand what and why people have the aspirations they have and motivation to do things a certain way (Reiche, B. S., Cardona, P., Lee, Y. T., Canela, M. Á., Akinnukawe, E., Briscoe, J. P., & Grenness, T. (2014), pp. 61–98). This is indeed a process that requires a lot of time and resources from organizations, but purpose-driven organizations see this as one of the most effective ways to empower employees (Cardona et al., 2019, p.66).

Connecting Personal and Organizational Purpose

The third and final fundament of PDL revolves around identifying the connection between personal and organizational purpose. Purpose both at a personal and an organizational level is a very broad concept, thus "its natural development is about discovering points of intersection" (Cardona et al., 2019, p.66). Of utmost importance here is understanding that purpose-driven leaders do not seek to influence by means of their personal purpose, but instead through the way they assimilate personal purpose at work and consequently how they connect it with the overall purpose of the organization.

The power to influence is fortified when leaders connect their individual purpose to the organizational ones. While personal purpose is the core of PDL, it is the connection of it to the corporate purpose that gives one the authority to lead others. A prerequisite to that is making the organization's purpose central to leadership. This is a thought that is supported by Cardona et al. (2019), who suggest that "organizational purpose acts as a source of authority for being THE leader within the organization. Individuals can exercise some kind of leadership based on his or her personal purpose or charisma, but that is quite distant of what we talk here. PDL is about embracing organizational purpose from the perspective of personal purpose" (p.67). Further support is given to this claim by Cardona & Rey (2008), who purport that PDL requires low "ego" in a climate of commitment, cooperation, and openness to change, nurtured by the sense of common purpose.

Methodology

My goal in this chapter is to elaborate on the methodological considerations that I have made, all throughout my research, to both find an answer to the problem formulation and organize my work in an orderly fashion. First, I will present the philosophical stance that I took on as the researcher, followed by which methods I employed to gather the data that would inform my study. Afterwards, I will give the reader insight into how the data I gathered was thereafter analyzed and the method I employed to do so.

Philosophy of Science

Ontology

To understand the nature of reality, ontological considerations must be made. Ontology, thus, is concerned with the nature of existence: it is the study of “what is”, of what the structure and nature of reality are (Crotty, 1998) and of what can be known about the world (Snape & Spencer, 2003). Richards (2003) proposes that ontology is the total sum of assumptions made about the nature of reality and what is. Bryman (2008) builds upon all this and puts forward the idea of “social ontology”, describing it as a philosophical stance in research, regarding the nature of social entities and whether these are objective or influenced, to a certain degree, by external social elements.

Bryman (2012) later elaborates on two different viewpoints: objectivism and constructionism. Ontologically, objectivism stems from realism and essentialism, two views according to which one gains knowledge based on already-existing reliable knowledge. To clarify this, objectivism essentially operates from accepting natural science as a paradigm from which to study human knowledge. It consequently also makes use of data collection and data analysis methods employed in natural science such as testing of hypotheses, explaining causalities, as well as modelling. All in all, according to this view, knowledge about the world stems from our very own experiences and is molded by our senses, ergo only phenomena validated by our senses can truly be regarded as knowledge (Bryman, 2008; Wellington, 2000)

Burr (1995) notices that the terms “social constructionism” and “social constructivism” are regularly switched and used as if they had the same meaning. However, an earlier study conducted by Gergen (1985) suggests that there is indeed a difference between the two terms.

Gergen favors the use of “constructionism” over “constructivism”, as the latter term is often “used to refer to Piagetian theory” and to a particular kind of perceptual theory, which could cause confusion” (Burr, 1995, p.2).

Social interaction as a basis to constructing knowledge is something that I am interested in, as throughout my research I investigate how the talent attraction field has been challenged by the Covid-19 crisis in regard to organizational attractiveness as perceived by talent. As a researcher adopting a constructionist stance, it is my belief that what people perceive as real is an outcome of the social constructions that take place between them and others, which consequently leads to a representation of social reality. This viewpoint was inspired by Burr (2003) who writes that “the only things we have access to are our various representations of the world, and these therefore cannot be judged against ‘reality’ for their truthfulness or accuracy” (p.23).

Epistemology

Bryman (2012) lines out two different epistemological stances: positivism and interpretivism. In the quest to establish the truth, positivism prioritizes objectivity and pure evidence, leaving no room to the researcher to affect the world. In other words, the researcher should ideally have no impact upon his or her research findings. Moreover, positivism purports that meaning already exists out there, waiting merely to be discovered, residing outside the researcher’s consciousness (Crotty, 1998).

At the opposite end of the continuum lies a different approach known as interpretivism (Bryman, 2008; Crotty, 1998). Interpretivism proposes that there are other ways of understanding the world rather than just through direct observation alone, and that is through our very own perception and interpretation of it. Knowledge of the world relies, in this case, on our personal understanding, which comes from the reflections we make on different matters (Ormston et al., 2014). As opposed to positivists, interpretivists purport that through the exploration of the social world that the people being studied are in, knowledge can be produced. While in the positivist tradition the researcher had to extract himself or herself from the findings and avoid affecting these findings, in the interpretivist tradition the researcher knows the world based on his or her interpretation of others’ interpretations. In this case, the research cannot be entirely objective seeing that the researcher is personally involved and the findings that he or she gets to are influenced by his or her perceptions, values, ways of thinking.

In my study, the epistemological considerations that stem from the interpretivist tradition were the most natural to follow. Knowledge concerning the talent attraction field is based on both my own interpretations having worked in the field and in the organization for almost a year, but also on the interpretation of other talent attraction specialists.

Inductive or Deductive?

The approach in the research that I have carried out, as well as the interplay between the reviewed selected literature and findings can be considered iterative (Bryman, 2016). An iterative stance has allowed for more flexibility, as this process encompasses both inductive and deductive reasoning. If I had solely worked inductively, then new theories would have emerged based on the findings that I was led to, whereas if I had opted for a deductive approach, I would only have tested theories based on the findings (Bryman, 2016). What I did instead was take the selected literature on talent attraction, employer branding, non-financial benefits, sense-making and regenerative leadership, all as a point of departure, and avoided confirming or rejecting any of it.

Data Collection

Qualitative Research

Quantitative research methods have been challenged by qualitative researchers, as in their view “a natural science model is inappropriate for studying the social world” (Bryman, 2012, p.181). In addition to this, the qualitative researchers consider that those who opt for a quantitative method often neglect the contrast between the social and the natural world. Another concern raised by qualitative researchers is that qualitative methods rely on the idea that all phenomena have an answer, often reifying the social world (Bryman, 2012, pp. 178-179). The focus of my research has been the talent attraction field and how it has been challenged by the Covid-19 crisis in regard to organizational attractiveness as perceived by talent. Therefore, what was interesting to me as a researcher and what I believed would best inform my study, was organizational members’ perceptions of how the company reacted to the crisis, their own lived experiences, personal motivations, and drive to act one way or another. Instead, I realized a better choice would be to employ a method that would require something else than statistical

or numerical data concerning these topics. In qualitative research, what is studied closely is the perspectives of different participants: what they believe is of importance. These perspectives are what guide the research through and through. The researcher is close to these participants, enabling him or her to understand the worldviews, beliefs, ideas, behaviors of these participants in the context of what is being studied. The data here, as opposed to the one in quantitative research, is rich and deep, as what the researcher aims for is understanding the participants' social reality (Bryman, 2012, p.408).

Interpretive research relies very much on qualitative data, which can be gathered using different tools. In this study, the instrument for data collection has been the semi-structured interview. Before I give the reader a more in-depth presentation of how I gathered empirical data using semi-structured interview, it is important to mention that interpretive research uses a theoretical sampling strategy in which respondents are selected based on theoretical considerations. I will argue my choice of respondents in the section below.

Selection of Interviewees

To inform my study and answer my problem formulation on how the talent attraction field has been challenged by the Covid-19 crisis in regard to organizational attractiveness as perceived by talent, I carried out six semi-structured interviews where I divided my interviewees into two categories: talent attraction specialists and talent employed at the organization during the Covid-19 crisis.

Initially my intention was to focus solely on how the talent attraction specialists in the organization experienced the impact that their field and the operations they carried out took in the beginning and throughout the pandemic. However, although the Human Resources department is large, the talent attraction team at the organization where I carried out my research is rather small, with only three experts that could give input on the matter. Moreover, the three talent attraction experts hold very similar positions, which while on the one hand would inform the study with consistent inputs, on the other hand would not be able to describe what joining the company during the pandemic had been like. It then dawned on me that I could employ the help of another group of respondents, that would also be suited for the study but in a different way, which is why I decided to interview three employees that joined the company during the pandemic. The idea was to get a sense of whether combining these two sources of

information would give me a more well-rounded insight into what happened to talent attraction during the Covid-19 crisis.

Due to the nature of my research, which as previously described has been interpretive, it quickly became evident to me that there was great value in having these two different sets of respondents giving me insight into their lived experiences and perceptions during the pandemic period. Before I go into more detail on the semi-structured interviews and data analysis, I would like to remind the reader that in interpretive research, data collection and analysis can take place simultaneously and iteratively. Such was also the case in my research.

In the table below, I put together a list of the participants selected to be interviewed, based on their experience with the phenomenon and their disposition to participate in the study. To protect their privacy, the names have been replaced and the participants will henceforth be referred to as Expert1, Expert2, Expert3, and respectively Employee1, Employee2, Employee3. Moreover, there are no audio or video recordings of the interview sessions: the audio interviews were deleted as soon as the interviews were fully transcribed, which the interviewees were made aware of in the beginning of the sessions.

Name	Area of Expertise	Duration of Interview
Expert1	Talent Attraction Junior Professional	45 min
Expert2	Talent Attraction Senior Professional	35min
Expert3	Talent Attraction Consultant	33min
Employee1	IT	25 min
Employee2	Business Development	27 min
Employee3	Administrative Worker	31 min

Semi-structured interviews

The problem formulation that I seek out to answer in my study is concerned with how the talent attraction field has been challenged by the Covid-19 crisis in regard to organizational attractiveness as perceived by talent. What sort of changes took place operation-wise, what learnings and takeaways were specialists in the field led to because of that tumultuous period, but also what makes an organization attractive to top talent based on their lived experiences during the pandemic?

To explore these issues, I carried out semi-structured interviews to be sure that the questions I was asking, which I formulated based on the selected literature, would touch upon the subject areas that I wished to examine. Bearing in mind Bryman's indications, I jotted down a list of questions as "in semi-structured interviews the interviewer does follow a script to a certain extent" (Bryman, 2012, p.471). I thus ended up with an interview guide but allowed myself the freedom to potentially ask probing or even new questions. Before conducting these interviews, I followed Lofland and Lofland's (1995) indications to think things through and establish what has been puzzling or particular about the phenomenon I was studying, but also what I needed to find out to find answers to my research question.

The reason why I chose the semi-structured interview as my data collection tool is because I had specific areas in mind that needed to be covered, yet I wanted to allow the interviewees the opportunity to speak freely about what they thought would be interesting to bring up. At times, during the interviews, the respondents rambled and went off tangent, which I, as the researcher, did not stop or discourage. I refrained from doing so because I took into consideration Bryman's (2016) suggestion that it is precisely in those moments that insight is given into what the interviewees believe is worthy and relevant to reveal.

Although I had prepared an interview guide, once the interviews were being conducted, I noticed that I sometimes steered away from it by asking some additional answers that fell in line with what the respondents were saying. What resulted out of this is that the order in which I asked the questions became slightly altered together with how I had originally formulated the questions. Regardless of these changes, the interviewees were, for the most part, asked the same main questions. All the interviews followed the semi-structured format (Kvale, 1996) and I, as the interviewer, was moving in tune with what the respondents were answering, without steering them in any direction.

Interview Guide

To work in what I intended to be an organized and orderly fashion, as well as have a clearer overview of the interviews to be conducted, I took into consideration Bryman's (2016) indications on how to prepare an interview guide. First, I established the topics that I wished to cover, as well as a logical and organic order in which to ask questions related to them, as to

avoid jumping from one topic to another and to give the conversations, between the interviewees and I, a more fluid and natural air. Thereafter, I drafted a first list of specific questions I was interested to ask but avoided being too specific or rigid about keeping them in their original form. In the end, after a small break from going through this list, I returned to the questions to secure that the language and formulation were accessible and the order in which they were asked was coherent.

There are no audio or video recordings of these sessions. Although the name of the organization in which I conducted my research has on purpose been left out, it can still be identified, seeing as it is the largest pharmaceutical company in Denmark. To ensure the interviewees that our conversations would be following the organization's rules and regulations about what may or may not be shared with the public, I pleaded that they refrain from mentioning any names of drugs, products or trials that are not on the market yet and moreover they were informed about their rights to refuse answering any questions that they considered to be inappropriate. The debriefing section consisted of me thanking the participants for making themselves available for the interviews, for their time and answers, as well as the option to later contact me should they have follow-up questions about my study.

Going back to the actual interview guide, I wish to elaborate on my decision to develop it, based on the selected literature, instead of simply going into the interviews without such a list. As opposed to an entirely structured interview, which requires a list of questions that remain the same and whose order is more rigid, the semi-structured interview guide is "a list of issues to be addressed or question to be asked" (Bryman, 2012, p.473), which guides the interview. My intention was to ask questions that covered different areas, which would ideally lead to answers that would adequately inform my study and be examined in my analysis chapter. The reason why I designed two different interview guides is because I had two different sets of interviewees: talent attraction experts and talent recently employed in the organization. It was my assessment that it would be impractical to ask them the same questions, as the employees would not be able to answer any talent attraction questions, and respectively the talent attraction experts would not be able to inform the study from the perspective of newcomers in the organization. However, to maintain cohesiveness and ensure that some common themes would form, I attempted to ask questions that both groups would be able to answer, such as for

example: *What are the top three aspects that make this organization attractive to get hired at?*

The interview guides are attached in the figure below (also as Appendix 2):

Interview Guides

Interview Guide for Talent Attraction Experts

1. How has the pandemic affected talent attraction activities?
2. How do you think the pandemic impacted the company culture?
3. Were there any employer branding initiatives that were used to make the organization a more attractive company to get hired at?
4. What do you think are the top three aspects that make the company attractive to top talent?
5. What non-financial benefits do the employees in the company have?
6. What more do you think that the company could do in order to attract but also to retain top talent?

Interview Guide for Employees in the Organization

1. Why did you choose to come work for this company?
2. What was important to you when you were applying for jobs?
3. What attracted you specifically when making this choice?
4. How would you describe the company culture?
5. How do you think the pandemic impacted the company culture?
6. What more could the company do to ensure that you are thriving in your role?
7. What would potentially make you leave the company for another job in another place?

Transcribing the interviews

As previously mentioned, the interviews were audio recorded for me to be able to describe them. Although some notes were taken during the interview, I knew from previous research experience that those would not be salient enough to rely on later in the process of identifying recurring themes and ideas. Furthermore, the interviews were quite lengthy and took place over the timespan of several weeks, with many different areas being covered and ideas that either clashed or overlapped. Field notes as a method to record interview data is still a popular practice nowadays due to its simplicity (Davidson, 2009). However, there are great disadvantages to using this method mainly because these events cannot be replayed, which potentially can lead to salient information getting lost, resulting in deficient data (Ashmore & Reed, 2000).

I opted for using transcribing software of the audio recordings of the interviews. This resulted in rough drafts of the interviews, where the program managed to identify the voices of different speakers, but the transcriptions were, here and there, faulty. Therefore, I found it necessary to

edit the drafts manually and read through them once more while the audio file was playing, in order to make sure that the transcriptions were current. Finally, it must be mentioned that all the interviews were conducted in English, which was not the native language of any of the interviewees.

Data Analysis

This is a section containing the considerations I made while engaging in thematic analysis to analyze the empirical data gathered through the conducted semi-structured interviews.

Codes and Themes

To Saldana (2013), codes are keywords that we attach to statements: “a code is a researcher-generated construct that symbolizes and thus attributes interpreted meaning to each individual datum for later purposes of pattern detection, categorization, theory building, and other analytic processes” (p.4). Saldana (2012, p.9), suggests that the mission of the researcher is to intuitively identify which data “feels and looks alike” when he or she codes sections of text. How is a code then different from a theme? Saldana (2013) indicates that where coding seeks to assign keywords to statements, themes come in the form of full sentences which describe what a theme is about. To Saldana (2013), the theme is the result one gets to after the coding, categorization and reflections are done. A theme to Saldana (2013, p.175) is “an extended phrase or sentence that identifies what a unit of data is about and/or what it means”. On that account, a theme is formed when we categorize a set of codes and is presented as a sentence or phrase to elucidate what it is concerned with.

Thematic Analysis

To conduct the thematic analysis of my empirical data in a professional and organized manner, I decided to follow Braun and Clarke’s approach to thematization (2012). Thematic Analysis is a popular method employed by researchers who work with qualitative data, but has not always been very well-defined as a mix of different approaches was used instead (discourse analysis, grounded theory, etc.) (Braun, Clarke, 2012, p.57). Braun and Clarke ‘s (2012) intention was to create a more systematic, step-by-step model and defined thematic analysis as

“a method for systematically identifying, organizing, and offering insights into patterns of meaning or themes across a data set” (p.57).

In my research, what was of particular interest to me was the meanings that emerged out of the semi-structured interviews and the data those rendered. The thematic analysis method therefore supported me in making sense of multiple meanings that emerged from the interviews, but more importantly in identifying the meanings that were relevant and would help answer the research question. Braun and Clark (2012, p.58) emphasize that while thematic analysis is a method of analyzing empirical data, it is not a guide on how to conduct qualitative research.

Moreover, thematic analysis does not follow specific epistemological stances, which allows researchers the flexibility to choose it as a method regardless of the theories and epistemological stances previously decided upon. My wish in the research was to interpret different stakeholders’ meanings, as well as factors that impacted the talent attraction field during the Covid-19 crisis and what resulted out of that period. Employing the use of thematic analysis in this case has allowed me to examine different patterns which, once analyzed, would answer my research question. It is also worth mentioning here that Braun and Clarke (2006) purport that thematic analysis is ideal in exploratory research in the cases where a new area of research is being studied. This fits very well with my own research, where I am studying the talent attraction field in the outstanding context of the pandemic, what kind of impact it suffered operationally, what resulted out of it and how it was experienced by both professionals and talented workforce profiles.

Thus, as previously mentioned, to work more systematically with my data, make sense of it and reach to some main findings, I organized the thematic analysis in six steps, as Braun and Clarke (2012) developed it:

- Step 1: Getting familiar with the data
- Step 2: Generation of initial codes
- Step 3: Identifying themes
- Step 4: Reviewing themes
- Step 5: Defining and naming final themes
- Step 6: Reporting the themes

In the section below, I will give a more in-depth look into how I approached these steps proposed by Braun and Clarke (2012), refraining however from introducing the themes, which will be presented in the Main Findings.

Conducting the Thematic Analysis

Step 1 & 2: Coding data

The first step in the thematic analysis is rather self-explanatory: at this stage the researcher must seek to know, understand, and ultimately become as familiar as possible with the data gathered. In my case, the data came in the form of the interview transcripts. The process of becoming familiar with the data required thorough reading and re-reading of this material. In the beginning, I read it seeking not to identify or see patterns, but mainly to refresh my memory on what was discussed with each of the interviewees. Later, I began underlining certain phrases and highlighting passages that were standing out, to which I added short notes. The notes were used deliberately to start making sense of the data (Braun & Clarke, 2012, p.60). It is too early in this stage to consider this coding, but rather a more in-depth observation of the data and the meanings that slowly emerged out of it. The goal at this stage was to become acquainted with the data and enable myself to spot certain meanings that would potentially lead to answers to my research question. A visual of this process can be seen in Appendix 3.

After this process of familiarization and selecting salient text passages, phrases that stood out and working out some raw meaning out of the data, I then moved on to generating some first codes. This is when working with data starts to become a more systematic process through the act of coding (Braun & Clarke, 2012, p.61). To quote directly from Braun & Clarke, “if the analysis is a brick-built house with a tile roof, then the themes are the walls, roof and the codes are the individual bricks and tiles” (p.61). Each time a relevant textual section was identified, I branded it with a code. Following Braun & Clarke’s (2012) indications, I knew that these codes would likely not all stay in their original form. Original codes were thereby reviewed by me and modified where necessary, on some occasions new codes emerging. This step wrapped up once all relevant textual passages were assigned codes.

Step 3, 4 & 5: Identifying, reviewing, defining, and naming final themes

In the third step, the analysis begins to take form with the focus here shifting from codes to themes. To Braun and Clarke (2012), a theme “captures something important about the data in relation to the research question and represents some level of patterned response or meaning within the data set” (p.63). The authors further indicate that, at this stage, the researcher is not so much discovering the themes in the data, but rather is constructing those (p.63). In my case this required going back to the coded data, identifying the recurring codes, clustering the codes that shared the same meanings or ideas, and finally categorizing them into overall constructed themes. To get a clearer overview of the frequency of the codes, I used an automated word cloud programme, which revealed how often certain words/codes were recurrently used. Based on that finding, I grouped the similar codes and started giving shape to emerging themes. In the beginning, the themes were either too broad or too specific, which I expected would pose an issue to readers of the research. To counter that, I once again followed Braun and Clarke’s (2012) indications, who write that themes should ideally stand out and be able to make sense on their own.

The fourth step, namely Reviewing the Final Themes, is all about ensuring the quality of the constructed themes based on the coded data and the empirical data material altogether (i.e., in this case the transcribed semi-structured interviews) (Braun & Clarke, 2012, p.65). The constructed themes should be reviewed through the lens of the codes and the researcher should, at this point, assess if the codes fit under the themes they were placed under. Codes that seemingly no longer fit with the themes they were assigned to, must either be relocated to a different theme or eliminated altogether. However, the themes can also be reformulated, and their boundaries redrawn, which would enable them to contain all pertinent meanings (Braun & Clarke, 2012, p.65). To check the quality of the themes, Braun and Clarke (2012) came up with a short list of questions meant to support the researcher at this stage:

- “Is this a theme (it could be just a code)?
- If it is a theme, what is the quality of this theme (does it tell me something useful about the data set and my research question)?
- What are the boundaries of this theme (what does it include and exclude)?
- Are there enough (meaningful) data to support this theme (is the theme thin or thick)?
- Are the data too diverse and wide ranging (does the theme lack coherence)?” (p. 65).

There were instances where some codes that I created based on the collated textual passages, which were misplaced, in which case I made the decision to place them under more relevant themes. The quality checking questions proposed by Braun and Clarke (2012) and listed above were useful in this process, as a recurring challenge in this process has been themes being too broad or too narrow. Moreover, particularly useful was the question of whether this theme would support me in answering the research question: sometimes my train of thought and being immersed in the data for long periods of time would have me construct a captivating theme, yet which did not reveal enough useful information about my research question. To avoid themes overlapping each other, I set some clear boundaries of what each of them should cover and concluded this step with a final revision to ensure they captured the most pertinent meanings in the data set (Braun & Clarke, p. 66).

The fifth step was defining and giving a final name to the constructed themes. What I mean by defining the themes is writing a short description of these, which encompasses the essence of each theme and what will be covered. Braun and Clarke (2012) propose that “a good thematic analysis will have themes that a) do not try to do too much, as themes should ideally have a singular focus; b) are related but do not overlap, so they are not repetitive, although they may build on previous themes; and c) directly address your research question” (p.66). Thereby, it should be clear to any reader of the research paper what the focus and purpose of the themes are, as these are the ones that will ultimately tell the “story” of the phenomenon researched. The themes “need to be developed not only in their own rights but also in relation to the research question and in relation to the other themes” (p.67). Afterwards, a name or a title must be given to these themes, Braun and Clarke (2012) suggesting that a good name is informative, brief and captivating.

Step 6: Reporting the themes

In the final step, the reporting of the themes can begin. My aim at this stage was to present the themes in a manner that seemed organic and logical, so that the result would be a coherent thematic analysis, which consequently would help answer the problem formulation on how the talent attraction field has been challenged by the Covid-19 crisis in regard to organizational attractiveness as perceived by talent. While these six steps proposed by Braun and Clarke

(2012) are extremely useful guidelines, one of the perks of conducting Thematic Analysis is the flexibility that this method allows for (p.69).

Trustworthiness of the Study

Lincoln and Guba (1985) purport that the trustiness of a research can both bring value and test its worth. To the authors, trustworthiness requires the establishing of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. There are several techniques that I have employed to achieve the criteria above. To achieve credibility, I used peer debriefing, which Lincoln and Guba (1985) define as “the process of exposing oneself to a disinterested peer in a manner paralleling an analytical session and for the purpose of exploring aspects of the inquiry that might otherwise remain only implicit within the inquirer's mind” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 308). I used colleagues and acquaintances to whom I have numerous times told the story of my research, findings, and conclusions. This helped me better understand my stance towards my own data and analysis, as well as see whether there was any underlying bias from my side regarding what assumptions I was making.

Thick description was a method used to establish transferability, which in line with Guba and Lincoln’s (1985) indications, was describing the researched phenomenon, talent attraction, in a very detailed way. I did so by including a case in my research and by constantly referring to what happened in the talent attraction field throughout the Covid-19 global pandemic period. To prove dependability, I used external auditing which involved asking for help from a fellow university colleague. To her, I presented the process and products of my research, and this gave me a chance to understand whether the findings, interpretations and reasoning were backed-up by data. Finally, for confirmability purposes, I used reflexivity. This was a good fit with what Malterud states, as I have been immersed in the talent attraction field: “a researcher's background and position will affect what they choose to investigate, the angle of investigation, the methods judged most adequate for this purpose, the findings considered most appropriate, and the framing and communication of conclusions” (Malterud, 2001, p. 483-484). To foster reflexivity, I designed a research which included multiple investigators (talent attraction experts and talent employed in the company during the Covid-19 period), which led to the emergence of complementary understanding regarding the study situation.

Main Findings

Based on the interviews that I had with both the talent attraction experts and employees hired during the Covid-19 period, four major themes emerged, which will illustrate to the reader how the pandemic impacted the talent attraction field, as well as what made the organization attractive to start working for during this period. Some of the themes and subthemes that were constructed led to findings that I was expecting, based on the reviewed literature, but also on my experience of having worked in the field during the pandemic. Other themes, especially those that were based on the statements from the employees, were entirely surprising, as their lived experiences were something that I did not have access to prior to our conversations. Although the first two themes are based on the interviews with the talent attraction experts and the last two themes on my talks with the employees, the reader will notice, by the end of the Findings session, that they are highly interrelated.

Theme 1: A new way to attract talent emerges.

The social distancing restrictions imposed by the Danish government meant putting on hold all the opportunities to engage in conversation with talent, therefore the team was suddenly faced with the dilemma: how do we keep the conversation going? How do we keep top talent “warm” and interested in us as a company? I wish to give the reader insight into how the talent attraction employees experienced the beginning of this new way of working. Expert 1 recalls that:

“Everything moved online overnight. Before the pandemic, everything was face to face, I would say like pretty much 99%(...) everything was cancelled, and we were given like two or three weeks to figure out what to do instead. (...) the career fairs went online” (Section 2, lines 1 to 3, Section 3 lines 1 to 10).

Expert 3 describes it similarly:

“Definitely the biggest change has been that everything was moved to be virtual, for sure. And all the interviews, assessment centers, attraction events, everything was moved to be virtual instead of face to face” (Section 2, lines 1 to 3).

This had enormous implications for the team at their work within the talent attraction field, as activities depended highly on being mobile, on proactively going out to meet talent. As opposed

to typical scouting for specific profiles to fill out hiring demands, what talent attraction seeks to do is appeal to as large an audience as possible, almost as if casting a huge net and collecting emerging talent. Not being able to do so brought along challenges that the team had not dealt with before. Yet along with that came a suite of learnings and opportunities, which potentially would have remained unraveled, had it not been for the Covid-19 crisis. To one of the interviewed talent attraction experts, the period was fruitful in that:

“(...) we have definitely become more international, because now it’s easier to talk to people from all over the world, using Teams, using webinars, through digital media in a completely new way. So we have definitely improved our outreach activities through these new opportunities” (Expert 2, section 4, lines 2 to 4)

“(...) we have also learned a lot about how to reach out on these new platforms. Going to virtual career fairs, on a lot of different platforms has been fun, but also very challenging because none of us knew how to do it or had done it before.” (Expert 2, section 5, lines 1 to 3).

Based on these statements can be drawn that the net cast at physical outreach events, suddenly became bigger and transcended actual physical borders. Instead of letting top talent slip through their fingers because of the social distancing rules, the team, by quickly moving outreach activities online, managed to reach out to a wider audience, one challenging to access in the past. The new activities started taking place on hosting platforms designed to come as close as possible to the physical career fairs, which consequently led to the team meeting unique top talent:

“What resulted out of it was that we reached out to more people globally. So it doesn’t matter if someone lives in Brazil, we can still interview them. (...) So the plus is that you could reach out to more people because of the pandemic, as everyone moved to flexible work from home” (Expert 3, section 2, lines 4 to 6).

While this marked the beginning of a new way in which talent attraction was understood and done, it did not stop there. The next thing that the team did was take reigns of this process of change, by acting innovatively and coming up with their unique way to create even bigger ripples and reach out to even more talented profiles. They designed online webinars where they would send targeted messages to target audiences, depending on what the organization needed. When the demand for graduate was high, they launched a series of webinars on topics such as

how to kickstart your career in Denmark or how to improve your CV and Cover Letter. In these webinars, they would invite young employees with student assistant, intern or graduate roles, who would talk passionately about how they made their own path to the company, what made them stand out in the recruitment process, how they were using their academical prowess in their roles, as well as sharing what it was that made them passionate about working in the organization. These webinars had an outstanding success:

“In Denmark we were the first ones out of the big companies to go for webinars and to establish this concept and keep in contact with all this talent that now during the pandemic we couldn’t really communicate with or be close to” (Expert 1, section 8, lines 8 to 11).

“(…) we knew our needs, as an organization, we knew what sort of profiles we were looking for, we knew what we needed. So, then we customized the webinars based on our needs, which was more targeted than going to an event of an external stakeholder (…) we hired people from New Zealand and Australia, because there was no top talent in the fields we needed in Europe (…) so apparently those people exist, but it was just really hard to find them” (Expert 1, section 9, lines 5 to 15).

In the dialogue with Expert 2, it is revealed that the reason why the company was successful in connecting with talent across the world was that the social restrictions period made the team reflect upon their values and reconnect with some of the overarching organizational aspirations.

“... we started communicating and talking about those values more often, but also acting on them. One of them was that we treat everyone equally and give them equal opportunities to join the company” (Expert 2, section 15, lines 4 to 6).

This statement from Expert 2 indicates that the team, amid coming up with alternative solutions as to how to continue their work, turned to the core values of the organization for inspiration. Of chief importance to the organization is giving offering patients the opportunity to experience living a good, normal life. Moreover, it is also their ambition to give everyone, regardless of their nationality, race, sexuality, creed an equal opportunity to become a member of the company. This is a point that comes through very clearly in the following excerpt:

“(...) there must be a lot of talent out there that feel like they were losing the opportunity to talk to companies, to figure out what job they should have (...) so for us it was really important to make sure that they, as the patients get an equal opportunity to experience life as normal as possible, that talent had a similar opportunity to still be able to communicate and interact with us. Human interaction, as much as could be done, was our guiding star during Covid-19” (Expert 2, section 16, lines 1 to 7)

Thus, at this point, the team was looking to create as many opportunities as possible to keep the conversation going and to interact, as much as possible with talent. But what sort of response did they get in return now that they were talking to a wider range of potential employees, with individuals coming from different profiles, from different parts of the world? It is interesting here to see how this way of engaging put things into perspective, which I will divide into two subthemes within the topic of talent attraction done virtually.

Subtheme 1: Talent becomes a New Audience during Covid-19

It is revealed in the interview with Expert 2 (section 6) that one of the biggest learnings that came out of moving activities online and thereby reaching out to a broader audience, worlds of possibilities opened both ways. On the one hand there were the new profiles of individuals that would be a good fit in the organization, which recruiters and talent attraction professionals did not have access to since most of the outreach activities were done physically and were only taking place in Denmark. On the other hand, the broader outreach brought along increased competition. Suddenly, the war for talent was not only taking place in Denmark, between the usual competitors, but the world opened up to numerous other organizations looking to attract top talent as well. This is something that was quickly picked on by the talent attraction team:

“Worlds of possibilities for top talent have also opened up and that definitely makes them pickier on where they will spend their time. So, we are also being challenged in a completely new way. Top talent is now very much focused on what’s in it for me, how do I actually get the right answers as fast as possible, and that makes it really important that we are on top of our game” (Expert 2, section 6, lines 1 to 5).

Expert 2 discusses this point further (section 7) claiming that one major difference between career fairs attendees before the Covid-19 crisis and the new audience is that the latter group

is much more prepared and systematic about how they approach companies. They voice concerns and have different curiosities about companies. They research the virtual company stand and seek out specific company representatives to engage in dialogue with. This, according to Expert2 (section 7) requires much more preparation than before the pandemic period, where the company would send out a random group of representatives to career fairs, who would talk about what the company does and tell stand visitors how to apply for a job. The difference now is that talented profiles, be those students or graduates, seek to carry out authentic conversations and expect more transparency on what an organization does and whether that can be a space where they, too, can contribute:

“(...) I’d say it’s new times, yeah. So, what we learned is, of course, that we need to be better prepared, we need to have the answers ready, that they are more to the point when they ask us stuff. We need to engage with top talent in new ways, in a way where we are more transparent about what it is like working at our company and what they can expect”. (Expert 2, section 7, lines 8 to 12).

The new audience, thus, is one that is better prepared, asks more targeted questions and is eager to dig deeper to discover the organization. This could also be due to the fact that top talent has also become more international now. Where the company was only attending career fairs and carrying out outreach activities in Denmark, the context of Covid-19 opened the realm of possibilities as far as recruitment and attraction go, by engaging with individuals, from other countries or continents, who do not know the company very well. Top talent from abroad is apprehensive, curious, because it is not as familiar with the organization and the brand as Danish talent is. This is a point that the three talent attraction experts make in their interviews, Expert 3 stating that:

“I feel like all Denmark worked here at a point. So, people here seem to have some sort of connection to the place either through their direct involvement with the company, or someone they know, relatives, stories they’ve hear.” (Expert 3, section 14, lines 2 to 5).

Expert 2 states that this familiarity that Danish talent feels when it comes to the organizational brand and identity, is exactly one of the top aspects that make the place attractive to Danes:

“It’s a prestigious company, of course, with a brand name that carries back a lot of tradition, especially in Denmark you will always find someone that has a family member that worked for us or a friend who works here and it is generally perceived as a great place to work”

To become more visible and more easily accessible by international talent, the team of experts shared in their interviews that their goals operationally was to open up even more to talent beyond the borders of Denmark. Among their projections for the future, they named participating to even more international career fairs, continuing with the virtual work, and creating all sorts of different settings such as case competitions, online company get-together events, and bridging the gap between current employees and prospective future employees.

This is a good segue into the second subtheme that emerged out of the collected data, which is the issue of how this new talent can be accommodated into the organization. If, indeed, talent has become a new audience, one that comes from different parts of the world and is not only joining a new organizational culture, but a whole national culture altogether, what sort of implication does that have on how these individuals are welcomed?

Subtheme 2: Accommodating the New Talent Audience

Whether talent is hired to work remotely or relocating to Denmark to work in one of the many offices that the company has, it will have to understand the organizational and national culture. As established in the previous subtheme, it is the ambition of the talent attraction team to keep on reaching out to a wider talent audience beyond Covid-19, seeing how a stronger global presence can lead to more outreach and implicitly to more attraction of top talent for difficult positions to fill:

“We should definitely open even more, I could definitely see us having twice as many webinars and virtual career fairs. The path forward from here is organizational members representing the organization more and more (...) sharing from their everyday life and life at work with rawness, with ups and downs and how to deal with all that. Showing talent from all over the world, hey, this is what a data scientist is doing at the organization, this is what a biostatistician is doing, these are the projects we are super proud of, these are the findings that we can actually talk about”. (Expert 2, section 33, lines 4 to 9)

Thus, the very first step of talent becoming more familiar with the organization as a whole is the story of what it is like working for the company being communicated by its current employees. However, two of the experts bring forward some concerns when it comes to talent from abroad, understanding that settling into a new country and in a new workplace needs a more systematic approach and with it, a more thorough onboarding system. In section 29 of the interview that I had with Expert 2, they explain to me that while in Denmark the brand is known and new employees are naturally drawn to the organization, such is not the case when it comes to foreign talent, where the brand is not as known. It is the expert's belief (section 19, lines 6 to 15), that after landing the new job at the company comes the whole process of relocating to Denmark, some new employees having to bring their near families along, but leaving behind a network of other close relatives, friends, and acquaintances. While the organization cannot make up for that, it is the belief of the expert that this transition could become a smoother process by having a more systematic onboarding process in place, where attention could go past learning the systems, processes, and operations, and go on connecting the new employees with small networks within the company:

“What I would like is something that would create a sort of ecosystem inside the company where we, through the workplace also explain the culture and the new life that you are going to experience as someone who moved to Denmark and make it easy.” (Expert 2, section 30).

Later, the expert explains to me that while such social activities and clubs are already-existing opportunities in the company, there is a danger to placing people together in a group and expecting them to bond and understand the culture of a workplace. To her, this moves beyond mere socializing, and to this she suggests combining the social aspect of understanding the company with more organized activities and networking sessions designed for newcomers to understand the organization:

“(...) perhaps it's more about making networks across departments in the company and actually having these coffee talks twice a week with people from different places, professionally, personally, culturally. I think we would benefit a lot from actually doing that. The more people you know, in your organization, the better your work will turn out.” (Expert 2, section 31, lines 5 to 8).

This is something that comes up in my conversation with Expert 1, as well. When asked what more could be done for the organization to attract and retain top talent, she immediately raises the issue of the company not being prepared enough to onboard and accommodate international top talent that is relocating. In section 29 of the interview, she expresses that international top talent, that already is located in Denmark can more easily find their way inside the organizational culture at the company: they have already been in Denmark for a while, they are acclimatized with Danish society and a workplace in Denmark. She believes:

“(...) we don’t need to go abroad to find international talent, there is a lot of international talent in Denmark. And they’re already familiar with the Danish working culture. The possibility of them being here and bringing value to the organization I think is higher than hiring someone from a different country to come here. We don’t have a strong enough onboarding system for that yet.” (Expert 1, section 29, lines 2 to 7).

In section 30 of the same interview, Expert 1 explains to me that hiring someone from abroad and not accommodating them into the organizational culture properly can become problematic when it comes to talent retention. She sees two different solutions to this conundrum: either employing international talent already based in Denmark, or coming up with a more sustainable way of easing the new employees into the organizational culture:

“This is a huge organization, I think employees take a long time to figure out and understand how big it actually is, so it would be nice if we could fast-track this process and combine it as a way of understanding both the operations and culture of the workplace and country you are in” (Expert 1, section 20, lines 6 to 9).

Two of the experts therefore believe that a more systematic way to onboard and accommodate new employees in the organization could increase the likelihood of them staying with the company for longer terms, especially when it comes to those coming from abroad. This is a scenario that the organization will inevitably have to deal with now that it has been established that strategically talent attraction will continue reaching out beyond the borders of Denmark to outsource talented profiles. However, an important point was made by Expert 3 during the interview. According to them (Expert 3, section 27), top talent, even the international talented workforce, indeed exists outside, but also in Denmark. The issue is that they might start choosing other employers in or outside of Denmark if the organization does not show a

willingness to implement changes post Covid-19, based on the challenges and the learnings that this period brought along:

“(...) the problem with the organization right now is that we do have top talent in Denmark, but they are not choosing us as their top priority. They are choosing other companies. And so, the question should be why? It’s not about just going to all career fairs and events and activities: it’s about what and how we present who we are as an organization once we are there. If we are not flexible, if we have old rules that have been there for a hundred years, if we do not become more approachable and more human-centered as to what we can offer to organizational members, then top talent will choose other companies where they can get that” (Expert 3, section 27, lines 3 to 9).

Theme 2: Brand Identity and Becoming More Attractive

One of the established things that have been discussed so far is the fact that the company, which served as the context for this research, is a well-established brand in Denmark, easily recognized by people living here. When asked about the top three aspects that make the organization an attractive place to work for, the talent attraction experts listed the prestige and brand name as something that individuals looking for their next employer are attracted to:

“(...) it’s the prestige and reputation and that it’s a well-established organization. Yeah, so it’s not a start-up. There are already 48000 people working here.” (Expert 3, section 14, lines 1 to 2)

“It’s a prestigious company, of course, with a brand name that carries back a lot of tradition, especially in Denmark, you will always find someone that has a family member that worked for us or a friend who works here and it is generally perceived as a great place to work where you can develop a stellar career” (Expert 1, section 20, lines 2 to 5).

There are other elements that the experts touch upon when talking about organizational attractiveness of the company in question. In the interview with Expert 1 (section 20), they describe that the organization is attractive because it is purpose-driven, with a mission to change people’s lives for the better. Finally, the third element they touch upon is the fact that

the organization's focus is very much on development. On the one hand of its employees, through different projects, processes, or training programmes, and on the other hand societally and environmentally through different sustainability initiatives.

Expert 3 (sections 12 and 13) invokes the similar reasons as to why talent is attracted to the organization, stating that because the company, although headquartered in Denmark, is “*global, multinational and huge*” (section 12, line 1), which allows for more freedom when tailoring one's own career path through work in different departments, on different projects, within different teams, in different affiliate offices. Once again, the matter concerning purpose comes up, listed as an attractive feature by Expert 3, who talks to me about especially the younger generations being incentivized to join companies where meaningful work is done:

“(...) it doesn't matter what you do in the organization, you can be an IT technician, you can be a recruiter, or like work in a factory, you will always work under the same banner of helping people stay alive or staying healthy. (...) I read studies that it's getting more and more important that top talented profiles don't want to work in a company that doesn't have a positive impact on society.” (Expert 3, section 13, lines 2 to 6)

A wide array of opportunities to develop within the company is also something that Expert 1 comments on in the interview I had with them, as well as working in a purpose-driven place (sections 20,21,22). An interesting point of view that they make is that the work culture within the organization is supportive of nature, with employees keen on helping one another. In section 23 they compare it to previous workplaces, where lending a helping hand was not a characteristic of the work culture, competition and a tendency to backstab being more predominant. What is salient here is their following remark:

“(...) I think what's attractive, but that's not something I knew before stating here, but once I started, I realized that the organization's culture is very supportive” (Expert 1, section 23, lines 1 to 2).

Factors that are attractive about the organization might not be visible or easy to comprehend by outsiders. This is when the conversation turned towards the employer branding initiatives during Covid-19 and whether those had any impact on attracting talent. In the interview with Expert 2 (section 14), they talk about visual elements used by employer branding to give

outsiders a peek into what they could expect if they started working in the organization. A yellow line, swirling, going up and down, was introduced in all branding materials and its meaning was related to the idea that careers, much like life, are anything but linear. Although not specifically planned for the Covid-19 period, the campaign fit with the period of disruption caused by the global pandemic, where many individuals lost their jobs and had to explore different career avenues to be able to make ends meet. The organization tries to appeal to talent by presenting this particular workplace as a space where the employee has autonomy and influence over the development of his or her career path:

“(...) I think it made a big difference in how the organization was perceived by talent outside the company. We introduced the yellow line, which (...) is meant to symbolize the fact that life is never linear, and neither are careers. One of the biggest selling points when attracting top talent is the fact that in our organization you can tailor your career journey the way you think is best for you” (Expert 2, section 14, lines 2 to 7).

Expert 1 backs up this claim and discusses the importance of brand identity elements with me in their interview (sections 17 and 18). They believe that the yellow line became a device to place the idea of cohesiveness and unity in the minds of outsiders. It is also their belief that the line was meant to give comfort to anyone navigating the job market during the Covid-19 period, as well as other hardships brought along by the pandemic. Almost as if the organization was seeking to offer some solace to anyone who stumbled upon promotional materials in form of videos, pictures, official announcements, by telling them that life comes with ups and downs and that things do not stay the same forever.

“(...) life and careers are never linear. They come with ups and downs, with unexpected twists and turns, and instead of running away from situations like that, we tried to present the organization as a (...) cohesive, tight brand. (...) maybe in that time of uncertainty it gave people hope, like, oh this looks like a company where they have it all together.” (Expert 1, section 17, lines 5 to 10).

What is interesting at this point in the interview with Expert 2 is a self-reflective thought they have, when they reveal to me (section 18) that by expressing the non-linear character of career paths, the organization began embracing it more than it was doing it in the past. Communicating

this message regularly led to a shift in thinking accepted at a company-level, which in turn began being leveraged to attract top talent:

“I think our thinking also shifted a bit and we started thinking (...) we don’t necessarily need to study HR to work in HR. Maybe you studied history or agriculture, and then you ended up in HR in some weird way. It was about embracing that, because before I don’t know if we were really embracing it, but I think the new employer brand helped us to embrace the different paths. It helped us present that to talent outside the company and leverage it to attract talent” (Expert 1, section 18, lines 14 to 19).

At this point in the interviews, the interviewees and I are getting closer to the idea of changes that have taken place and changes they wish would take place in the future for the company to become an even more appealing employer. This was discussed with all the three talent attraction experts, and it related highly to the learnings and conclusions drawn by them and the way they experienced the Covid-19 period in their field. While the prestige and reputation of this global healthcare organization is undoubtably a factor which attracted people in the past, the pandemic opened the eyes of the talent attraction specialists to the fact that talent is a new audience, which comes with a new set of expectations and demands. Some of these new aspirations involve feeling more comfortable approaching the organization and considering it as a future employer, as well as the matter of having more flexibility in terms of doing hybrid work.

Subtheme 1: Tradition is a double-edged sword

As established earlier on, the organizational brand of the company in question bears the stamp of prestige and tradition. This is a global healthcare organization with a mission to cure a series of chronic diseases through the research, development, production, marketing and selling of medicine all over the world. The organization has been operating for a hundred years, with its headquarters in Copenhagen, Denmark, and affiliate offices in other countries as well.

Several times during the interviews with the talent attraction experts what came up was the idea that the organization is typically perceived as conservative, difficult to approach, serious, intimidating even. This is an understanding that the talent attraction team reached to because of them participating to online career fairs, virtual outreach activities and when carrying out

their own series of webinars, where they started engaging with talent in a more direct, more personal way. Expert 2 describes it in their interview as a process which made the organization more approachable especially to younger talent. In their answers they reveal that while the big brand name and well-established business are factors which attract workforce, the same elements run the risk of people not connecting with the brand enough to consider it a potential future employer:

“Right away we could see that it took us a little bit down from (...) that pedestal. Having ongoing interaction with talent made us look more human and approachable. (...) it made it less frightening to interact with us (...) more humanly possible to make it inside the organization” (Expert 2, section 18, lines 1 to 4)

In the same section, the expert voices their concern that becoming part of the organization needs to be reframed as a more achievable goal, so that talent is encouraged as much as possible to join the company instead of going through a process of self-doubt and applying for jobs at other companies where the requirements and expectations are more manageable. As the expert underlines in their answer, this is a big concern in the current war for talent, as the company cannot risk losing gifted profiles to competition:

“(we need) to make joining the organization a more reachable goal and not just something you think, no, it’s not doable for me because I am an average student. We need those profiles as well in the war for talent that we have at the moment. Top talent needs to see the organization as more approachable. I would love to continue on this mission as we are coming out of the pandemic” (Expert 2, section 18, lines 5 to 8)

The same point is brought up by Expert 3 in their interview, where their belief is that a more active presence on virtual platforms and the initiative to create their own targeted webinars to keep the flow of conversation going with talent was the first step in breaking the image of traditional bordering on stiff. To them, what needs to happen is a systematic paradigm shift where a more modern approach to how people work is not only accepted but developed through original initiatives as a way to leave behind the rigid suit-and-tie avatar for who gets to be employed in the company and what a 9 to 5 workday is supposed to look like. They state:

“There needs to be a systematic change at an organizational level in how we leave that conservative image behind of always doing it how we have always done it. (...) the webinars really kind of helped kickstart that feeling of (...) the company starting to become a little bit more approachable (as now you can meet) people who work here and see that not everyone is corporate suit and tie and that you’re not ever going to fit in there if you are different”

(Expert 3, section 20, lines 1 to 7).

However, it is not just a matter of interacting with talent in this new fashion that will bring gifted employees closer to the organization. Another aspect that has come up in the interviews is the matter of having more flexibility in terms of hybrid working (working some days in the office and others from home). In their interview, Expert 3 (section 24) states that the shift to working remotely has not yet happened in the organization. Although due to rules and regulations imposed by the Danish government to work remotely and comply with social distancing, as soon as the restrictions were lifted, employees were asked to return to the office. Expert 3 perceives this as a factor that contributes to the image of the organization as stern, old-fashioned, and conservative, attributes which risk turning top talent away. They believe:

“(...) the organization lacks flexibility on working from wherever (...) I think a lot of top talent that could make a huge difference in the company gets lost to competition in organizations that embraced this way of working” (Expert 3, section 21, lines 5 to 7).

It is at this point that it became evident to me that the talent attraction experts understand that the organizational brand is not one that outsiders can easily relate to, as the company is often perceived as corporate, unapproachable and, at times, intimidating. What was interesting to me, then, was to engage in conversations with organizational members that were freshly employed in the company, to hear whether these first impressions had any impact on them choosing the company as their next employer and what exactly else made them interested and attracted to the prospect of working here. Below I wish to give an overview of two major themes that were constructed based on the interview answers and what kind of findings, which would help me answer my problem formulation, started coming to the surface.

Theme 3: Making mixed first impressions

In the interviews I had with the employees at the organization, a recurring point that the interviewees made was the fact that prior to their hiring and stepping inside the organization, they did not feel as strong of a connection to the brand identity as outsiders, as they felt as insiders. When talking about where their motivation to apply for a job here stemmed from, all of them invoked reasons such as: the organization was well-established, it was a known brand, with an international environment and affiliate offices around the world, and a mission to improve people's lives. So far, the perception of the outsiders does indeed match the characteristics that employer branding initiatives work on emphasizing to the public and to top talent. The employees describe their perception of the organization as:

“(...) one of the biggest workplaces in Denmark, and their mission is to improve people's lives” (employee 1, section 4, lines 7 and 8)

“(...) of course I knew who they were and what they do here” (Employee 3, section 7, line 3)

They all went into details about how they knew the company and what sort of preconceived notions they had built in their minds before their first direct contact with the organization. Employee 1 describes in their interview (section 4) how having family members who worked in the company gave them the impression that the company was *“a good place to work at”*. To Employee 3 the place was attractive because their goal was to land a job in what they considered a large organization, so their goal in the job-hunting process was to *“join one of the big companies in Denmark”*. However, what is interesting here is the fact that, based on the answers and statements that employees gave me, it seems that the organizational brand identity comes off, much like talent attraction experts believed, as unapproachable and very exclusive. These first impressions led to the employees feeling apprehensive about applying to the jobs they went for, pondering on whether they would fit in in a place like this. The interview excerpts below can give the reader an insight into the thought processes that the employees underwent prior to choosing the company as their future employer:

“(...) I was like, what am I even doing in this place, because they say oh we hire top class applicants and everyone is in a suit and I couldn't really see myself in there with all these people and in this atmosphere” (Employee 3, section 8, lines 3 to 5)

“(...) this is something that is for like biology or some engineering or IT people, not for people like me who studied on the more humanistic side of university programmes”
(Employee 3, section 10, lines 4 to 6)

“(...) one can very quickly be scared off because the company brands itself as serious, respectable, professional, top-of-the-class, world leaders in drug development, solid and constant high performance, ambition, excellence. These words have some sort of harshness about them (...) like something that is impossible to get into unless you are top-of-the-class-yourself” (Employee 1, section 27, lines 2 to 6)

“(...) I was a bit intimidated when I applied for jobs here because it was hard to connect with the human side of business” (Employee 1, section 28, lines 3 and 4)

We can deduct, based on what has been shared, that indeed there seems to be a barrier between candidate who apply for the jobs at the organization and being able to see themselves as potential new employees. This can be related to what the talent attraction experts were also affirming in their interviews, sustaining the view that outsiders tend to perceive the company as corporate, rigid, unapproachable, and exclusive. However, it is very interesting to continue the discussion on organizational brand identity perceptions, because there are also factors that do appeal to the outside talent, enough to overpower the impression that the organization is difficult to penetrate.

What makes outside talent see past all that is the organization’s mission to help humanity, which is an aspect that appealed to all three of the interviewed employees. In their discussions with me, they shared the fact that they instantaneously felt a calling, a connection, a drive to become part of the mission. The thought of contributing to the greater good made a difference in how they perceived the company, as although they could do a similar job in a different company, it was important to them to put in work in a place what contributes to people’s lives being saved:

“(...) it was important to work for a place where my efforts and my time were going towards something good (...) I just wanted my work to have some sort of a bigger purpose”
(Employee 1, section 14, lines, 1 through 6)

“(...) it was important that it was part of something that ultimately had a positive impact (...) it mattered that I was part of the greater good” (Employee 1, section 15, lines 4 through 6).

“(...) it was important to me that I join a company with a mission that speaks to me (...) I can do this work here or there or everywhere, but where can I do it where it gives me maximum satisfaction to put all these hours in?” (Employee 2, section 10, lines 1 through 5)

“I really connected with the whole idea of helping people all over the world and contributing a little bit to this greater good (...) I thought, wow, if I worked here I could maybe in some small way help in this” (Employee 3, section 7, lines 6 through 9)

This looks to be a major attraction factor when it comes to motivation to join the organization. Its power lies in the fact that talent outside the company is ready to look past the fact that seemingly the work culture is not entirely aligned with who they are and apply for a job anyway. The idea of joining a place where their work would bring a small contribution is an incentive big enough to make them apply for the job, despite the workplace being too conventional and traditional for their liking. At this point, a smaller subtheme formed, as the conversations with the organizational members made me understand that things are different once individuals have more direct contact with the company.

Subtheme 1: First contact with the Organizational Culture

That perceived entry barrier and incompatibility with the organizational culture of the company began dissolving from the interview stage in some of the employees. In their interviews, they reveal to me that the atmosphere was light, that they felt at ease, that they got a sample of what the people in the company were like, what their potential hiring manager was like and that ultimately made them even more eager and excited to step into the organization as new hires. When I asked Employee 3 whether they would have been disappointed had they not gotten the job, they let me know that:

“Yeah, definitely, especially after the interviews, because I realized how nice people were and how great the mood was during the interviews and then I thought ok, if this is how nice my manager is then the whole team must be very similar, and I would like to be part of that kind of group” (Employee 3, section 12)

This point of view is also sustained by the declarations of Employee 2, who was also pleasantly surprised during their interview period:

“(...) I thought the interview process would be much more stressful than it actually was (...) I got this sense of, ok, this is a cool crowd, it’s not as (...) stuck up and serious like I thought it might be, which was a bit of a concern for me in the beginning. But the mood was light and the discussion was interesting and they gave me a really good insight into what I can expect coming into the company and that made my decision easier” (Employee 2, section 14, lines 1 to 6).

At a later point during the interviews, the employees let me know that this barrier faded away more and more as they settled into their new roles. Their shared experience is that the organizational culture was one characterized by a high level of support, of team members helping one another, low interest for competing against one another, with managers actively involved in their employees’ progress and wellbeing.

Employee 2 (sections 16 and 17) tells me that once inside the organization, their experience was that the workplace culture was supportive, despite there being a steep learning curve and a lot of hard work to put in as a newcomer. In their view, the employees are granted a lot of trust, both from other team members, but especially from line managers. They describe being entrusted with a lot of different projects and tasks, which initially surprised them as the level of difficulty and responsibility both were high in their opinion.

Employee 1 (sections 23 and 24) gives me a similar impression, stating that the organization is very professional, with teams full of individuals who are passionate about what they do and put a lot of hard work and dedication to achieve the different goals. Very much like Employee 2, Employee 1 describes the beginning of his journey with the company as a period where fast-paced learning took place, but that they managed to navigate that with the support of their department. Once again the motif of individuals not competing against one another comes up, with employee 1 describing in section 24 of the interview that organizational members are much more focused on bringing the newcomers on board than

Employee 3 describes the company culture in very similar lines:

“(...) a bunch of highly professional people who put in a lot of hard work for something that is greater than all of us together. I think the support is very high in the teams (...) if I have a problem with work or I can’t figure out something (...) I can always ask for help without

feeling that someone might turn me away or sabotage me” (Employee 3, section 23, lines 3 through 10)

This period of getting acclimatized to both the organization and the new positions did not come without its challenges, as all three interviewed employees joined the company during the Covid-19 global pandemic. Therefore, I was curious to hear about some of the challenges of this phase, as well as how that shaped the workplace culture, as experienced by the interviewees. I will present some of the most salient thoughts in the following subtheme.

Subtheme 2: Workplace culture during and post Covid-19

To Employee 3, the remote work and social distancing that was to be complied with during the Covid-19 period, brought the team members closer to one another. They recount (sections 25, 26, and 27) that they were always in touch with colleagues online, through meetings and activities, seeking *“as much as possible to not stay divided”*. Eventually this constant engagement became exhausting, as employees were at home, jumping from meeting to meeting, without a moment’s break, but by the end of the period they figured out a good balance. As the restrictions were lifted and people came back to the office as usually, it became Employee 3’s impression that team members started to slowly drift away from one another, chipping away at the idea of a cohesive department:

“(…) I can feel that we are slowly drifting apart again which is such a paradox because we are more together now than we were for the past two years” (Expert 3, section 27, lines 2 and 3).

Employee 2 recalls joining the organization during Covid-19 as problematic, as they were not the most enthusiastic about working remotely. To them, working from home is reminded as a period of great division (sections 37 and 38), with frustrations and difficulties, especially as a newcomer in the company. Not being able to ask a question as it popped into their head, not being able to read the room, and the lack of non-staged or pre-planned interactions drained them of energy. They do understand, however, and explain to me, that this was a general state of sensemaking that their team was going through, where everyone was attempting to find the right balance of how to keep things going operationally.

However, what stands out at this point in the conversations with the three employees is how now that the restrictions have been lifted, the organization is falling back into the same way of doing things: coming into the office every day, working from 9 to 5, and having a lot of different tasks, meetings, and projects that they work on separately. This is the point in the interviews, where they seem puzzled by the fact that instead of taking the opportunity to become more modern in the way daily work is structured, by embracing a hybrid model of working some days from the office and some from home, the opposite takes place. There seems to be an unwritten agreement that the new normal, is in fact the same old normal, where everyone comes physically in to work. Although some employees think this is a good sign, which points to the fact that people enjoy coming to work physically, they do admit to me that the flexibility of working from home is missed:

“(…) I think we are sadly going back to full-time office work all the time, which is something I don’t enjoy. It’s like an unwritten rule, you know, if the boss and the majority of the team goes to the office it’s a bit bad light on you to work from home, even if you yourself know you are more productive in that setting” (Employee 1, section 33, lines 7 to 11)

“(…) the people are happy to come back to work and be in the office, to me it definitely makes it more fun, although I do miss starting the day a bit later and working from home because coming all the way to the office especially if you have a very long commute can be a bit draining” (Employee 2, section 39, lines 1 to 4)

Ultimately, they do mention in their interviews that this is something that they wish the organization would consider, because it would loosen up the proverbial tie and give it an air of a place where flexibility and making sure the employees are thriving are top priorities (Employee 1, section 41; Employee 2, section 41).

This brings me to the final theme that I constructed based on the things that were communicated to me during the interviews with the employees. We began discussing what the company does to ensure that they are thriving in their roles, what more could be done, and which sort of initiatives make them want to stay longer in the company, as well as what would make them leave.

Theme 4: Developing as an Organizational Member

It was established, in the beginning of the interviews, that the reputation, as well as the general mission of the organization, were two main elements which attracted the former jobseekers to join as employees. Another big factor in this decision-making process was the joint perception that this organization would be the perfect space for them to develop as young professionals. Employee 3 shared that the international environment would be something they would enjoy being part of, as their belief is that they learn and grow through work with people who come from different cultures, parts of the world, and lived experiences than their own (Employee 3, section 14). In line with the idea of self-development is also the statement that I got from Employee 1:

“(...) I have some career milestones to accomplish and goals (...) my goal was always to get hired in a large organization because the bigger the place, the more opportunities there are to grow and learn and advance (...) I would like to try some things out, see what else I can do” (Employee 1, section 19, lines 2 through 6)

The prospect of trying work out in a different department or in a different team, in one of the affiliate offices from abroad is perceived as a path for development, growth, and learning:

“(...) I could imagine transferring for a year (...) very cool to have the possibility to transfer for a while and see how things are done in different parts of the company” (Employee 1, section 21, lines 6 to 7 and 9 to 10)

“(...) my goal was to land a job in a bigger place because (...) it would give me more opportunities to learn and become better in my field (...) there are more people to learn from” (Employee 2, section 9, lines 4 through 7)

Progressively, the employees discovered that there were benefits they could enjoy, which would support them in the path to self-development, either at a personal or professional level. First of all, much like the talent attraction experts, the employees mentioned the many opportunities they have for support of their well-being. Employee 2 describes it very well (section 43) when they list the workout facilities, annual health check, free therapy sessions, and many other such programmes.

However, it seems as though the employees, especially this batch, who are in the beginning of their careers, are interested in development opportunities that move past the typical workplace benefits like the ones listed above. Their interest revolves around learning and acquiring more knowledge about the company, as their belief is that the more they understand the company, the different lines of business, the way the different departments are interrelated, the more this clarifies the potential trajectory of their career paths within the organization. This led to the following subtheme.

Subtheme 1: Understanding the organization

A leitmotif that predominated in the interviews I had with the three employees was getting to know the organization better. As these individuals had not been part of the organization for many years, they explained to me that even after months and months they still had a difficult time wrapping their minds around how big the company was, how many different departments, areas, teams there were and how these were interrelated.

Employee 3 explained very clearly that they would like to be involved in more activities outside their current role, so that they could learn more about the company and its operations (Employee 3, section 32). Aside the tasks or projects or activities they could get involved in, which would shed more light onto the different areas, they also point out the fact that this sort of cross-departmental endeavors would give them the opportunity to network and meet other organizational members, which otherwise they would not meet. Elaborating on this topic, Employee 3 lets me know that there are indeed folders with access to a general overview of the different areas in the organization, but they would appreciate learning more about them through direct contact with members from other teams, rather than through reading off PDF documents or PowerPoint presentations:

“(…) I am sure there is some sort of PDF or PowerPoint presentation of what we do in this production site and what we do in the headquarters or what the statisticians are doing in this other site and so on, but it’s always so much more personal when you meet them” (Employee 3, section 33, lines 2 to 5).

This point of view is mirrored by Employee 2 and Employee 3, when they explain to me that despite having been in the company for over a year, they still have difficulties understanding the mechanics behind different areas and different sites, and they long for more opportunities to get there:

“(…) more learning opportunities, but learning about the company because, as I told you before, sometimes it can be hard to understand exactly the details and the mechanics behind what different departments do and what it actually looks like, what sort of research they are involved in, and how can someone from my team contribute so that their work gets fast-tracked (Employee 2, section 44, lines 3 to 7)

“(…) I have been part of this company for some time and I still can't wrap my head around how big it is and how many different areas and departments there are and what other lines of business are working with” (Employee 1, section 21, lines 11 to 14)

What is interesting about this topic is that getting to know the organization better stretches beyond the intention to network with other members or learning about projects that fall outside the day-to-day duties in their roles. They explain to me that getting in contact with other departments or teams, would also give them an insight on how their own work contributes to the bigger mission of the organization, which is to improve the lives of millions of people around the world living with chronic disease. While the idea of contributing to this good cause was in the beginning a factor of attraction when considering the organization as a future employer, the purpose of the work at times gets lost. As one of the employees points out in their interview, not everyone in the company is a medical doctor, a researcher, or a scientist, which can easily lead someone who works in a more administrative or business-related role to thinking: is my work meaningful and am I contributing to this mission in a real way? This led to the last subtheme that formed based on the interviewees' answers.

Subtheme 2: (Re)Discovering Purpose

Based on what was shared in the interviews with the employees, I started to understand that this feeling of separateness, of not having a stronger understanding of how the work of different departments is interconnected, and how that ultimately adds up to the mission of the whole

organization, led to organizational members losing sight of the impact that their work has. There are instances where they share this very openly, for example when Employee 3 declares:

“(...) of course I understand that we are all working towards the same purpose, right, to help millions of people who have to deal with chronic disease (...), but sometimes this purpose gets lost (Employee 3, section 34, lines 1 to 4)

“(...) some days you can be in front of the computer all day with your head inside Excel sheets and reports and invoices and do budgeting and then you kind of forget that your work has a meaning and a purpose and that your contribution matters (Employee 3, section 34, lines 5 to 8)

Employee 3 elaborates on this idea and connects it in Section 37 with the idea of motivation to do one's job, At the end of the day, as they put it, they are working within a corporation, where work sometimes gets repetitive and overwhelming, which can chip away at one's drive. This, they find, is problematic, because once someone in the team does not have the inner resources to perform well, then this inevitably affects the team and creates a ripple effect, which sooner or later is felt by the whole organization. To emphasize the importance of this point of view, Employee 3 states: *“Things go downhill when people don't care anymore”* (Employee 3, section 37, line 6).

Why is it then important to understand the meaning one's own work has? Employee 2 believes that it is a motivational drive, but also a way to discover how else one can contribute, as part of one's own developmental plan. In section 23 of the interview with Employee 2, they tell me that to grow and perform at top capacity, then one must have a sturdy plan into place: a combination between what one can do, what else can be done in the company, and what one's own passion and purpose are. Finding meaning in the work put in is important to them: *“(...) I would slowly whittle away if I was stuck in a job that didn't give me this satisfaction* (Employee 2, section 26, line 2 to 3).

To illustrate it even better to the reader, what was captivating at this point was the fact that all three employees listed not seeing meaning or purpose in their work any longer as a factor that would make them leave the organization. The most compelling thing in this case is that the very same attraction factor which draws the employees to the organization, which is engaging

in some sort of purpose-driven work, can very easily dissuade them and make them look for new employment possibilities outside the company:

“Losing sight of how my contribution makes a difference would also make me start wondering if maybe I would be of more value somewhere else” (Employee 1, section 44, lines 3 and 4).

I would leave *“If I didn’t see a point to me being there anymore and if my hands were tied to my back when it comes to what more I could do”* (Employee 2, section 47, lines 7 and 8).

“(…) if there was no room to advance (…) I think I would eventually start to consider it or if I was doing the same work over and over again and I couldn’t have the room to try different things here and there and get absolutely bored with the role” (Employee 3, section 43, lines 6 to 9)

However, at this point, I became curious to also understand whose responsibility it is for purpose to become more visible and easily accessed? Is this an innate resource that an organizational member can access at own free will, or is this something that needs a more systematic approach? If the latter, should team leaders be in charge of setting it up and what would that look like? To understand that, I needed to find out what was being done now and what more could be done, from the perspective of the employees.

When asked whose duty this was, Employee 2 states (section 30) that this is one’s own mission, but also that it falls under the responsibility of leaders and managers to guide their employees and enable them to see more clearly what their purpose is and what kind of projects, work, and new challenges can be assigned to someone for their work to feel purpose driven. This is something that Employee 2 expects from their line manager: *“I like to think that my manager could offer some solutions or give some advice or come up with some sort of plan of how to do it, what to change, where to go or where to stay”* (Employee 2, section 32, lines 3 to 5). They describe (section 35) that one to one meetings do take place between them and their manager, but these talks are still a formality, where task and projects updates are discussed, but conversations on a more personal level are not a priority.

The lack of human-centered conversations is also something that Employee 3 points out, expressing also a desire to have more open discussions with their leader and rest of the team about the purpose of the teams work, how people stay motivated, where individual passion comes from and how that can be translated in the daily tasks:

“(…) what would help would be having a bit more human conversations (…) we could have more of these meetings maybe with the whole team, where we discuss a bit about what we are passionate and what we burn for in our jobs, how we could do more of that in our projects, how our work helps the work of different colleagues and how this whole work we do is tied up together” (Employee 3, section 40, lines 2 to 6)

The next thing I was interested in having the employees talk about was what this would look like in practice. Employee 3 (section 31) gives me some very clear examples of what would help them rediscover and reconnect with their purpose. To them, coaching or personal development workshops would be beneficial, as they admit that they are still in the beginning of their career and having a well-defined purpose would also clarify professional development and the next steps to be taken. Displaying great capacity for metacognition, they ponder about the use of these personal development and purpose-finding endeavors for more senior organizational members, but then conclude that even those could benefit from such sessions:

“(…) maybe more senior employees don’t need this (…) but maybe they also need a brush-up on what else they could do, what their core motivation is and how that helps them in the work they do (…) having a bit more direction and more connection to the organization would give me these booster shots of motivation here and there” (Employee 3, section 41, lines 3 to 7)

The other two employees expressed that more opportunities to interact with different members of the organization would give insight into not only the purpose of different departments, but it would be a good change to communicate one’s own purpose and hear what drives others, where they are making an impact, as well as where their passions and aspirations lie. These sort of interactions, be they short, physical or online, meetings or workshops, would cover ground in the trifecta: understanding how the organization works – understanding purpose at an organizational level – understanding own and others’ individual purpose.

Summary of the Main Findings

In **Theme 1: A New Way to Attract Talent Emerges**, the reader got insight into the impact of the Covid-19 upon the operations that the talent attraction team had to put on hold, but also to rethink and redesign. Outreach activities, which no longer could be carried out physically, pushed the team to develop a more visible online presence. The aim of this was to keep the flow of conversation with top talent going, as a strategy to continue filling the organization's talent pipelines. Virtual career fairs and targeted webinars designed by the team led to a wider outreach.

These new worlds of possibilities, however, also gave a new shape to who talent was as an audience, which is covered in **Subtheme 1: Talent Becomes a New Audience**. The new audience challenged the organization by being more upfront: what can you do for me as a company and why should I choose you as an employer? New expectations from talent's side (remote work, development possibilities, meaningful work), as well as its much more international nature, led the talent attraction experts to the realization that the organization does not have a strong enough system in place for accommodating this new type of employees. In **Subtheme 2: Accommodating the New Talent Audience** it is revealed that new processes must be designed and communicated to outside talent. The clear, new message must be: we know coming to a new country and stepping into a new organization is difficult – we will take care of you.

This can potentially lead to the organization becoming more attractive, a topic covered in **Theme 2: Brand Identity and Becoming More Attractive**. In this theme, it is established that the top three elements that make the organization an attractive workplace are its reputation, opportunities for professional development, and a supportive workplace culture. However, some of these elements are not visible enough to outsiders, especially to international talent who is not familiar with the brand and its identity. The organization presents itself as a place where one can find a place to develop professionally and tailor one's career journey. There is only one condition, though: you must earn your place here. At least that is what the talent attraction experts believe the brand communicates to the outside public, which as explored in **Subtheme 1: Tradition is a double-edged sword**, can be problematic in the post-pandemic times. On the one hand, individuals are attracted to the reputation and well-established company name, whose purpose is to save the lives of millions of people around the world living with chronic disease. On the other hand, the organization is generally perceived as overly traditional. The talent attraction experts made sense of this throughout the pandemic and their

aspirations going forward are to reframe the image of the organization as a less conservative, more accessible one.

In **Theme 3: Making Mixed First Impressions**, it is revealed that first impressions matter indeed and that in the process of browsing for jobs, the organization gives mixed messages to outside talent. Reputation and being purpose-driven in the work are, as predicted by the talent attraction experts in theme 2, factors that incentivize talent to seek work in the organization. However, it is also confirmed by the employees that the highly conservative image of the organization and the high standards when hiring are factors that intimidate candidates. Nevertheless, those who do apply, end up, as revealed in **Subtheme 1: First contact with the Organizational Culture** that things are not as they seem. From the initial, direct contact with the organization, through first round interviews, potential new employees sense that the atmosphere is pleasant and welcoming and they begin to look forward to becoming part of it. In **Subtheme 2: Workplace culture during and post Covid-19**, the reader learns that once inside the organization, the workplace culture reveals itself as one of support, but that aspects related to being overly traditional can still be spotted.

Theme 4: Developing as an Organizational Member shows that one of the major issues that newly hired employees face is getting to understand the company and its many different departments, teams, projects, and contributions. In order to develop, one must have a solid understanding of what one is capable of, but also of where one's career path is headed, which is explored into more detail in **Subtheme 1: Understanding the organization**. To be able to do so, the employees express a desire for more cross-departmental work which would bring them into contact with other organizational members and shed some light onto how the work of one department enables the work of another and how all these pieces put together contribute to the overall organizational purpose. Individual purpose is brought up in **Subtheme 2: (Re)Discovering Purpose** where employees claim that a better understanding of how one's work is meaningful is a factor that can sustain motivation and that can be detrimental in the decision to leave or stay in the organization. Passion and purpose could be revealed through more systematic conversation between leaders and employees, and among teams, as although everyone is working towards the same organizational goals, not everyone's work is patient-centered and directly connected to the mission of improving people's lives.

Discussion

I wish to begin the discussion chapter of the thesis by reviewing the findings summed above in relation to the selected literature presented in the earlier stages of the paper. In a day and age where services and products are regularly copied and reproduced, having the right talent employed will give a company a huge competitive advantage in the global marketplace (Bafaro, Ellsworth, & Ghandi, 2017; Keller & Meaney, 2017). Organizations are competing against one another to stand out as attractive employers and rely on their ability to attract the right talent (Huselid, Becker & Beatty, 2009; Guthridge et al., 2008). As noted in the literature review chapter, Guthridge et al. (2008) state that organizations need to get involved in as many different types of outreach activities to find talent and pursue talent attraction at a global level. In the organization that has served as the context for my research, the Covid-19 global pandemic put a halt on many different outreach activities, which Guthridge et al. (2018) indicate companies should be involved in: headhunting, advertising, university visits and recruitment on campus, hosting open door days, career fairs, etc. The talent attraction department in the organization knew very well that not keeping the conversation flow ongoing would lead to talent slipping through their fingers. Thus, they decided to do the only thing they could, given that they had to comply with the social distancing restrictions: they moved operations online and made themselves visible to a wider audience of talent.

This stronger online presence made the talent attraction team realize that, much as Froese et al., (2020), Khilji, Tarique, & Schuler (2015) predicted, the one of the greatest challenges that the organization was facing was how to manage a talent audience that is continuously becoming more and more diversified, educated and globally mobile. On top of that, the team realized that bringing in talent to the organization is only half of the job, a topic widely explored in the first theme in the main findings section. To keep the organization's talent pipelines filled, efforts must go into the retention of talent, a point in line with the findings of Daniels et al (2017), who, through, extensive studies established that talent attraction is a field in perpetual motion, with organizations on a cyclic mission of fetching new talent and filling in the gaps when talent leaves.

Brand reputation is a big factor that comes into play when talk about talent attraction. As established in the main findings chapter, both talent attraction experts and newly employed organizational members admit that a well-established name, backed up by tradition and

reputation is something that incentivizes individuals to apply for jobs in an organization. There is a connection between this belief and the findings of Fombrun (1996): the general reputation of an organization is a major factor to consider because reputation gives people information. A logo and a tagline can evoke different feelings and inspire individuals to either wish to become a part of the organization or turn away if it does not fall in line with what they wish their employer to be like. In the main findings, the reader learned that the brand identity of the global healthcare organization in question was perceived by outsiders as conservative, stuffy, and rather unapproachable. This is something that talent attraction experts were also aware of, as declared in their interviews, so the challenge is: is this really who we wish to present ourselves to the world as an employer? The importance of employer branding when attracting talent is something not to be overlooked. This is also an indication that comes from Gatewood et al. (1993) and Rynes (1992), who decades before demonstrated through own extensive research that the perceived reputation of an organization highly influences its capability to attract top talent.

Nonetheless, the global healthcare organization in my study proved, through the declarations of all interviewees, that brand identity can express more than just one thing. It might be that outsiders get the impression of a traditional employer, but they also see a business driven by the noble pursuit of improving the lives of millions of people around the world living with chronic disease. There is something attractive about playing a small part in that grand mission. The sheer size of the organization further sends messages that outsiders respond well to: this is a large company, one in which you can develop professionally, with many different departments and affiliate offices where one can move around, learn, and grow through various roles and responsibilities. This is something that this particular organization tries to leverage as much as possible in their outreach activities, acting in line with what Lloyd (2002) described as strong employer branding: the process of constructing the image of being a fantastic place to work and placing that image in the minds of potential future employees.

However, what is being transmitted in the attraction phase through employer branding elements and initiatives must also appear in day-to-day processes once someone gets hired. After all, who a company says they are is more than just a tagline, logo or mascot, but involves also the policies, procedures, mission and vision, all of which shape the company culture. As established by Mandhanya & Shah (2010) and reviewed in the literature chapter, employer branding tools should not merely be used to lure new candidates in, but also to keep the current

employees motivated and committed, as not acting in line with what organizations promise to stand for can risk the loss of talent. At this point it is worth remembering that, as employer branding literature purports, that global and universal practices cannot always be used as a one-size-fits-all solution, and even less so in times of crisis such as the Covid-19 period has been. What was instead suggested by Aaker & Joachimsthaler (2012), Vaiman, Sparrow, Schuler & Collings (2018) was that a closer inspection of the current context in which employer branding is constructed and presented be done, so that branding practices can adapt to meet the needs and demands of current and upcoming talent. This is something that to a certain extent was done in the organization: the talent attraction experts did indeed realize that coming into more direct contact with talent through webinars and virtual career fairs made the company seem more approachable, more modern, and more accessible. However, for this image to become consolidated in the minds of potential new employees and international talent, this must be backed up by actions. A company cannot present itself as modern, forward-thinking, and interested in accommodating the needs of organizational members when there still seems to be resistance regarding practices such as remote/hybrid work and a systematic, human-centered onboarding process. This idea is supported by Adrianova et al. (2018) and Erkmen et al. (2017) who believe that whatever promises talent attraction makes when seeking out new employees, through employer branding, must materialize through internal branding efforts once the new employees are onboard and throughout their experience as part of the organization. On top of that, what enables this transformation from who an organization was into who it is becoming is the talent within organization. Organizational members cannot act as a support for the brand and bring it to life when they meet outsiders if there is no symmetry between employer branding and the actual work experience, which is also a point sustained by Bafaro et al. (2017) and Merrilees (2017).

Apart from brand reputation and initiatives that make a workplace desirable, there are other factors that come into play when we consider job attractiveness. When asked what the top aspects that attract individuals to work for the healthcare organization in this case, both talent attraction experts and employees listed non-financial benefits such as development opportunities, focus on employee wellbeing, and a supportive work culture. This matches with what Admuson (2007) noticed in his research, which was that financial rewards are no longer the chief elements guiding talent in choosing employers, with other elements coming into play, elements which traditionally were not regarded as important as they had no immediate financial value to the employee. Here the connection between non-financial benefits and promises made

in the branding and attraction phases can be used to check validity: are we giving people what we are telling them they will receive? The brand in question promises many opportunities for development, as this is a place where it is understood that careers, much like life, are not linear, but come instead with twists and turns that will dictate the course of one's professional trajectory. However, this is not aligned with what the newly hired employees shared during the interviews. All expressed a desire for a clearer development journey, which is challenging to visualize due to the massive size of the company and the lack of a more structural approach to identifying what makes one's work meaningful, as well as what the next logical steps are in one's personal and professional development.

What is interesting here is the fact that the interviewed employees all fall under the Millennial generation of workers. It makes sense that they yearn for clearer paths of development and engaging in purpose-driven work, as according to Thompson and Gregory (2012) these are some of the most significant elements that contribute to attraction and retention of these types of workers. It became clear, based on the conversations with the employees, that there is a tendency nowadays to choose employers based on the alignment between own values (in this case altruism, growth, contributory value) and the organizations', much like Amundson (2007) also noticed. Whether that is more of a priority now, post Covid-19, is difficult to say. But given the indications that people are quitting their jobs or leaving the workforce altogether in the post-pandemic era more than ever, as found by De Smet, Dowling, Mugayar-Baldocchi & Schaninger (2022), that is not a far-fetched supposition. The direct consequence of this is the fact that human resources practitioners, leaders, and hiring managers must rethink their strategies and make the fitting changes to gain competitive advantage in the attraction of talent. Where do they go from here?

Connecting Findings to the Theoretical Framework

To answer that, I need to turn to the theoretical framework of engaging in meaningful work and being driven by purpose. Lips-Wiersma and Morris (2009) as earlier reviewed, found that meaningful work stems from four different sources: 1) developing and becoming self, 2) being united with others, 3) being of service to others, 4) expressing the self. In addition to that, Steger and Dik (2010) believe that meaning in one's work is found when employees can make sense of their experience (i.e., who they are, their place in the organization), can experience a sense of purpose (i.e., identify and pursue greater goals), and can be of service to the greater

good either indirectly or directly. Based on this, I draw that meaning is built in relation and connection with others. Many of the spheres that enable one to find meaning in one's own work depend on contact with others: being united with other, being of service to others, contributing to the greater good. This matches very well with the finding that individuals who apply for jobs at the global healthcare organization indeed felt intrinsically motivated to join as members due to the noble pursuit of the company and the purpose-driven nature of the work. However, as pointed out many times during the interviews with both the employees and the talent attraction experts, not everyone joining the organization will have a direct and clear contribution to improving or saving people's lives. Most of the organizational members will not come in contact with patients or go on developing life-saving medicine through ground-breaking scientific research. On the contrary, as brought up by the interviewed employees, oftentimes, when going about routine tasks around the clock and working to meet deadlines, purpose tends to get lost in the background. What could be done for organizational members to become more in tune not only with the meaning and aspirations at an organizational level, but also their own?

This is highly related to the idea of organizational culture in a company. I think of organizational culture as defined by Schein (2010), meaning a repeating sequence of assumptions, meanings, and values concerning daily practices in an organization. Pratt & Ashforth (2003) and later Pratt et al. (2013) purport that organizational culture has a big impact on how employees find meaning in work. This is a point sustained by Cardador and Rupp (2011) who believe that organizational culture influences thinking of work as meaningful when: 1) organizational culture aspects are aligned and acted upon across different parts of the organization, 2) elements of an innovative and supportive work culture are consolidated, 3) when focus is drawn on the values and integrity of the organization.

To a large extent this does not take place in the global healthcare company, as one of the main findings based on the interview data is that there is a great feeling of separateness that the organizational members experience in their work. This is due to the sheer size of the organization which is run by 48.000 employees in offices around the world, but with the headquarters in Copenhagen and most sites scattered in Denmark. Numerous times the employees declared that they feel the work is done in silos, with few to no opportunities to understand the work of different departments or other teams. While access to such information is possible, through documents illustrating where the different areas and lines of business are located and their overall targets, there is a clear desire for learning this information through

opportunities to connect directly with other organizational members. For a company whose tagline is *“together, we are life-changing”* it can become problematic in the long run if more and more organizational members start feeling that the work is done in silos. Is then the case that some departments are more life-changing than others and that some work brings more contribution to the overall mission, while other departments’ work is not as meaningful. Or is the next step forward coming up with a more structured approach to make everyone understand what their contribution is so that this can be more easily communicated between members? As of now, it is evident to me that the first element listed by Cardador and Rupp (2011), namely organizational culture aspects are aligned and acted upon across different parts of the organization, is not met. There cannot be talk of alignment when organizational members sense such high a level of separateness from department to department and do not have a good understanding of how their own work is meaningful and how it contributes to the work of a different department, and consequently how all of this put together makes improving people’s lives possible.

Elements of an innovative and supportive work culture do exist, but do not seem to be consolidated, which is an element that Cardador and Rupp (2011) list as contributing to organizational members seeing meaning in their work. In the main findings it is established that the workplace culture is generally perceived as supportive, from the first contact with the company through initial interviewing phases, but also later through pleasant experiences within individual teams, and good manager-employer relationships. Nevertheless, the work is often described by the employers as, at times, individual, with few opportunities to engage in cross-departmental collaborations or projects that go beyond the responsibilities of the job role. Innovation at an organizational level exists through larger initiatives such as a heightened focus on sustainability projects and diversity and inclusion agendas, but I could not identify anything more specific, which concerns the individual employer, that can point to the culture of the workplace as being innovative. The final factor listed by Cardador and Rupp (2011), which makes it easier for employees to find meaning in their work is focus being drawn on the values and integrity of the organization. Once again, I could not find clear examples of how this is done at the global healthcare company. Initially I believed that this is when the manager-employee dynamic would reveal that indeed there are some practices, such as coaching, career path development sessions, or something similar, to infuse employees with purpose and alignment with the organizational values. My findings, though, show that employees, although generally pleased with the relationship with line managers, do not benefit from any such

offering. Their lack made me wonder whether these would have any sort of value at all, but then I went back to the theoretical considerations made by researchers before me. Albrecht, Bakker, Gruman, Macey and Saks (2015) believe indeed that focus being drawn on the values and integrity of the organization is part of practices that aim to sustain or increase employee engagement, which consequently impact how employees experience meaningfulness in their work. Giving further basis to this claim, Bailey et al. (2017) state that this is a matter of great importance. Organizations can easily be perceived as inauthentic if such practices are not implemented with the intention to become part of the day-to-day practices in the organization. This, in turn, can lead to the corrosion of meaningfulness in one's work from organizational members' side.

Purpose-driven Leadership

Leadership plays a key role when it comes to employees experiencing meaningfulness at work. Chalofsky (2003), as well as Steger and Dik (2010), proved through their own research that employees will experience meaningfulness in their work when they understand who they are and what their values are, when they have a good understanding of the organization they work in and its overarching goals, and finally when they understand the fit between themselves and the organization. This applies to the series of interviewed organizational members in the healthcare of the company, as they are individuals who work in departments which are far away from the organization's purpose. Their line managers can make a great difference in their case, as they are the ones who can enable this type of understanding in organizational members. To illustrate how this can be done, I will make use of the Purpose-driven Leadership theoretical framework proposed by Cardona et al. (2019) and apply it in the case of the global healthcare company.

Cardona et al. (2019) claim that constructing purpose at the top of an organization and then passing that on to other areas can no longer be perceived as a key to high performance if companies wish to create a common purpose. According to the authors, purpose is something that already exists, which cannot be articulated and passed on, but instead something which needs to be discovered by organizational members (Cardona et al., 2019, p.58). Who holds the power to influence in this case? While the responsibility to invite organizational members to work on (re)discovering their purpose falls on the shoulders of leaders, everyone in a company should be able to communicate their purpose and support others in finding theirs.

To be able to do so, Cardona et al. (2019) make an appeal to leaders to engage in a process of self-discovery, so they can understand where their personal purpose stems from, what it is, and what makes their lives meaningful.

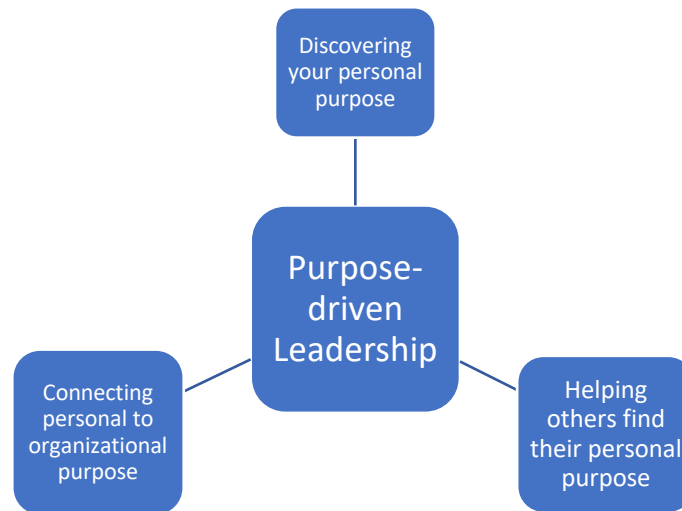


Figure 1: Fundamentals of purpose-driven leadership (PDL), Cardona et al. (2019)

The model above shows the pillars of the Purpose-driven Leadership (PDL). While the authors indicate that the model should not be understood as linear, top-down, horizontal, or bottom-up, but rather as a concentric process which acts in all directions (Cardona et al., 2019, p.63), its practical application can start in a clockwise motion, especially if this has not been tried before. Once more established, the rest of the work consists in perpetually engaging in activities that will sustain purpose-driven leadership. But what sort of implications could this have in relation to talent attraction and particularly in the case of the global healthcare company? For the answer to this question to emerge, we must first look at each of the pillars of the PDL framework and imagine what this would look like in practice.

Purpose-driven Leadership in Practice

First, top management, line managers, and team leaders would have to work on discovering their own personal purpose. A leader in tune with what their passions are, where their motivation comes from, where their ambitions and aspirations like will be better equipped to lead him/herself and consequently others. As explained in the theory section, leaders do not automatically know what their purpose is just because they were appointed in their roles.

Personal development sessions could be organized for leaders in which they can become more in tune with their motivation to act as leaders. The series of personal development sessions would involve reflections upon purpose in daily activities and in how one interacts with others. Why do leaders do things the way they do? Based on which values and beliefs do they make decisions? What does the inner moral compass point to when faced with having to make difficult or radical decisions? By engaging in this kind of self-reflective work, leaders can begin to understand that purpose is a path and not a destination, and therefore that one simply cannot be told what their purpose should be.

Second, leaders must help others discover their purpose. After a first series of personal development sessions, in which they understand where the motivation to lead comes from, as well as what purpose daily activities and interactions hold, the next step would be to support their employees in discovering their own purpose. This could take place in the form of team meetings, where the leader would act as both participant and facilitator. To help others understand their purpose and the meaning in their work, a leader must first be able to communicate his/her own purpose. This is something they should be able to do based on the work from the previous personal development sessions. In sharing their purpose and teaching others how to find it, leaders can set the ground for building trustworthy relationships with their employees. Leaders at this point must feel comfortable enough to both share their purpose and her others', while also allowing them the space and time to get there. This type of activity is best done in teams and groups, as one gets a much clearer picture of oneself when trusted colleagues are there to act as mirrors.

Finally, the leaders must carry on this work by helping employees identify the connection between their personal purpose and the organizational purpose. It is necessary at this point to realize that the true value of this whole journey comes from the leaders' ability to connect their individual purpose to the organizational ones, and help others do so, as well. As Cardona et al. put it, "organizational purpose acts as a source of authority for being THE leader within the organization. Individuals can exercise some kind of leadership based on his or her personal purpose or charisma, but that is quite distant of what we talk here. PDL is about embracing organizational purpose from the perspective of personal purpose" (Cardona et al., 2019, p.67).

This type of work can be done by top leadership, with the CEO and senior vice presidents passing it on to heads of departments and directors, who in turn can do the same with line

managers and team leaders. Notice how this passing on from top leadership downwards is not a communication of the purpose: here is what the purpose is, pass the message to your team. It is instead a training in how departments and teams can organize this type of work on their own.

Implications for Talent Attraction and Contribution to the Human Resources field

While this process can take time and resources before it becomes a consolidated practice, embraced at an organizational level, this has great potential on improving talent attraction, meeting hiring demands, and securing the talent pipelines of the global healthcare company with top candidates.

I learned that during the Covid-19 pandemic period, a new way of attracting talent emerged. Worlds of possibilities opened through the new outreach activities that became virtual. This is a practice that the talent attraction team plans to continue with as they saw the value of a wider outreach and realized how many talented profiles from around the world they could find in this way. However, this also gave new shape to the kind of audience that the experts encountered: this is an audience interested in what the organization can do for them, which is much pickier than before, asking more upfront questions and expecting more transparent answers. A more systematic approach to meaningful work could be a valuable thing to talk about and present to this new audience during outreach activities. Ambassadors of the company, as well as talent attraction experts would be able to present these personal development sessions and team workshops as something that is special about the organization. It would help newly acquired talent to accommodate faster in the organization and learn about what other members are driven by, how that is connected to the overall company aspirations, where and how the new employees' contribution would make the most impact and paint a clearer picture of their career journey within the organization.

Integrated and consolidated purpose-finding activities would also reframe the brand identity and make the organization more attractive. One major problem that the organization is facing is the fact that people find it too corporate, overly traditional, and only at the interview stage does the supportive company culture begin to make itself known. By advertising that there is a great interest and focus placed on individual development through purpose-finding practices, the organization would send clearer messages that there is a culture of support that new

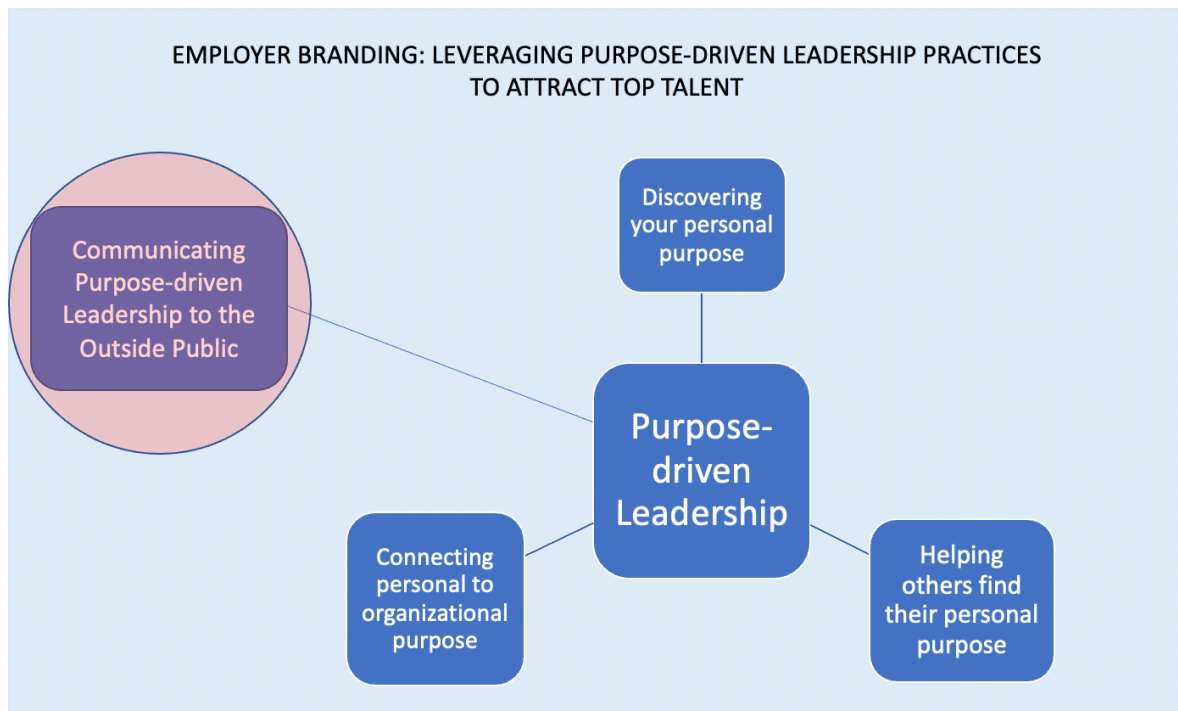
employees can enjoy. This interest in fostering thrivability and making sure that organizational members have clear direction when it comes to what they want to achieve in the company, as well as a solid understanding of why they want to achieve that, will appeal to the upcoming workforce, as it has been established that these are the top elements that they consider when looking at potential employers.

Soon enough this would be felt by already existing organizational members, who would be able to share about these experiences with outsiders and acting as brand ambassadors. Purpose-finding sessions would be yet another step in breaking the barrier between outside talent and a rigid brand that seems stuck in their way and do not embrace innovation. Purpose-driven leadership is a novel approach to leadership, taking things further from how leadership was traditionally thought of as a process, which would signal, especially to the upcoming generations of workforce that this is a place where, post Covid-19, change is not something to face, but something that the organization drives.

Driving a more systematic model of purpose-finding practices would allow for more symmetry between employer branding and the actual work experience. People are drawn to this workplace because they believe they will develop personally and professionally through different projects, different roles, in new departments or other affiliate offices around the works. However, as the old adage goes, you cannot be what you cannot see. Organizational members, especially newcomers, need to gain a better understanding of this massive company and how it operates to be able to identify where they can make contributions and where the next logical steps in their career journeys can potentially take them. Cross-departmental purpose-finding sessions would give an insight into what other organizational members work with and into how they connect their own purpose and their own work to the organizational mission and purpose. This would cover major ground when it comes to understanding the organization, understanding the meaning of one's own work, developing as an organizational member, and becoming more well-equipped to access purpose during critical times where the meaning in work becomes blurry. Moreover, it would also cater to the need of organizational members to stop feeling disconnected from other teams and departments: it might be that the work and different projects are separated, but we are all connected to the organizational purpose, which is a collective journey.

Contribution to Academic Literature on Talent Attraction

Aside the practical contribution that the findings and suggestions for practitioners, the thesis brings an addition to the Purpose-driven Leadership model proposed by Cardona et al. (2019). In its original version, PDL relied on three fundamental pillars: discovering your own personal purpose, helping others find their personal purpose, connecting personal to organizational purpose. Based on my study, I believe that if this approach to leadership were adopted in a company, and concrete, systematic purpose-finding activities such as development sessions and workshops were put in place, an organization could turn this into an employer branding initiative, which could be subsequently leveraged to attract talent. Below the reader can see a modified model, where to the left side of the figure a new pillar of purpose-driven leadership emerged:



Communicating purpose-driven Leadership practices, initiatives and systems can reframe the brand image in the minds of top talent outside the company in the post Covid-19 pandemic era. This is a company that is driven by purpose not in words, statements, or taglines, but also in practice when it comes to their own employees. Being patient-driven is an extraordinarily noble pursuit, and no one can take away from the huge impact that the global healthcare organization has on the daily lives of millions of people around the world living with chronic disease.

However, why not ensure that everyone in the company feels, through the meaningful work that they put in, directly connected to this mission? This type of new framework that leaders of leaders would act from, can potentially lead to the attraction of more talent to the organization. What talent wants now, post the pandemic years, is an employer who is transparent, authentic, who delivers on the promises that they make during the attraction phase and prioritizes the development and wellbeing of their workforce. How employer branding can communicate these messages would be a work in progress: it can be targeted campaigns promoted on the organization's website, it could come in form of social media platform posts, it can be in testimonial videos of organizational members.

Where I am absolutely certain that this work can begin, however, is through employees, and talent attraction experts, acting as brand ambassadors at different outreach activities, online or physically, telling future talent stories about how working in the company opened their eyes to the path of purpose. How, no matter if you are a business administrator, a recruiter, a factory worker, a chemist, an IT specialist or a medical doctor, the work you do has great impact on changing people's lives: a mission everyone marches towards, purposefully.

Conclusion

The talent attraction field has been challenged during the Covid-19 global pandemic period by a new talent audience. Top talent has more demands now than ever and is not afraid to communicate that to potential employers, as well as push them to up the ante when it comes to what they can offer. This has been a period of great turmoil and disruption, where many employees around the world either lost their jobs or were forced to work under pressuring conditions. As we are coming out of these outstanding and bizarre last years, talent attraction experts must begin to embrace that what worked to lure candidates in, may no longer have the same desirable outcomes now. What talent finds attractive is candor and transparency: who are you as an organization and what does your brand stand for? More importantly, is there alignment between who you say you are, through employer branding initiatives and your company reputation, and who you actually are through what you do for your employees? Talent nowadays seeks work in organizations that are purpose-driven, which provide them with opportunities for growth, and that are actively driving change for the development of their organizational members, through new and innovative practices. This thesis is a valuable read

for any human resources scholar or talent attraction practitioner who wishes to understand how a journey on the path to finding purpose can be leveraged as strategic advantage in the war for talent.

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Appendix 1: Interview Transcriptions

Expert 1

00:01 (I)

1. Thank you so much for agreeing to be interviewed by me. The recording this interview will be deleted once I transcribe it and I will protect your privacy by keeping it anonymous. I am interested in looking at talent attraction, and how the talent attraction field was affected by the Covid-19 crisis. Of course, if there's anything that you will feel that it's something that we need to keep within the team and within the work parameters, then feel free to not answer the question. How has the pandemic affected talent attraction activities?

01:21(E)

2. Everything moved online overnight. Before the pandemic, everything was face to face. I would say like pretty much everything 99%. We had some virtual things, but it was like almost everything face to face. And then during the pandemic, everything went online or it was cancelled.
3. In beginning of the pandemic, everything was cancelled. Yeah. And we were given like two or three weeks time to figure out what to do instead. And then after that, everything was online. Yeah, so the career fairs went online, we were using different kinds of platforms. And it was very confusing, because then we didn't know how to work with the platforms. A lot of the platforms that we were given to work with, I don't even remember the names, there were like 15 different platforms, maybe. But it was just really horrible. They were not made for online and kind of like the volumes that we were working with, so they were crashing down all the time. It wasn't looking like things were gonna open up soon, so it was a chaos in the beginning. So the first month, we were just trying to figure out what to do. Yeah. So then we started doing the webinars because that was a result of having to adapt to the pandemic.
4. We were using other companies' platforms, but because they were not yet fully developed, things were not working out the way we wanted. So then we figure out, it's

better to do something on our own, instead of relying on the external stakeholders. So that's why we started doing webinars.

05:16 (I)

5. Are these webinars something that also other companies were doing or not back then back then?

05:22 (E)

6. No, because we were the front runners in that there were other companies that followed up like or so.

05:34 (I)

7. And what was the purpose of these webinars?

05:38 (E)

8. To reach out to students and to do talent attraction through the webinars. So we had different sorts of webinars, we had the whole the same package, we have now kickstart your career, we had the daily stock market for internationals, attracting international talent. And then we had CV and cover letter, which is something that the universities are often requesting from us. And they were extremely popular. But we had, of course, like in the beginning, we had no idea how to brand them. We had no idea like how to communicate it and how to do a webinar. Like it was just a chaos in the beginning from our side as well. But we picked up quite fast. And then other companies followed up. And they were there started doing the same things. But I would say in Denmark, we were the first ones to go for webinars and to establish the concept and keep in contact with all this talent that now during the pandemic, we couldn't really communicate with or be close to.

06:41 (E)

9. Yeah, and then like, we could do things our own way. Because if we go to a career fair, it's the external stakeholder who says what we need to do, where the where our booth is gonna be and how big it has to be, and who are gonna be the audience, you know, they, they like, provide that to us. But if we do our own events and our own webinars, we can we have free hands, we can do whatever we want. And we know our need, as an organisation, we know what sort of profiles we're looking for, we know what we need. So then we could customise the webinars based on our needs, which was more targeted than going to an event of an external stakeholder. Yeah. So that's why we also did a webinars that were very targeted. And they were hiring people from New Zealand and Australia, because there was no one in Europe who was a top talent in the fields that we needed more employees in. And we thought that we are going to have maybe 10 people attending the webinars. But we had almost 500 people signing up, and 25 showing up for the webinars. So apparently those people exist, but it was just really hard to kind of find them through the universities, because before we would just reach out to universities.

09:04 (E)

10. That is not to say that the Covid-19 was entirely advantageous. We were kind of like, thrown into nothingness and we had to find a way out and to make sense of things. And I think in that moment, like you become very creative, and you think of like different

ways of doing things. And if there was no pandemic, we would have never done that. It would have been just like, doing the same old things. I think the pandemic kind of forced us to think differently. Some organizations used it as an opportunity to figure new things out, some waited it out.

10:22 (I)

11. Interesting input. And how do you think that the pandemic impacted the company's culture?

10:34 (E)

12. For the company culture I think what changed things up was the fact that everything had to be virtual, so that definitely complicated things for people organization during that time.
13. We were just working online, and we had some newcomers who joined and for the first 4 or 5 months they worked online only and we only saw them after like half a year of working together. We also work very closely in our team with someone who is based in a different country and we have never seen her face to face, I think it's strange.
14. I think the problem in the beginning was that we had so many meetings, my calendar was full from nine to five, like there was maybe 15 minute breaks every like here and there. But there was no space for anything. There was no space to do the actual work - we had meetings for everything. Like now, it's not like that- we still work remotely some days a week but it's not as intense.
15. In the beginning of the pandemic, I think our department had a lot of pressure thinking like, how are we going to do networking? How are we going to make the work fun? How are the interns gonna learn things? Are they going to enjoy their internship when it's virtual, and there was a lot of pressure to do different kinds of social activities. So we had a lot of like, odd stuff going on, many networking events a week. And we had coffee meetings as well, like once a week just to have a coffee with the team. We had gymnastics events. And we had some like, just like morning briefings and like the day was just filled with all kinds of meetings that were not necessarily like, so important, but we thought that it's important for the team to have the feeling of togetherness and closeness to the point where it was exaggerated and not authentic at all.

14:49 (I)

16. Yeah. Were there any employer branding initiatives that were used to make the organization a more attractive company to get hired at?

15:17 (E)

17. Well, just before pandemic, the yellow line story was introduced. But it was like the timing was just like overlapping with the beginning of the pandemic, but I believe it made a difference in how we showed up as an organization. The yellow line is this element we add in all of our promotional material like videos and pictures and official announcements and it is meant to be a symbol for how life and also careers are never linear. They come with ups and downs, with unexpected twists and turns and instead of running away from situations like that, we tried to present the organization as a place

where we embrace these curveballs. I guess this helped to present the organization, as this, you know, cohesive, tight brand, where everyone is working towards the goal of like life changing careers. And then the story of the yellow line is something that maybe, in that time of uncertainty, gave people like hope like, Oh, this looks like a company where they have it together.

19:35 (E)

18. It's hard to say if this is something that had a huge impact or if it appealed to talent in a massive way – if you ask me I think it did because a strong brand and strong, memorable elements does make a difference in talent attraction and in the way talent perceives an organization as attractive to work for. But this is just my perspective, because I'm sitting here every day and I see how things are going. But I'm like kind of soaked into this and into this thinking that it has helped. Yeah. But I actually don't know. But I think in some ways, because when we did the webinars and virtual career fairs, we focused on storytelling, and then telling about the story of the yellow line. And careers are never linear. And sometimes we have ups and downs. And I think our ways of thinking about careers change that as well. Because before it would be this, thinking that you go to a great university, and you study HR, and then you get a job in HR. And then after 10 years, you become a manager or something. But this kind of the story behind the yellow line is that your career is not linear. And sometimes you have ups and downs. And sometimes you do something completely different. And then you end up somewhere completely different. So like, I think, our thinking also shifted a little bit and we started thinking like, okay, but it's not, we don't necessarily need to study HR to work in HR. Maybe you study history, maybe you do agriculture, and then you end up in HR in some weird way. And then it was about embracing that. Yeah. Because before I don't know if we're really embracing it, but I think the new employer brand helped us to embrace the different paths. It helped us present that to talent outside the company and leverage it as a way of attracting talent.

21:57 (I)

19. What do you think are the top three aspects that make the company attractive to top talent?

22:10 (E)

20. Top three aspects that make the company attractive to talent? I think the first one is meaningful careers and purpose-driven work. At least that was one of the things that attracted me, that you work for a company with a good purpose, like helping people, you come to work and everyday you feel like you're actually doing something good.
21. Also, you are working for an organisation that is driving sustainability initiatives and trying to think about the environment and trying to think about people's health and people's well being. And working for an organisation that has like very strong ethics. I think it's attractive, I think this is one of them.
22. Another one that I find very attractive is the global opportunities that the organisation is so big, that you can always shift to other departments and you can try other tracks and see how it could feel to work in another department. They have this, I don't

remember how it's called this programme where you can do three months or six months working in another department. And it's very attractive for a lot of people. And the size of the organisation of course, there is the possibility to kind of moved, move on with your career and you don't need to be stuck like 15 years in the same department in the same position, but there are a lot of opportunities across the organisation in different countries. I think that says attractive.

23. One more Yeah, I think what's attractive, like, but that's, that's not something I knew before starting, but once I started, I realised that organisation culture is very supportive. There is not much competition, because I worked in other companies. There is a lot of competition between the employees. They were kind of like, not always competing out or they wanted to kind of backstab you hmm. And in no one honestly we don't have, like, if you struggle, then people want to help you.
24. But I think it's a culture of supporting patients but also where employees help out each other. Because, like, in a lot of companies, the bonus structure very result focused. Here it's more like focused on the teams and your willingness to help other people.

26:24 (I)

25. What non-financial benefits do the employees at the organization have?

26:40 (E)

26. Yes we have a lot of health benefits for example, I think, for example if I compare it to other companies that I have worked for there are more health and fitness initiatives, we have access to facilities where we can work out, we have a health check that we can go through twice a year where you can find out if everything is ok with you, if your analyses turn out ok, if you have to lose weight, if you have poor eyesight or back problems or some sort of physical trauma if you have been in an accident and stuff like that. I think if you have diabetes you also get some benefits from like insulin or I don't know something like that
27. Yeah. I think we also have access to psychologists and priests and we have some emergency lines, for example we had a Covid-19 line we could call in case we were feeling anxious or stressed, I never used it myself, but I think it is nice, especially if you were an expat just moved to Denmark and started before the pandemic began, I imagine many felt extra vulnerable being in a new country and new environment and then this huge thing happens and life changes overnight, you probably needed some extra support.

29:03 (I)

28. Super interesting. And then I have one last question for you. In your opinion, what more do you think that Novo Nordisk could do in order to attract but also to retain top talent?

29:27 (E)

29. To attract I think that's just my personal opinion because I do believe in that, you kind of hire for the attitudes and personality and then you train for skills. Right now there's a lot of international students in Denmark already, we don't need to like go abroad to find international talent, there is a lot of international talent in Denmark. And they're already familiar with the Danish working culture, the the possibility of them being here and bringing value to the organisation, I think is higher than hiring someone from

another country to come here. We don't have a strong enough onboarding system for that yet.

30. Because if you are hiring someone from abroad, and then they come to Denmark, and then they realise they're not actually really fan of the Danish working culture, or they are not really enjoying their time in Denmark, because all their friends and family are in another country. So then I think we would get better retention rate for someone who already knows the culture and the work life in Denmark. Some sort of way to ease employees into both the new country and the new organization. This is a huge organization, I think employees take a long time to figure out and understand how big it actually is so it would be nice if we could fast-track this process and combine it as a way of understanding both the operations and culture of the workplace and country you are in.
31. On the other hand I think development programmes is one of the most important things we do to retain talent because if you work a couple of years in the same position, you want to develop, you want to try new challenges you want to have, you want to be recognised. And if you are not ready, if you're like, skills are not recognised, then you start to look from outside. And then like if, if I'm three years in the same position, and having pretty much the same salary and the same title is not attractive. I need something like something more I need more kind of challenges and growth opportunities. So I think there has to be even more focus on training. I think what is very important to have like one on one conversations with your manager to figure out what's the direction you want to go to. And then, like support that direction. Of course, the manager is not going to do everything for you, but at least that your manager is aware of like, how to support you, and then you need to act on it. And then like, get the appropriate training. So if you want some, let's say, like, if you if you work as a project manager, I think it would be really cool to send you out to a project management training, and develop those skills, get a an official certificate, to be a project manager, and then, like, grow in that direction, because if there is no support, to grow into the direction you want to go, then people will leave and they will find their way outside the organisation.
32. I think also it would help especially newcomers in the organization to understand how meaningful and impactful everyone's job is in the organization and how no matter what department you are in your contribution is invaluable. I think many organizational members don't necessarily see the difference they make on people's lives and wellbeing, because in the end of the day, we are not all seeing the medicines, we are not all seeing the patients, we're not all medical doctors. So like, we don't feel that in the same way. But those who know the organization very well or come into contact with other members from other departments have a clearer picture of what's happening in the organisation.
33. It's difficult for me to say exactly how we should do things differently. I think it could be nice to see some more concrete examples of how we help people. I know what helps me the most is having the meetings with the representatives when we invite them to career fairs to represent their work. I hear about their work, because if they work with the medicines, then like, it's really cool to understand how we are actually changing lives.

34. If I didn't talk to them, if I didn't have these meetings with employees from other departments who works closer with the patients, I wouldn't know. But I think it would, it would help to kind of organize these talks or it could be seminars or webinars or something where we can see what's happening in the organisation. It doesn't need to be long meetings could be like half an hour every month or something just to like, talk about the new developments in the medicines and with the patients and also on a global level because now we sit in Denmark, but it would be very nice to know what they're doing in some other country like I don't even I couldn't even tell what the factories are. I know that there's something in China and Russia and USA, but it would be really nice to kind of maybe get a virtual tour or like, hear about the working culture in another location and hear about, like how the organisation looks from another country. Yeah

45:33 (I)

35. Good, these have been all my questions. Thank you so much for helping me out with this interview.

Expert 2

00:00 (I)

1. As you well know, I am interested in Talent Attraction phenomenon and how Covid-19 has impacted this field. As you are a talent attraction specialist, I thought it would be interesting to have a talk with you and ask some questions that will inform my study. It will be anonymous and although I am recording now, I will delete these recordings once I have transcribed the interview.

00:48 (E)

2. Okay. Yeah. But then it is not a problem. Yeah, let's talk about it.

00:57 (I)

3. So my first question is how has Covid-19 affected talent attraction activities?

01:05 (E)

4. That is a big question. I think it has impacted it in a lot of different ways. Because we have definitely become more international, because it's now easier to talk to people all over the world, using Teams using webinars using digital media in a completely new way. So we have definitely improved our outreach activities through these new opportunities.
5. I also think that the that we have learned a lot about how to reach out on these new platforms. Going to virtual career fairs, on a on a lot of different platforms has been fun but also very challenging because none of us knew how to do it or had done it before. And it's been a learning journey, I think, not only for the companies, but also for those that have developed and created the platforms and also for the students.
6. And I also think that the worlds of possibilities for top talent have also opened up and that definitely makes them more picky on where they will spend their time. So we are also being challenged in a in a completely new way. Top talent is now very much focused on what's in it for me, how do I actually get the right answers as fast as possible,

and that, of course, makes it really, really important that we are on top of our game, every time.

7. Before the pandemic, we used to just attend career fairs and not really prepare: we would just show up. Now it has become a lot more transparent: if a talented student comes to a virtual career fair, they will have a look at the list of representatives who are attending on behalf of the company and specifically pick that person. They will know exactly what they want to gain from the conversation with one of our employees and that is completely new. And that of course makes it more difficult for us but it also ensures that we will get a lot more benefit out of our dialogues. So more work, more benefits, but also a completely new audience because it's not the same people that we met before the pandemic- top talent is more prepared now. So, so
Yeah. So what we learned is, of course, that we need to be better prepared, we need to have the answers ready, that they are more to the point of when they ask us stuff. We need to engage with top talent in new ways, in a way in which we are more transparent about what it is like working at our company and what they can expect.

06:50 (I)

8. How do you think the pandemic impacted the company's culture?

07:03 (E)

9. I think culture is always changing, but now it changed extremely rapidly. So what we thought would take 20 years or 10 years took like 10 months, for example working virtually has been a huge game changer. It certainly helped us transcend borders and work in teams with people located in other countries. But it's also put a lot of new dilemmas into our everyday work like how do we actually socialize at work?
10. Because if we didn't plan, they would not happen as they did before. Those questions where you just drop by a desk and get some quick answers and some dialogues that will change the way you see things are not happening as easy as before you have to plan in a new way. Weirdly enough we got closer to colleagues that work abroad because everyone was using Teams so it became more normal to talk to them all the time, but there were close stakeholders that became more distanced than ever because we did not know how to maintain the communication and interaction in an organic way.

09:45 (I)

11. Were there any employer branding initiatives that were used to make the company more attractive to get hired at?

10:22 (E)

12. So are you asking me about platforms? Are you asking me about the branding stuff?

10:30 (I)

13. Branding stuff.

10:45 (E)

14. We had an employer branding project that was started before the pandemic and was going on throughout the pandemic. It was a coincidence, but I think it made a big difference in how the organization was perceived by talent outside the company. We

introduced the yellow line, which we added to all of our promotional material, which is this line that swirls and goes up and down: it is meant to symbolize the fact that life is never linear and neither are careers. One of the biggest selling points when attracting top talent is the fact that in our organization you can tailor your career journey the way you think it is best for you. It might be that you started in one department, but you have an interest for example for sustainability, so you can arrange to move cross-departmentally and work on a project that aligns with your passions and what you burn for.

15. During Corona, I think what we did, and what was different from a lot of other companies, or perhaps we were one of the few that succeeded with the virtual career fairs and the webinars. And I think the reason that we succeeded was actually partly based on our 10 Essential company values and that we started communicating and talking about those more often, but also acting on them. One of our core values is that we treat everyone equally and give them equal opportunities to join the company.
16. It was really obvious for us when Corona hit that there must be a lot of top talent out there that feel like they lost the opportunity to talk to companies, they lost the opportunity to figure out what kind of job they should have and how to have those dialogues with companies. So for us, it was really important to make sure that they, as patients get an equal opportunity of experiencing life as normal as possible, also students had a similar opportunity to still be able to communicate with us and interact with us. Human interaction, as much as could be done, that was our guiding star during Covid-19.
17. That was complicated to figure out and I think we are still trying to figure out it now as we are coming out of the pandemic. We were sitting down in the team talking about how do we solve this? What kind of platform is out there? What do we think will make sense for talented profiles? What can we give them that will bring that feeling of connection with us as a company? And that was actually why we started the webinars because we really wanted them to know what was going on with us, how could we help them? How could they prepare and find their way into an organisation like ours, what is the atmosphere like, what are we like as employees?
18. Right away we could see that it tooks us a little bit down from that, in Danish we will say pedestal. Having ongoing interaction with talent made us look more human and approachable. Not to take away from being super professional and having a really high educated employee staff but to make it less frightening to interact with us. To make it more humanly possible to make it the inside the organization. To make joining the organization a more reachable goal and not just something you think, no, it's not doable for me because I'm an average student. We need those profiles as well in the war for talent that we have at the moment. Top talent needs to see the organization as more approachable. I would love to continue on this mission as we are coming out of the pandemic.

15:41 (I)

19. What do you think are the top three aspects that make the organization attractive to top talent?

15:50 (E)

20. Oh, that is also a really, really good a really good question. So, what are the aspects that makes Novo Nordisk attractive? It's a prestigious company, of course, with a brand name that carries back a lot of tradition, especially in Denmark you will always find someone that has a family member that worked for us or a friend who works here and it is generally perceived as a great place to work where you can develop a skill. Second and I think more importantly it's a company with a purpose, we are at and saving people's lives and I think that any employee here directly on developing new medicine or working as administrative a certain extent led by that purpose. Thirdly, we are a company that is very focused on development, be that on a personal or societal level. On a personal level we try to give employees as many opportunities for development as possible, through projects, training programmes, new opportunities inside the company. At a larger scale we are front-runners in sustainability initiatives and we are a company that wants to be as green as possible.
21. I think those are the key cornerstones of what makes us great to work at. And I think all these things are something that appeals to talent. The only thing that sometimes is difficult for us is that people think that we are a little snobby and exclusively for the top 10 people in the world. That is an obstacle that needs to be acknowledged and something that we are trying to change.

19:12 (I)

22. What non-financial benefits are there for employees that are meant to support talent retention?

19:14 (E)

23. First and most importantly to me is the many opportunities for growth. We have courses you can take and things that you can be trained in, you can go to conferences, all of these things are also important for your own development. We have managers that will help you and focus on you and actually have the time to have these one on one dialogues on a weekly or monthly basis. So I think that is very good. If you are asking me if I think we are there, I definitely don't think so. I still think that having a good onboarding plan is something that we are missing quite a lot. I think a lot of teams are doing a great job. But I think overall the organisation is, is missing out on a lot of opportunities to make sure that there are networks outside of the teams and this is especially important since we hire a lot of international talent that is new to the Danish culture and to a country where perhaps it is not the easiest to make new friends and feel welcome.

20:36 (I)

24. Anything else?

20:55 (E)

25. Yeah, I think there is huge emphasis on health, perhaps more physical than mental, but yeah we have a whole homepage where you can look up different exercises, good suggestions of taking walks, doing some yoga, we have access to fitness facilities and walking paths at our headquarters. We also have a bi annual health check which is great and quite popular among employees because you get a very thorough physical check to see if everything is well. It's actually really, really nice and it's very much aligned with

who the organization is if you can say that without personalising a company too much but but it is very much about health and healthy lifestyle and creating those good lives.

26. We have lawyers and social psychologists. Yeah, so if you if you get injured post physical or psychological accidents then. someone will be ready to take care of you. This is a huge and well-established part of our company and sometimes we forget how lucky we are to to have all of these people we even have priests you can go to
27. Or if employees have gone down with stress, they will get support to get a different job in the organisation when they come back and I think that is a huge safety net. Or if I get laid off in my position, I will be offered another job. So I will come into this job bank and then in the category of my competences I will be when there is a job. I will be screened for that that job, and hopefully put in there. Yeah, so they choose their own employees instead of people from outside. And I think that's a huge, huge thing.

25:12 (I)

28. In your view, what more could the organization do in order to attract but also to retain talent?

25:46 (E)

29. We could do more branding wise about our positions and about where we are headed at as an organization. I think we have been really lucky in Denmark to have a huge brand. That means that people are coming more or less by themselves, but abroad we are completely unknown. It is becoming more and more difficult to actually attract foreign talent. So branding wise is also a huge task lying in front of us if we want the best talents in the world and we will need them. And then you can say when when you actually land that job in Novo Nordisk there is also a huge task in onboarding and especially people from abroad. Because they come without their family or the broader perspective family, they might bring their nearest family but but they don't bring aunts and uncles, cousins and the network that you have if you are staying in your home country. And we perhaps we can't make up for it, but perhaps we can make it easier to find them or, or get the new friends new connections, new people that the that you can meet with. As Danes we have a reputation of going home after work and wanting to see our colleagues before eight o'clock the next day. And that is of course not very welcoming or inclusive. I think having a more systematic approach to it would increase talent attraction and retention, especially when it comes to international top talent.
30. What I would like is something that would create a sort of ecosystem inside Novo where we, through the workplace also explain the culture and the new life that you are going to experience as someone who moved to Denmark and make it easy.
31. Of course as any other company we have all the activities, all the clubs and running clubs and wine clubs, and whatever. And of course, that is a good opportunity. But yeah, that might not be enough. We have this really dangerous thing about shoving people together and expecting them to work it out. But perhaps that's not what is needed perhaps it's something quite different from from that old cultural path and perhaps it's it's making networks across departments in Novo Nordisk actually opening up for having these coffee talks twice a week with people from different places, professionally, personally, culturally. I think we would benefit a lot from actually doing

that. The more people you know, in your organisation, the better your your work will turn out, I think.

31:44 (I)

32. And then my last question is, what talent attraction activities that we adopted during the pandemic are here to stay?

32:00 (E)

33. I think that is our virtual career fairs and our webinars because they are actually making our global talent pipelines fill up more than ever. And I even think we should, if we had the money, we should expand on that one. We should open even more. I could definitely see us having twice as many webinars and virtual career fairs. The path forward from here is organizational members representing the organization more and more, opening up, sharing from their everyday life and life at work with rawness, with ups and downs and how to deal with all that. Showing talent from all around the world hey, this is what a data scientist is doing at the organization. This is what biostatistician is doing. These are the projects that we are super proud about. These are some of the findings that we can actually talk about. Outside of Novo Nordisk I think we, we could benefit a lot from from opening up and even creating new things like smoke, small case competitions, more challenges, small meetings online were where we could see the talents in action. That could be fantastic. We need to loosen up our ties, so to speak, we need to transmit that we are people helping people, attracting other talented people to help us in this quest, because as our company motto also says, together we are life-changing.

37:20 (I)

34. Thank you very much for answering and participating to my study, I think you made some very interesting points.

Expert3

00:00 (I)

1. Thank you very much for agreeing to give me an interview. This recording will be deleted once I have transcribed the interview and I will preserve your anonymity as previously agreed upon. The topic of my research is talent attraction and how it was impacted by the Covid-19 crisis. My first question is how has the pandemic affected talent attraction activities?

00:36 (E)

2. Definitely the biggest change has been that everything was moved to be virtual, for sure. And all the interviews, assessment centres, attraction events, everything was moved to be virtual instead of face to face. What resulted out of it was that we reached

out to more people globally. So it doesn't matter if someone lives in Brazil, we can still interview them. And we couldn't, because they let's say they couldn't accommodate and couldn't travel. So the plus is that you can reach out to more people because of pandemic, everyone moves to virtual flexible, like work flexibility and working from home was moved to many companies and many companies want to stay with that.

3. Many companies moved to fully remote work. So what it means for our company is that we have great we have even greater competitors, because many companies nowadays offer fully remote working conditions. And it's very attractive to young people to be fully remote. So it did change what you can offer as an employer. Basically companies became even bigger global employers, just in a new, more abstract, more complex sort of way.

03:08 (I)

4. How do you think that the pandemic impacted the company's culture?

03:33 (E)

5. For us I think what became obvious was how much we like to collaborate and work in teams. And that especially was noticeable in our company during COVID-19. Everyone, when we are dialling in everyone has the cameras on to imitate that we are face to face. That's not common with other companies at all. So that's definitely something that nobody does. So you can see that people want to collaborate with each other. Talent attraction is the department that you have to collaborate with all areas in the company, basically.
6. I think we engaged more in collaboration because people meetings all day long. So if you are working from home, and meetings, you don't spend time on working in the office, finding a conference room, commuting .
7. On the other hand, COVID-19 had a great impact on everyone in terms of, you know, just feeling, feeling left out, feeling kind of exhausted and feeling isolated. There are people who didn't leave the home throughout the pandemic, so they definitely felt left out of some activities that have been happening or things like that until we could make sense of how to work in this new format
8. I think that our employees because of getting back to office right now and kind of getting back to life, they feel more appreciative. And that's a good culture and company, they feel, you know, they appreciate Oh, we can see each other we can do stuff together. So I think that's plus.

07:14(I)

9. Were there any employer branding initiatives that were used in order to make the organization more attractive to get hired at?

07:32 (E)

10. I think employer branding played a huge role. What was used to signal how the organization kind of dealt with it, both from patients and employees' side, because they advertised that in the media and LinkedIn and everywhere that they are helping the cause. Other than that I also think that the new initiatives we engaged in like all of the

events that we were doing online, so just doing a normal talent attraction, career fairs workshop seminar, but doing that online and the doing graduate recruitment centre online for the first time. I think we had an upper hand here, unlike other companies that just decided to wait things out, I feel like we went the opposite way and engaged even more in conversation with top talent and made ourselves more visible by, you know, putting ourselves out there, attending virtual career fairs, launching our own webinars and creating all of these opportunities for top talent to meet our employees, figure out what their options are within the organization, but also what the working culture is like and what they can expect there.

09:32 (I)

11. What do you think are the top three aspects that make the organization attractive to top talent?

09:47 (E)

12. Yeah. I think that definitely that it's that it's global, multinational and huge. Especially if you are in the beginning of your career or if you are changing up your career path, there are many different ways in which you can tailor your career path and go from a department to another, work on different projects, with different teams and other affiliates. But apart from that, there are a lot of roles where you can just move around countries. And I think that this is definitely something that attracts talent.
13. The second one, I think, definitely what it represents in terms of meaningful, purpose-driven work. And doesn't matter what you do in the organization, you can be IT technician, you can be recruiter or like work in a factory, you will always work under the same banner of helping people stay alive or staying healthy. And I think that it was actually I read studies that it's getting more and more important that top talented profiles don't want to work in a company that doesn't have a positive impact on society. So your company should actually have positive impact on society in some form. And then the most obvious ones are healthcare companies, because that the impact is you can see it straight away. Right. That's the second.
14. Third I think it's maybe maybe the prestige and reputation and that it's a well established organization. Yeah, so it's not a startup. There are already 48,000 people working there. I feel like all Denmark, worked there at some point. So people seem to have some sort of connection to the place either through their direct involvement with the company, or someone they know, relatives, stories they've heard.

12:40 (I)

15. What kind of non-financial benefits are there for the organizational members that would support employee retention?

13:34 (E)

16. Definitely what catches my eye and that is different from other companies is the care and effort that goes into looking after employees' physical health. The biannual Health is something that the organization invests a lot of money into, so as an employee you can have an extremely thorough check of your health and get feedback on your physical condition, eyesight, support with your diet, a training plan if you have to lose weight, support if you want to quit smoking, access to training facilities where you can work out, shower and then go to work in the office. That's definitely the amazing I think the

most amazing thing I saw and I talk about it all the time. I remember when I found out I thought I talked about it all the time with all of my friends.

17. What is also great is the many development opportunities, like the leadership or employee development and all of that stuff, also development of hard skills like courses to become better at Excel, language courses and I am sure there are many others but I can't remember it right now. Let me think. Hmm, yeah I am sure there are more, there are opportunities to get in touch with a therapist in case you are going through stress or have family issues, I know this is something that was used a lot during the pandemic because it was a difficult and delicate time for many.

18:34 (I)

18. What more do you think that the organization could do in order to attract and retain top talent?

18:50 (E)

19. One thing that I think we could do, which was also a huge learning from this super weird period and that is also connected with COVID-19 is becoming more flexible and in tune with employee's needs on a human level. So definitely the flexibility of going a bit more remote now that we have tried it out for almost two years and saw that it worked. There are many more organizations out there that are way more flexible in terms of remote work. Everything changed during the pandemic and overnight we had to figure out a way to make it work remotely. Now, as soon as the pandemic kind of ended we're getting back to office again, you can still work from home a bit. But still, the mindset is, you have to be in the office, very traditional, even old-fashioned mindset. Very conservative.
20. There needs to be a systematic change at an organizational level in how we leave that conservative image behind of always doing it how we have always done it. I feel like we did that during the pandemic with the webinars. That the webinars really kind of helped kickstart that feeling of, you know, this, this company is starting to be a little bit more approachable, because you can go to these webinars or to virtual career fairs and talk to people who work there and see that not everyone is you know, corporate suit and tie, and that you're not ever going to fit in there if you are different. And I feel that the webinars and the career fairs helped bridge this gap a little bit.
21. But I think it's a drop in the sea. I think that it definitely helped, but then when you count how many people we talked with face to face, like not not face to face, but like on camera. And they saw us and they kind of could get the vibe, then it's like, comparing to how many we want to hire it's like it's a drop in the sea, I think the next step from here is to be more remote, to be more flexible. The organization lacks flexibility on working from wherever and coming to office when it suits like obviously there are times when you have to, but I think a lot of top talent that could make a huge difference in the company gets lost to competition in organizations that embraced this way of working.
22. So yeah, and I think that this is also a big learning from Covid-19 that you know, your organization's that are stuck in their own ways and are present themselves as being very traditional, very conservative, like maybe bounced back, you know, harder as a result

of Covid-19 than the ones who said, Okay, we need to be flexible and change things up. And, you know, roll with the, with the punches.

23. There are companies out there that before Covid-19 were completely flexible on the remote work. They already could work hybrid, or already could work fully remote. So for them COVID-19 didn't change anything. In that sense, zero, like, you know, obviously, like they had to close the office at some point. But nothing changed because they were already super flexible. So they were attractive, but now everyone's flexible. And we are becoming not that attractive anymore because we are not making room for that flexibility. I think we went hybrid, we did the remote work during Covid-19, but our mindset didn't.
24. Our mindset feels like we said ok, this is just temporary because it was requested. Now the pandemic just, you know, kind of finished and we are rushing back to our old ways. I think it's people really not trusting this process. Yeah. Saying yes, let's do, you know, hybrid work. But still at the back of their minds. Oh, I wonder, you know, are they really working? Did they take like too long of a break? When it's like, if you relax and allow it, you will see that work is still getting done. And the house is not on fire if people work from home.

27:05 (I)

25. What talent attraction activities that we were doing during the pandemic are here to stay now that we're kind of coming out of the pandemic?

27:26 (E)

26. So definitely everything virtual, virtual career fairs and webinars and all outreach activities that we can do online, they're here to stay, because we have had tremendous success with them. I feel what changed is that before the pandemic, we almost didn't do virtual fairs. Or we didn't do virtual fairs, because we didn't trust them. And then because of pandemic, everyone was forced to do virtual and now we trust them. So what's here to stay is that even if the events move to be face to face, again, some of them, we will do new events that are virtual, because of the knowledge that we have. And because if the pandemic didn't happen, we wouldn't do them ever.
27. I feel like what we could do is not about making the organization famous because we already are. It's much more about flexibility. If we are more flexible, we will get top talent in Denmark. We'll get more of them. Because the problem with the organization right now is that we do have top talent in Denmark, but they are not choosing us as their top priority. They are choosing other companies. And so the question should be why? So it's not about going to all career fairs and all events and all activities: it's about what we present and how we present who we are as an organization once we are there. And so if we are not flexible, if we have old rules that have been there for like, 100 years, if we do not become more approachable and more human-centered as to what we can offer to organizational members, then top talent will choose other companies where they can get that.

33:15 (I)

28. Thank you very much for answering these questions and offering your insights into this. I really appreciate it.

Employee 1

00:00 (I)

1. Thank you so much for agreeing to be interviewed by me. The recording this interview will be deleted once I transcribe it and I will protect your privacy by keeping it anonymous. I am interested in hearing how you experienced coming into the company during the Covid-19 period, what attracted you to the company and what you wish had gone a bit differently from how it was. My first question to you is, why did you choose to apply for a job at this organization in particular?

00:59 (E)

2. Thank you, that's a cool question and a nice way to kick, umm, yeah, kickstart this discussion with you. Ahh, hmm, I mean, can I be broad, or do you need the quick answer in a nutshell?

01:10 (I)

3. Please, share as much as you wish.

01:14 (E)

4. Yes, so, I have known about the company for a long time now, basically I am from Denmark so everyone knows someone who works here. For me it was both my parents so I sort of knew so much about it beforehand. They always talked fondly about it at home, so it was this innate feeling that ok this is a good workplace, without really understanding or being able to say what exactly made this place, you know, so great to work for, maybe because I was young and didn't know the place myself, wasn't working there, but yeah. Then later on, I started thinking ok this is one of the biggest workplaces, like companies, in Denmark and their mission is to improve people's lives so that was something that attracted me to apply and try to get a job there.

03:45 (I)

5. Is that aspect important to you?

03:50 (E)

6. The helping people part?

03:53 (I)

7. Yes

03:55 (E)

8. Oh yes, big time, I think especially my generation, I am in my late twenties now, but I think my generation and also upcoming generations, they care about these things. I mean I could have applied to other big companies in Denmark, but people nowadays do their research, you know, and they see oh wow ok this company is actually causing a lot of damage to the environment and is doing very little to change that. That doesn't work anymore in this day and age, I think, I don't want to speak in the name of everyone who is looking for a job these days, it can be tough out there, so I see how this can very quickly turn into a moral dilemma for many, especially for people that are coming out of a long education and are ready to join the work market.

05:12 (I)

9. What do you mean by this turning into a moral dilemma? Can you elaborate a bit on that?

05:20 (E)

10. Yes, as I said, if you for example are a student or you know have been a student for many years, put yourself through a long education, you are now ready, I am talking here about someone who is graduating, you are now ready to join the work market and finally get paid a salary, kickstart your professional life with a job and get that experience, then maybe your instinct is to not be picky and you can be tempted to say yes to the first thing that comes, you know? It's hard for me to have a sense of what everyone is doing, but from my perspective and also what I have seen in people that I am close with, it can go either you say yes get a job and done, or you make an inventory of what is important to you in a workplace and then go after that.

06:29 (I)

11. That is a great segue into the next question I have for you, what is important to you or better yet, what was important to you when you were job hunting and deciding which companies to apply to?

06:51 (E)

12. Haha, I knew that was coming as well, that is a great question, can I think about it a bit before I say?

07:00 (I)

13. Yes, please, take your time.

07:40 (E)

14. So yeah, I think for me as I also was saying earlier, it was important to work for a place where my efforts and my time were going towards something good. Does that make sense? Is it arrogant to put it this way, I don't know? I don't want it to seem that I am too good for other companies, it wasn't like that. I just wanted my work to have some sort of a purpose. I work with something that to be honest with you is not my biggest passion in life, but it's something that I am good at right now and that I can contribute with. I have never been one of those people who knew since they were six that they wanted to be doctors or policemen and save the world, I just went along with what I could do and school and worked and kind of went with the flow.

09:20 (E)

15. So I realized later on in my life that for the work I do to make me feel fulfilled and maybe also proud and happy with what I do, it was important that it was part of something that ultimately had a positive impact. Positive impact on the environment or animals or people's lives, that didn't matter so much to me, but it mattered that I was part of a greater good, so I have known a long time before I started applying that this was gonna be important.

10:10 (I)

16. That's super interesting, thank you for sharing. Anything else?

10:41 (E)

17. Yes, of course it's not always rainbows and butterflies and saving the world, so for me it was important that my workplace was going to pay me well and be a place I could develop myself.

11:15 (I)

18. What do you mean by developing yourself, can you talk a bit about what that is to you?

11:30 (E)

19. Yes well, I have some career milestones to accomplish and goals that for example I could not fulfill in for example a start-up setting, so my goal was always to get hired in a large organization because the bigger the place, the more opportunities there are to grow and learn and advance in your career. I don't see myself doing the same thing until I get to pension age, I would like to try some things out, see what else I can do, see what other latent skills I can bring up to surface, which is I think in my view at least, a thing that is more difficult to achieve in a small company, but that is not to say that smaller companies do not have its perks, sometimes.

13:25 (I)

20. What attracted you specifically to the company you are working in right now, besides the things that you mentioned were important to you during the job hunt?

13:40 (E)

21. Hmm, good question, yes those two I did find here. I am not sure. I guess what attracted me was the highly international environment that employees enjoy here. I like working with people from other cultures and other places around the world. My education has an international angle, and I also took a sabbat year, is that what that is called, a sabbatical where I traveled and it gave me an appetite for wanting to go and see more of the world. In this workplace there are a ton of affiliate offices where I could imagine transferring for example for one year. I am from Denmark and Denmark is a small country compared to the rest of the world and I never had the experience of working and living in a completely new culture than my own so I think it is very cool to have the possibility to transfer for a while and see how things are done on other sides of the company. I think actually this is something I would need at some point because I feel like I have been part of this company for some time and I still can't wrap my head around how big it is and how many different areas and departments there are and what people from other lines of business are working with, so I definitely perceive it as a

huge advantage. Other than that I don't know, maybe more things will pop up in my head as we go along haha.

14:58 (I)

22. Nice, yes, thank you very much for the answer. How would you describe the company culture?

15:15 (E)

23. Well, I think joining the company during a period of turmoil is difficult when it comes to organizational culture. People were under pressure, everything was changing and happening fast, I was new and we were working online a lot, which made it challenging for me to make sense of the culture. I think I came at a point where there was a major shift in company culture between what was and what is to be. The place is very professional, everyone is very passionate about what they do and my feeling is that you have to be a dedicated individual to thrive in this kind of environment. It is a steep learning curve and a fast pace from day one, which I think was the case even before Corona, but what made all the difference in the world to me was the supportive environment.
24. People here are not out to compete against each other, on the contrary, the manager, leaders, more experienced coworkers all work in your favor, to help you, help them and ultimately help patients. This is something I was a bit afraid of, because you always hear the stories about corporate world and how everyone is ruthless and it's a jungle and you have to look out for yourself. This couldn't have been further from the truth, but the thing is that you can't know this for sure unless you are in there living it and experiencing it yourself.

17:14 (I)

25. I know you have not been in the company that long, but how do you think the pandemic impacted the company's culture?

17:32 (E)

26. Yeah, as you say, it's quite hard for me to pinpoint some stuff specifically, but I think the company is still in the process of figuring out what the new is and where to go from the Covid-19 times. The focus is definitely on how to help people more and more, patients and how to provide them with the medicine they need in order to live good lives, so it seems to be that there is an accelerated period of hiring large volumes of new employees. This is where I think a stronger onboarding needs to be set into place because we are now out of the pandemic period, so what has been learnt needs to also be put into practice. I think what the company is attempting to do now is step a bit away from the stamp of tradition and rigidity that it was known for before and getting an organizational culture makeover.
27. Employees, especially young talent that is fresh off the benches of university can very quickly be scared off because the company brands itself as serious, respectable, professional, top-of-the-class, world leaders in drug development, solid and constant high performance, ambition, excellence. These words have some sort of harshness about them, I think, they make this look like something that is impossible to get into unless you are top of your class yourself. Of course, if this is the kind of stuff that motivates you this will not scare you off.

28. Me I think I am somewhere in between, I want to run with the big guys, right, I want to be in an environment where I am pushed and challenged to grown, but I can honestly say that I was a bit intimidated when I applied for jobs here because it was hard to connect with the human side of the business.

19:04 (I)

29. Was it easier to connect with it once inside?

30. Oh yes definitely, once in I could see that the support is great, that teams and departments collaborate in a manner that fosters your wellbeing and that employees are looked after, but it was not so, how should I say this, evident before I applied.

19:37 (I)

31. In what way is your wellbeing fostered?

32. I think there are a lot of things that employees can benefit from. So for example what works for me is the one to one meetings with my line manager where we align not only on the tasks that I have to perform but also on how I am doing and managing the workload. I have access to all sort of health facilities on the workplace premises, which is something I use, and I think there are some counsellors that you can get in touch with if you are going through something difficult or if something gets too much, but I haven't made use of that so much.

33. On a task level I think my personal wellbeing comes from the fact that I am in charge of different projects and I am given a lot of trust, but I also benefit from the help of my team in case I need to consult or, what is that called in English, in Danish we say sparring, yes to spar with someone on something. There were a lot of work from home days during Corona because, yeah, everyone had to work from home. I think the fact that the place didn't go on fire and that business carried on made the company more willing to accept that sort of work space flexibility. But I think we are sadly going back to full time office work all the time, which is something I don't enjoy. It's like an unwritten rule, you know, if the boss and the majority of the team goes to the office it's a bit bad light on you to work from home, even if you yourself know you are more productive in that type of setting.

20:55 (I)

34. Is that type of work set-up and flexibility important to you finding the company attractive to work for?

35. Yes, definitely. I didn't know it was so rigid as it is, I assumed that everywhere now people have this type of hybrid work hours and work days, but it is actually, well maybe only in my department, as I said this place is huge, but in our team at least, people are keen on coming to the office more than working from home. I mean this could also be because we have all been cooped up at home for so long, for some people it just doesn't work, but for me it does.

21:49 (I)

36. Why does that work for you?

37. It works because it allows me the flexibility I need in order to make my everyday function and work in a natural way. It's hard to put it into words. I think the work from home saves me two hours of daily commuting to work through heavy traffic and then those hours I can use on something like a walk, or cooking some healthier food, working out a bit, making sure my place is clean. I mean, these are small things, but added up to me they make a difference.
38. Also, I am a bit of an introvert so sometimes the sensory overload from coming into the office and talking all the time, being surrounded by people, others chatting around me, it can very quickly become too much, we have open space offices with flexible seating, so to me sometimes it becomes chaotic and I find myself thinking wow I wish I was working on this big presentation that is soon due from home. But I also see it from the point of view of people who have kids and house chores and not a lot of outside work activities, that coming to the office can be like a relief, you know, like a place to socialize and be a fully functional human being, dressed in clean civilian clothes, haha, and catching up by the coffee machine with a colleague.

23:18 (I)

39. Haha, yes, it makes total sense, thanks for sharing. Lastly, can you please tell me what the company could do to keep you for as long as possible? And alternatively, perhaps you could reveal what would make you leave and join another company?
40. Oh wow. Let me think about it for a second, that is a complex question.
41. I think the more I think about it, the flexibility issue is something I really hope they will develop more. These are new times, where people have already proven that they could indeed make remote work just fine, and also it's not like, uhm, you know, like this is such a novel thing, other companies have been doing it for a long time even before the pandemic, so I don't really see the point in keeping the rigidity of coming into the office every single day and doing the nine to five like a million years ago for the next I don't know how many years.
42. Also, I think the human aspect of a workplace gets lost in a place so big, because people tend to stick around with their team and hardly talk to others in the company about their work and their contribution and what new projects they are working on. I think this would help me better understand the company and the industry and how what I do is helping someone in production or in research and development. This gets lost because there hasn't yet been put in place some sort of a system of bringing people from different areas and different departments together.
43. The company is a huge machinery where everyone works and works and makes it work, but you can quickly get sucked into this vortex and lose the bigger picture. I understand this is more easily achieved in a smaller place, as I said smaller companies do have their perks as well, but I also can't imagine that it could be so difficult to put something in place especially since we are using technology so much still and we come to the office to have fifteen online meetings a day with different stakeholders and internal employees.
44. What would make me leave? Hard to say. Probably not advancing and not being challenged enough in my role would make me pursue other stuff somewhere else. Losing sight of how my contribution makes a difference would also make me start

wondering if maybe I would be of more value somewhere else, but other than that something really drastic would have to happen for me to leave, for me where I am at right now is very good and I am enjoying being a part of the company a lot.

25:52 (I)

45. Thank you very much for answering and helping me in this research, I think you have given me some very valuable insight into this and I appreciate you taking the time.

46. 25:58 (E)

47. You're very welcome, yeah, it has been my pleasure,

Employee 2

00:00 (I)

1. Thank you very much for agreeing to do this interview with me, I really appreciate you taking the time and contributing to my research. As I have told you before, this is in relation to my thesis where I am exploring the field of talent attraction and how it was impacted by the pandemic and how talent who joined the company during this period experienced joining the company, what attracted them to this place and what thoughts and impressions they have so far since they joined. This will be recorded, but the interview as we agreed will remain anonymous and the recording will be deleted once I have transcribed everything. Are you ready to start?
2. Yes, ready and excited, I think, well, hope I will give you the answers you need, so yeah, I mean, let's do it.

01:40 (I)

3. Excellent! First of all, could you please tell me a little bit about why you chose to come and work for this company?
4. Well, to be honest with you I was not really pleased with my previous job and I was looking to switch jobs, not so much do a career change or a switch, but more do the same thing but somewhere else and in a new team and then I saw this position was opened and thought, yeah, ok, well, this is a good opportunity and I know about the company, so I applied and got the part after I interviewed and then I started.

02:48 (I)

5. What made you want that change if I may ask?
6. Yes, I was not happy with how things were done at my old workplace, I was there for three years and then it didn't look like things were going to move anywhere for me personally and on a career level I felt like I would be stuck in that role for many years to come. I mean the role was not too bad, but I could already feel that ok I am in this role but there is not a clear advance route, if you can understand what I mean. So I slowly started looking for other possibilities outside the company and Corona hadn't started yet because I think if it had, I wouldn't have dared to start looking for something new because so many people were losing their jobs during Corona so it's always better, I think to play it more safe and stay where you are until things settle down a bit.

7. So it's not to say that I specifically wanted to work here, but more that this place looked like something that I needed at the time, you know? It's a huge company, where I could imagine that there are many things that one can do and many different roles, roles that already exist and roles that are being created as we go along, so my idea and my wish was to be in a place like that because that would mean more opportunities for me to advance and maybe try my hand at managing a team or taking on more strategic responsibilities and maybe step away operationally from being in the first line.

05:02 (I)

8. I see and is there anything else that was important to you when you were looking for jobs or when you were looking for potential future employers?
9. Oh yes, absolutely, it is not just about that I can definitely say that. So definitely I was looking, umm, how do I say this, I think I was looking for something where I would learn more because I don't have a lot of years of work experience in that sense, so my goal was to land a job in a bigger place because somehow in my head that would give me more opportunities to learn and become better in my field. I worked in a way, way smaller company before this, so this is something completely new to me, but I like it because there are more people here that I can learn from.
10. It was also important to me that I join a company with a mission that speaks to me and I have diabetes so to me it was like also very personal when it came to jobs because I was going to final interviews with other companies and then I was thinking ok, I can do this work here or there or everywhere, but where can I do it where it gives me maximum satisfaction to put all these hours in? So it definitely played a huge role in my decision and I was, you know, um, hoping in the end that they would choose me because I would wear that as a badge of honor.

07:21 (I)

11. Is there anything else that attracted you specifically to this organization other than what you've mentioned so far?
12. I mean, it's hard to say, right, because I didn't know so much more about it that what I could read from the website and other places, because I didn't really know anyone who worked here so it's hard to pinpoint what exactly attracted me to it aside the fact that it is massive and that I could have a nice career here.
13. I liked the focus on sustainability and the different projects that the company is trying to drive in this direction, so far I don't really see how I can move to be more a part of that because I honestly haven't even had the time to think about it very much or do something.
14. I had a good experience while I was interviewing for it, I was nervous and excited and thought the interview process would be much more stressful than it actually was, it went well, well obviously haha, I got the job and everything. But no, seriously, I think the people I met because I did meet my hiring manager at the interview and I got this sense of ok, this is a cool crowd, it's not as, sorry to say, stuck up and serious like I thought it might be, which was a bit of a concern for me in the beginning. But the mood was light and the discussion was interesting and they gave me a really good insight into

what I can expect coming into the company and that made my decision easier, you know, like more clear that ok, I want to come and work in this company and I want to be better so I can stay.

08:51 (I)

15. Very interesting, thanks for sharing that with me. How would you describe the company culture now that you have been with it and in it for a while?
16. Yes, hmm, well I think people are very supportive, but it is also a very demanding job with a lot of hard work and steep learning curve. You know, there are days and days, sometimes it's fun and sometimes it's a lot of work, but I guess that's how it's everywhere or at least how it should be. I think it's nice to have this up and down flow of work coming in because if it is too easy then I can get bored and if it is too stressful then it becomes demotivating to me.
17. I like that there is a lot of trust that is placed in the employees and I can see this in the sort of tasks I have and in the projects that I drive, where in the beginning I was like, wow this is like a lot of responsibility, and I mean a lot, to the point where I was like wow, can I even do this with how much experience I have? But little by little I saw these projects coming to life and then I got great feedback from my manager and the team was also very supportive so somehow I made it work without a manual of hoe to survive your first three months in this crazy massive place where so many other people work.

10:12 (I)

18. Would you have liked that kind of manual?
19. Haha well that was just a joke, but to be honest with you, I would not mind having that kind of tool for the first while. I mean this sort of work and work in a company in general, you kinda learn it as you go along, but it was difficult for me because I am still, or at least I still consider myself in the beginning of my career, in a more serious way, and I felt very overwhelmed stepping in here. I mean I of course had the help of my manager and team members that could be a buddy so to speak to me and show me how the different systems and programmes worked, but it took me a really long time and there are days where I still wonder if I am there to understand all of the company abbreviations and acronyms and business lingo.
20. Not just that, but it can sometimes be very difficult because of course the skills are transferable and I feel like I came with a good backpack of knowledge from my previous job, but my previous job was not in the pharmaceutical industry, so it took a while to understand what people are doing in this company. Like, obviously at the surface everyone knows what we do as a company, but it's hard for example to understand how my work and someone else's work and someone else's from the same department is connected and how we are sort of working and supporting each other as departments to get to the results that we get or have to get to.
21. But it's not bad, I just wish there was more in this sense, because we do have a lot of information on our internal sharepoint pages and intranet, but nobody has time to read through all of that or keep up with what that team in America is doing or what other

offices in Zurich are doing and sometimes even other areas and lines of business are difficult to understand so yeah, it can get complicated.

12:48 (I)

22. And how do you manage that if you don't mind me asking?

23. I mean, to be honest with you I just try to do my job as best as possible and most of the time that is enough to make things work and to feel good about it. It doesn't stress me or anything or give me too much frustration, so I don't know if I actually have time to think about it too long or too often. But I guess this somehow relates to what I told you in the beginning, right, if you want opportunities to advance then you have to have some sort of good idea about where to go to, a plan set into place of what you can do and what you want to do so that you can do both a good job and do something that you are passionate about and that is more in line with your passion and what you burn for.

24. I mean I don't know, maybe this is naïve to think, but I think that there are many people out there who really love what they are doing and work for them is super beautiful and exciting because they are working exactly with what brings them joy and happiness and with what truly makes a difference. And so there are also many people who don't like what they do and don't do anything about it and don't get any help to do anything about it and then they become demotivated and miserable because they don't enjoy what they are doing, but they do it because they have to.

14:23 (I)

25. And which category would you say that you are part of now?

26. Haha, definitely part of the first one and that makes me very, very pleased. I think I would slowly whittle away if I was stuck in a job that didn't give me satisfaction, so that is definitely not my case for now. I like what I am doing, but I can also be a bit of a realist or a pessimist or what do you call it, and think about the future and try to find some new ways to keep the excitement and the motivation going, but I also know that motivation is just something that goes up and down and a lot of work needs to be put into it to be maintained or upheld.

15:31 (I)

27. Who is responsible for that?

28. For what?

15:45 (I)

29. For motivation and keeping that alive.

30. Well, it is everyone's own mission I would say, but it definitely is also part of the job of your boss or your manager to see if they can contribute with anything and be of help.

16:11 (I)

31. And is this something you feel you are getting in your current team?

32. From my manager? Yes, I guess in a way, but I am also not at the point where I am bored or anything like that, because I haven't been here long enough to no longer enjoy

what I am doing. But I like to think that if I got to that point that my manager could offer some solutions or give some advice or come up with some sort of plan of how to do it, what to change, where to go or where to stay.

33. I feel like we have a pretty good relationship and that he is involved in...

16:43 (I)

34. Your manager?

35. Yes, my manager, we have one to one meetings regularly, but that is mostly to check in on tasks and give progress reports and sometimes the conversation drifts to more personal level and to how I am doing as a whole, but that is definitely not a priority on the agenda unless there is something seriously wrong going on or something that I am struggling with.

17:21 (I)

36. How do you think the pandemic impacted the company culture?

37. Well I don't know what it was like before, but I am glad that we are back at the office now, because for me it was a mess stepping into the company during Corona. Like everything was online, I had to work from home all the time and I had a million questions to ask and it felt very difficult and annoying and frustrating asking these questions online where you wouldn't really be able to read the room and see if you are bothering people. I was on the phone with IT support all the time because the computer would break or I couldn't log into my Outlook e-mail or some such thing.

38. Then the online meetings were draining me of energy because we were stuck to the chair all day long, logging in and out of meetings that could have been e-mails, but I understand, like everyone was trying to do the best they could do and they weren't in that situation before, so of course they were doing things as they moved along and hoping for positive outcomes, but I don't think this is something that this organization is a single case, I think everyone all over the world was dealing with this and hoping it would pass sooner.

39. I think now that there is no restrictions left the people are happy to come back to work and be in the office, to me it definitely makes it more fun, although I do miss starting the day a bit later and working from home because coming all the way to the office especially if you have a very long commute can be a bit draining.

19:40 (I)

40. Is that not an option anymore now that there are no more Covid-19 restrictions?

41. Yes, no, it is definitely still an option, but I don't know how much people make use of it and if it is still something that is accepted, I don't know, sometimes I wish this was a bit more clear, like yes you can work three days from the office and two days from home, or the other way around or what do I know. I mean I see this as an accepted practice everywhere else, well, you know, from other people who work in different places. But I can imagine that this will eventually become a fully accepted practice here as well, I am just a bit surprised it hasn't happened yet, cause we did do it during corona, but not now, but it's not a major factor that I think about it all the time, it's just

something I think everyone would enjoy and that would give a bit more freedom to be a person and give a better work-life balance.

20:57 (I)

42. Definitely. Now, could you please put some words into what more the company could do to ensure that you are thriving in your role?

43. In this role I have now? Hmm this is a very wide question so I am not sure how to approach or how to answer. I think all in all there are a lot of opportunities for employees to take care of themselves, to look after themselves and their wellbeing and a lot of options like you can work out for free, you can use a work therapist for free, you have local HR business partners that can help you in case you have an issue that you want to discuss about with someone else other than your boss, you have opportunities to socialize now and then with people from different departments, but I guess this more to do with the employees thriving overall, because all large companies have these sort of benefits packages.

44. I think that for me personally, because the others I have mentioned I barely use, so it doesn't make that big of a difference for me personally, although I do believe it's a great offering for everyone employed here. I think for me what would make a difference is more learning opportunities but learning about the company because as I told you before sometimes it can be hard to understand exactly the details and mechanics behind what different departments do and what it actually looks like, like what sort of research are they involved in and how can someone for example from my team contribute so that their work gets fasttracked because maybe we can help one another better but we don't realize it enough.

45. Sometimes, no matter how much we say that together we are life-changing it looks like we do work in silos and we are super divided and then once in a while we get a company e-mail update of what is up or some sort of corporate announcement, but it would be nice to have a better overview of what is going on, where are we making an impact, where are we going with this project and this project, how can Global IT for example and production sites in Kalundborg, two areas that have very little to do with one another, help each other in completing tasks and goals together? I mean, it doesn't have to be this super time-consuming and complex set-up, it can just be some monthly meetings where you learn more about the company that you are in so that you can do your job better and think innovatively about ok, what more can I do to help?

26:39 (I)

46. Thank you so much for that. Lastly if you could help me with one curiosity that I have, what would potentially make you want to leave the company for another job in a different organization?

47. If I didn't see a point to me being there anymore and if my hands were tied to my back when it comes to what more I could do. Since I came here, I started working out a clearer career path for me where I could combine skills, knowledge and areas of development and that has painted a clear picture of where I hope to be in five, ten years from now. I understand that nothing goes exactly according to these plans we make, I mean hell, we have just come out of the strangest most unexpected two years ever that

no one saw coming. But I will leave if I am not challenged enough and don't have an opportunity to grow as a professional and achieve these goals.

Employee 3

00:00 (I)

1. Thank you very much for making yourself available and agreeing to be interviewed for my research as part of my master's studies, I know we talked on the phone a while ago, but as a quick recap this is an interview where I am interested in learning more about your motivation to join the company, how you experienced the time as a brand new employee, especially during the Covid-19 period, if it's living up to your expectations and what other thoughts you have about your experience so far. This interview will remain anonymous and the recording will be deleted as soon as I will finish transcribing everything, so I guess we can get into it unless you have any additional questions for me before we begin?
2. No, I am good to go, I have never done it, well I have done this for my own project, but I am excited to be on the other side of the interview now haha.

01:21 (I)

3. Amazing! Ok, so could you to begin with please tell me a little bit about why you chose this company to work for?
4. Sure, well, as you know, I haven't been with the company for very long, I was hired in the beginning of two thousand twenty, so right before the big outbreak with the pandemic and all of that. Basically this was my first job because I had graduated the previous year and I was looking for different opportunities after I finished my degree. So for a while I took a bit of time off to think about what I wanted to do and what kind of company I should go for because I wanted to go for an administrative position so I was looking for office work, but I was very afraid that the administrative, office work in a smaller company would quickly make me feel, you know, a bit bored, a bit unchallenged.
5. Then I thought that maybe I could move to a different city and work, so it was all a bit of a mess with where I was going and what I wanted to do, but like, I didn't just want to say yes to any kind of job for the sake of having a job, so I really waited for a while before I could find something that was more in line with my dreams and my expectations.
6. So then, yeah, when I saw the job opening here I said, ok, this is something I definitely have to apply for because ever since university days I knew I wanted to join one of the big companies in Denmark, so at the back of my mind I think I was always, hmm, how can I say it, like in a way hunting or on the lookout for opportunities in a big organization. And when I talk about big organizations I am mostly speaking because I know this is basically the only chance for internationals in Denmark, who maybe don't speak the language, to make it career-wise, because these are the types of places who need international workforce.

7. Yeah, I was happy to see the job ad posted in English and that there were no language requirements, I mean Danish language requirements, so I applied and I stalked the company a bit more, because of course I knew who they are and what they do, but I didn't really know what the vibe was, you know? So I looked it up online before I prepared for the job interview and I really liked what I saw, you know? I really connected with the whole idea of helping people all over the world and contributing a little bit to this greater good, because I have a grandma, my mom's mom who died from diabetes complications and it made me so emotional because then I thought wow if I worked here I could maybe in some small way help in this. I mean obviously I am not a medical doctor or some scientist, chemist whatever to do work with medicine or discovering some cure to these diseases, but like you know, just saying that I worked there would make me feel proud.
8. Other than that to be honest with you I didn't really know all that much, I just went ahead and applied and hoped whatever work experience I had would be enough because it looked like a super serious workplace, like seriously I was like what am I even doing in this place, because they say oh we hire top class applicants and everyone is in a suit and I couldn't really see myself in there with all these people and in this atmosphere but then I got the job, haha, and it was like definitely not what I expecting, like people are way nicer than it seems from the outside, like not to say that from the outside they don't seem nice or something like that it's just you know, a first impression, which actually turned out to be wrong.

04:49 (I)

9. Nice! Where did you find out about the company?
10. I mean they were always there at our university when we had these events where companies would present jobs and what people do at their, uhm, at work there and how to apply for a job there and so on. I never personally approached them because it wasn't really my plan to work in the pharmaceutical industry, I thought ok this is something that is for like biology or some engineering or IT people not with people like me who studied on the more humanistic side of university programmes. But then after I graduated and started thinking about jobs and making lists of where I was applying, I thought ok even places like these have a need for human resources people, for office assistants, personal assistants and so on so then my mind changed and I was like okay, I'll give it a shot like what is the worst thing that could happen, they will just say no and then I will try again somewhere else.

05:45 (I)

11. Would you have been sad if they had said no to you?
12. Yeah definitely, especially after the interviews I had because I realized how nice people were and how great the mood was during the interviews and then I thought ok, if this is how nice my manager is then the team must be very similar, and I would like to be part of that kind of group and in a company that really does so much good for people.

06:38 (I)

13. I'm glad to hear that. So what else was important to you while looking for a job and for a potential new employer?

14. Well definitely the aspect of working in an international environment was my number one priority and that is definitely not only because of the language, because I do at some point want to learn Danish and fully integrate into the Danish culture, outside and a work. But it was more to do with the fact that I also lived in many countries, studied abroad, I am an expat, I want to move around in circles where people are thinking different than me because they come from other places in the world and have alternative ideas, and we learn from each other from these experiences but also because things are done different where they come from. That is how it has always been for me ever since I moved from my home country to study abroad and I want it to be like that because otherwise it will be a bit dull.

08:00 (I)

15. And what else attracted you specifically to this organization or was it just pure luck, you got the job, it somewhat matched with what you were looking for so you said yes?
16. I mean that is also true, but I guess what also really, really attracted me is the mission of the company, because there are so many other multinational companies all over the world to go work for, but then you sit back and ask yourself the question, hmm do I really like wanna work for them? Like what exactly is this company doing for the world, do you know what I mean?
17. Like for me it was important to work for a place where I would be proud to work at, because I don't want to put any hours into something or someone who is not doing the world any good and on top of everything also destroying the environment, treating employees poorly. Like, of course this was a risk that I would be taking here, as well, because no one can guarantee you that a place will be everything you dream of in workplace, right?
18. But on the other hand, you know, these things get to the surface no matter how hard someone tries to cover them, and I do my research very thoroughly and so do many people, especially the younger generation, like you just can't get away with these things anymore as a company.
19. I read about the different initiatives when it comes to diversity and inclusion, about the different sustainability projects and the Circular for Zero project, and it made me think ok this might be just words and pretty pictures but it doesn't look like that and I have a good gut feeling about it. And to be honest with you, I saw the reaction to Corona and how it was dealt with and how well we were taken care of and it proved that ok, this was the right way to go after all. But you can't know that for sure, you know, sometimes, umm, sometimes you just have to risk it and say yes, there's always gonna be something that is maybe no going according to the plan or doesn't sit well with you and then you have to resolve it.

09:51 (I)

20. And do you feel like you can do that currently?
21. Well, to be fair I haven't had to, because nothing out of the ordinary happened, but yes, I feel like if I went to my manager and had something I needed help with, I would get the support I needed. I know there are many options for the employees here to deal with all sorts of issues, like if it's more personal and you don't want your whole tea, to know about it or feel like you can't discuss it with your boss, you always have some sort of

support like therapy and for example there was the Corona hotline where you could call in case you were stressed or felt alone or felt you couldn't perform well. I didn't make use of it, but just having the sense of ok, there something I can do in case things go down too fast, so that gave me a lot of comfort, like there's something there, I don't have to deal with it on my own, you know? I think that's very important and it was super important even before Corona, but it definitely opened people's eyes to that we are super lucky to have this.

10:59 (I)

22. Thank you, yes, that's very important. So how would you describe the company culture?

23. Haha, I think I just answered that. I mean I don't know, culture is such an abstract, huge thing, it's hard to choose some words to encompass something so big. I think we are a bunch of highly professional people who put in a lot of hard work for something that is greater than all of us together. I think the support is very high in the teams, well I don't know if it is like that everywhere, but like if I have a problem with work or I can't figure out something, which still happens very often because I still feel like I am one of the newer ones in the department, I can always ask for help without feeling that someone might turn me away or sabotage me.

11:51 (I)

24. Ok, then how do you think the pandemic affected the company culture because you did join very little before everything started and you all had to work remotely for a long period after that?

25. Well, from what I saw and what I can say, I think for me it actually brought us in my team a bit closer because we were always in touch online, in meetings and we were trying as much as possible to not stay divided, so we were doing all sorts of fun activities, having coffee dates, doing gymnastics, doing work meetings.

26. Of course at some point it got a bit too much, because it felt like even if we were home alone we never had a moment to breathe because we jumped from meeting to meeting and activity to activity. So now that we are back, the work has become more individualistic, so we all have separate tasks and we see each other at the office, but we are each stuck to our own computers and don't use as much time as before to talk to each other past the operations and the projects and tasks that we are working on.

27. This is something that I wish we could keep from the pandemic times, because I can feel that we are slowly drifting apart again which is such a paradox because we are more together now than we were for the past two years so it almost doesn't make any sense. And that is my own team that I am talking about, so we are not even talking about other teams and other floors, like I have no idea what the people one floor below us are doing or working on, which is a bit bizarre because then it makes me think ok, this company is huge, so I am never gonna get to meet everyone, obviously, but it also shouldn't be so hard to meet other people and get together and do more things.

13:40 (I)

28. Are you thinking about socializing activities or what do you have in mind?
29. Yeah and not necessarily just that, but it would be nice to do some sort of cross-departmental work or be involved in more work together, where you know someone from IT comes with a solution and someone from business development comes with something, and someone from procurement or from quality or from human resources brings some ideas. But I don't know if people would be keen on doing that because we do have so much work to do, and maybe this is more like a university thing where you work in groups on different projects, I think that's an element that I am missing in our work here because especially in my position it can very easy get lonely and a bit of the same thing every day.
30. But I'm not complaining, like it's been good for me, it's just maybe something that needs to be improved but I also see that this takes a lot of planning and resources and if these are not there then this doesn't really have or will have priority.

14:44 (I)

31. So what more other than that could the organization do to make you thrive in this current role that you have now?
32. Well that is an interesting question, I don't know what else to add other than what I told you so far. I think I would like to be involved in more activities outside my own role so I could learn more about the company, because for example I know you are part of global talent and you send employees out on career fairs and stuff like that, like that is something that I would like to be a part of because when you go to these events you bring employees from different lines of business who work with different stud, so it would be so nice to come to some of these events to meet students or graduates and get them to work for us, but also it would be so super nice to meet other coworkers who you would never get to meet if it wasn't for these activities.
33. So you get to learn the company so much better because of course you can read about the different departments, I am sure there is some sort of pdf or PowerPoint presentation of what we do in this production site and what we do in the headquarters or what the statisticians are doing in this other site and so on, but it's always so much more personal when you meet them and have those genuine and authentic talks like employee to employee and find out what people are passionate about and what their purpose is.
34. I think this is another thing that I am missing from time to time, like of course I understand that we are all working towards the same purpose, right, to help millions and millions of people who have to deal with chronic disease, and you want them to have better lives and normal lives, but sometimes this purpose kind of gets lost, do you know what you mean? Like some days you can be in front of the computer all day with your head inside Excel sheets and reports and invoices and do budgeting and then you kind of forget that your work has a meaning and a purpose and that your contribution matters.
35. I haven't been in this role for long enough to get so bored with it, but I do see others, not necessarily here with us, but in other workplaces, where it can feel like a hamster on a wheel just running and running and putting the work day in and day out and kind of live life missing the point? Does this make sense, oh my God, I feel like I am

completely rambling right now, haha, I don't want to give the wrong impression or make it sound so bleak.

18:50 (I)

36. No, not at all, please go on.

37. No I think that's it, I think maybe it's just a fear of mine, because this is the corporate work we are in, even if we do have a good mission and we are helping people, we can't hide behind the fact that this is corporate life we are talking about and things can so quickly get boring and overwhelming at the same time and then if motivation goes down the drain then you are in trouble, and the team is in trouble and the whole place is in trouble. Things go down when people don't care anymore.

21:30 (I)

38. How could your manager for example help with that do you think?

39. I mean you know, I think this is very much an individual thing to a certain degree because your manager can't read your mind or babysit you through these phases where you are demotivated, where you are slacking a bit, where you maybe don't give it your all, and of course there will inevitably be signs of that at some point, like it will show in your performance and in your activity but to me getting there would be a critical point already.

40. I don't know what the manager or managers can do in these situations, I think for me personally what would help would be having a bit more human conversations, like how we have the one to one talks about tasks, then we could have more of these meetings maybe more with the whole team, where we discuss a bit about what we are passionate and what we burn for in our job, how we can do more of that in our projects, how our work helps the work of different colleagues and how this whole work we do is tied up together.

41. Maybe we could do some coaching or some workshops, some personal development especially for someone like me who is very young still and very much in the beginning of my career, because maybe more senior employees don't need it, but what do I know, maybe they also need a brush-up on what else they could do, what their core motivation is and how that helps them in the work that they do. I have had very little of that in my life and in my professional life so having a bit more direction and more connection to the organization would give me these booster shots of motivation here and there.

26:03 (I)

42. Thank you for sharing. Ok, we are coming to the end of the interview now and the last thing that I want you to talk about, if you can, is what would make you leave the company and go for another position somewhere else?

43. Oh that is very difficult, I have not have any thoughts so far about ever leaving and I know this is just an imaginary scenario, but even like this I don't really know. Probably if something very unfair would happen to me or if I started being treated very badly, which I hardly think would happen, so I can't imagine something very dramatic or something very bad happening to me that would push me somewhere else. Probably if there was no room to advance and then in another company I would get a higher role or position, I think I would eventually start to consider it or if I was just doing the same work over and over and over again and I couldn't have the room to try different things here and there and get absolutely bored with the role or if the team became

dysfunctional in some way. But these are of course very far-fetched reasons, I think for now I am very happy with what I do and I like it, so I don't see myself leaving any time soon.

31:09 (I)

44. Thank you so much for being open to this and for your answers, I really appreciate it!

45. You're welcome, it was fun and I hope I could be of help.

Appendix 2: Interview Guides

Interview Guides

Interview Guide for Talent Attraction Experts

1. How has the pandemic affected talent attraction activities?
2. How do you think the pandemic impacted the company culture?
3. Were there any employer branding initiatives that were used to make the organization a more attractive company to get hired at?
4. What do you think are the top three aspects that make the company attractive to top talent?
5. What non-financial benefits do the employees in the company have?
6. What more do you think that the company could do in order to attract but also to retain top talent?

Interview Guide for Employees in the Organization

1. Why did you choose to come work for this company?
2. What was important to you when you were applying for jobs?
3. What attracted you specifically when making this choice?
4. How would you describe the company culture?
5. How do you think the pandemic impacted the company culture?
6. What more could the company do to ensure that you are thriving in your role?
7. What would potentially make you leave the company for another job in another place?

Appendix 3: Manual Coding

