



A Survey Experiment on Future Knowledge Workers: Consequences of Falsely Promising a People-Centric Workplace

*Employee Preferences and Concerns About Employer Brand
Integrity: A Study of Future Knowledge Workers*

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Preface

At the Norwegian School of Economics there is a term amongst the students known as “Bedpress Bingo” – meaning that one participates on company presentations at the university with an imaginary Bingo-board to check off the boxes each time the company representatives mention commonly used phrases such as “great opportunities to learn and grow”, “great work environment”, “stimulating work projects” or “responsibility from day one”. Ironically, these well-intended buzzwords can start feeling hollow and inauthentic for students who keep hearing them over and over. Do they actually mean what they say, and does that mean that all firms are equally great employers? Is the work environment really as good as portrayed?

Having worked for several organizations while studying for our degrees, we started to experience a pattern-gap between how employers would portray themselves externally versus the reality that met us inside the company walls. Continuing to confer with fellow students and others who had graduated and worked for some years, we kept hearing similar stories to our own. Many of our older and well-educated friends were leaving their employers due to dissatisfaction and not feeling engaged at work. Here, some have even become entrepreneurs to avoid the risk of ending up in a bad work environment.

Due to this, we began researching answers, talking to company managers, professors and go deeper on the topics of knowledge workers, employer branding, motivation, and employee engagement. The results are the study you can now read about in this thesis.

This study would not exist today without the help from our friends at NHH, UiB Law and NTNU Industrial Economics who participated in our study, or the commercial and academic sparring partners that aided us in gaining more clarity on the topic. Of those, we would like to thank Federico Lozano, Mette Hopsdal, Camilla Skogstad, Tron Kleivane, Ole Jacob Ytterdal, Alexander Madsen Sandvik, Agnes Roll-Matthiesen and Vegard Solbakk Fuglseth. Lastly, we would especially like to thank our supervisor Hallgeir Sjøstad for the sturdy help and guidance in developing this thesis.

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Table of contents

1.	EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	6
2.	INTRODUCTION	7
2.1	RESEARCH QUESTIONS	9
2.2	STRUCTURE OF PAPER	9
3.	LITERATURE REVIEW	10
3.1	FUTURE KNOWLEDGE WORKERS: WHO ARE THEY AND WHAT DO THEY WANT?	10
3.1.1	<i>What is a Knowledge Worker?</i>	10
3.1.2	<i>Who is the Next Generation of Knowledge workers?</i>	11
3.2	MOTIVATIONAL FACTORS AT WORK – MONETARY AND PEOPLE-CENTRIC	12
3.3	THE EMPLOYEE LIFECYCLE AND THE VALUE PROPOSITION OF PEOPLE-CENTRIC WORK PRACTICES	14
3.3.1	<i>Attracting Talent – Employer Branding and EVP</i>	15
3.3.2	<i>Employee Engagement</i>	16
3.3.3	<i>Retention</i>	18
3.4	TWO CHANNELS TO ATTRACT KNOWLEDGE WORKERS: FORMAL AND INFORMAL	19
3.5	IMPLICATIONS OF FALSE ADVERTISING AND SIGNALING ON COMPANY INTEGRITY	20
3.6	“GREEN-WASHING” EMPLOYER BRANDING	22
3.7	FAILING AT THE ENGAGEMENT AND RETENTION STAGES’ MIGHT AFFECT THE EARLIER ATTRACTION STAGE.....	23
3.8	HYPOTHESES	24
4.	METHODOLOGY.....	26
4.1	RESEARCH DESIGN AND APPROACH TO THEORY DEVELOPMENT	26
4.2	METHOD	27
4.3	PROCEDURE FOR DATA COLLECTION	29
4.3.1	<i>Survey Design</i>	29
4.3.2	<i>Survey Part 1: Descriptive Overview</i>	32
4.3.3	<i>Survey Part 2: A Controlled Experiment</i>	33
4.4	METHODS OF ANALYSIS.....	38
4.4.1	<i>Preparations of Data Set</i>	38
4.4.2	<i>Preparing the Data for Descriptive Analysis</i>	38
4.4.3	<i>Statistical Testing</i>	38
4.5	RESEARCH QUALITY	39
4.5.1	<i>Reliability</i>	39
4.5.2	<i>Validity</i>	40
5.	FINDINGS AND RESULTS.....	42

5.1	RESULTS AND ANALYSIS FOR STUDY PART 1: WORKPLACE PREFERENCES	42
5.1.1	<i>Ranking of Preferences</i>	42
5.1.2	<i>People-centric vs. Monetary Factors</i>	43
5.2	RESULTS AND ANALYSIS OF STUDY PART 2: CONTROLLED EXPERIMENT.....	45
5.2.1	<i>Hypothesis H1: Effects of Branding People-centric Practices</i>	45
5.2.2	<i>Hypothesis H2: Effects of False Promises on People-centric Work Practices</i>	46
5.2.3	<i>Hypothesis H3: False Promises versus Not Branding</i>	47
6.	DISCUSSION	48
6.1	SHORT SUMMARY OF MAIN FINDINGS: THE BIG PICTURE	48
6.2	STUDY PART 1. IMPORTANT WORK-RELATED FACTORS FOR FUTURE KNOWLEDGE WORKERS	48
6.2.1	<i>Our Ranking vs. Nordhaug et al. 2010</i>	48
6.2.2	<i>General Takeaways on the Students' Workplace Preferences</i>	49
6.3	STUDY PART 2 – THE IMPACT OF FALSE PROMISES ON PEOPLE-CENTRIC WORK PRACTICES	52
6.3.1	<i>H1 – Control Condition vs. Workplace Promise</i>	52
6.3.2	<i>H2 – Broken Workplace Promise vs. Workplace Promise</i>	53
6.3.3	<i>H3 – Broken Workplace Promise vs. Control Condition</i>	55
6.4	MANAGERIAL IMPLICATIONS.....	56
6.5	LIMITATIONS	57
6.6	RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH	58
7.	CONCLUSION	61
8.	BIBLIOGRAPHY	63
9.	APPENDIX	71
9.1	THE SURVEY USED FOR DATA COLLECTION.....	71
9.2	OVERVIEW OVER WHY VARIABLES IN PART 1 WERE CHOSEN.....	78
9.3	STUDY PART 2: ANOVA-TESTS AND POST-HOC TESTING WITH TUKEY'S HSD (MORE TECHNICAL DETAILS)	81
9.4	STUDY PART 2: SEPARATE ANALYSES OF <i>JOB SATISFACTION</i> AND <i>WORK ENGAGEMENT</i>	82
9.4.1	<i>Analysis of Participants' Expected Job Satisfaction</i>	82
9.4.2	<i>Analysis of Participants' Expected Work Engagement</i>	83

Table of Figures:

FIGURE 1 – IMPLICATIONS OF FALSE ADVERTISING ON COMPANY INTEGRITY (PRITCHARD, 2014)	21
TABLE 1 - DESCRIPTIVE VARIABLES FOR STUDY PART 1	33
TABLE 2 - RANKING OF PREFERRED WORKPLACE CHARACTERISTICS	43
TABLE 3 - OVERVIEW OF T-TESTS BETWEEN ALL VARIABLES AND THE COMBINATION VARIABLE OF SALARIES.....	44
TABLE 4 - TOP 5 RANKING VARIABLES: NORDHAUG ET AL. (2010) VS THIS STUDY	49
TABLE 5 - REASON FOR CHOICE OF VARIABLES IN STUDY PART 1.....	80
BAR CHART 1 - THE WORKPLACE PROMISE CONDITION (VS. CONTROL) HAD NO SIGNIFICANT EFFECT ON THE THREE DEPENDENT VARIABLES	46
BAR CHART 2 – THE BROKEN WORKPLACE PROMISE CONDITION (VS. WORKPLACE PROMISES) HAD A SIGNIFICANT NEGATIVE EFFECT ON THE THREE DEPENDENT VARIABLES	47
BAR CHART 3 – THE BROKEN WORKPLACE PROMISE CONDITION (VS. CONTROL) HAD A SIGNIFICANT NEGATIVE EFFECT ON THE THREE DEPENDENT VARIABLES	47
BAR CHART 4 - STUDY PART 2 "EXPECTED JOB SATISFACTION"	83
BAR CHART 5 - STUDY PART 2 "EXPECTED WORK ENGAGEMENT"	84

1. Executive summary

Decades of empirical research has documented that job satisfaction and employee engagement are important factors at the workplace, which in turn are positively associated with organizational performance. In short, organizations with satisfied and engaged employees tend to perform better than organizations with dissatisfied and disengaged workers. Even though firms often brand themselves as concerned with work environment, job satisfaction, and employee well-being, the actual engagement levels at workplaces worldwide appears to be alarmingly low. Thus, it seems to be a mismatch between what several firms externally portray themselves as and the real experience employees have within the workplace. In addition, the importance for firms to acquire skilled knowledge workers is on the rise as manual labor is increasingly being automated and replaced by highly educated professionals. Understanding and meeting this group of future knowledge workers' needs is argued to be paramount for companies who wish to succeed in the future. Inspired by these recent trends in society and the business world, we conducted a two-part study on the preferences of future knowledge workers and the effects of not living up to the promises of a people-centric work environment in one's organization.

In the first part of this study, a descriptive survey was used to investigate which factors future knowledge workers deem important when choosing an employer. Based on past research, 20 attributes were tested on future knowledge workers from top universities in Norway. The results showed that job satisfaction, interesting work, good social environment, trust, and opportunity for personal growth were ranked as the five most important factors by a sample of 658 respondents. This part of the study also found that students ranked most people-centric factors as significantly more important than salaries.

In the second part of our study, we conducted a survey experiment to investigate the effects of falsely advertising people-centric work practices to future knowledge workers. These results showed that false promises of people-centric practices can have a negative effect on firms' ability to attract, engage and retain critical talent. Furthermore, the study found that whether a company brands themselves as people-centric or not, had no significant effect on predicted attraction, engagement nor retention levels. One implication of these findings is that companies should be aware of the potential risk of using people-centric branding: The gain from such advertising appears to be smaller than expected, and the backfiring effect that occurs if they should fail to live up to their own promises might be substantial.

2. Introduction

It is well established that the work environment has a large impact on motivation and performance (Herzberg, 2008; Harter, et al., 2020; Anitha, 2014; Kahn, 1990). All else equal, organizations with good work environments tend to outperform organizations with poor work environments, especially when it comes to individual motivation to do one's very best (Anitha, 2014; Gallup, 2021). Therefore, many organizations wish to convey a positive employer brand, such as having a great work environment and focusing on *people-centric practices* (Chhabra & Sharma, 2012). In this thesis, the term *people-centric* is used to explain characteristics such as a good social environment at work, job satisfaction, engagement, trust, and opportunity for personal development. Despite widespread adoption of people-centric branding strategies, however, workers within an organization may have a very different perception of the actual reality in the firm. Consequently, we find it of great importance to study what happens when firms portray themselves as people-centric but in reality, are not. To examine this research question empirically, we conducted a survey experiment to investigate how future knowledge workers react to false promises of people-centric practices, and the potential consequences on expected attraction, engagement, and retention.

Previous business research implies that global disengagement (Gallup, 2021), stress and mental health (Pfeffer, 2018; Gallup, 2021) at the workplace is an increasing issue. According to a report on Microsoft 365 and LinkedIn employees, these issues are affecting younger generations even more, especially in the wake of the recent global pandemic (Microsoft, 2021). As companies are struggling to retain new generations of knowledge workers entering the workplace (Randstad, 2020), new means of sustainably managing well-being and productivity is arguably needed. Therefore, this thesis also seeks to understand the needs, preferences, and motivations of future knowledge workers for an ideal workplace.

According to research on knowledge workers, facilitating productivity and motivation amongst this group of educated workers is essential if firms wish to enhance organizational performance, competitiveness, and innovation in the future (Drucker, 1999). Even though research within the field of knowledge work suggests different approaches of motivating knowledge workers, there is still a lack of solid findings on this topic, where researchers often recommend to further investigate the drivers and motivators of knowledge workers. In addition, knowledge work is not constant, but something fluid that needs continuous development and nurturing (Drucker, 1999). Therefore, it is argued that the value of

knowledge workers diminishes over time if they do not continuously evolve with new developments, methods, technology, and procedures. Due to the fluidity of this worker group, which generation they belong to, and contemporary time they grew up in could also affect what drives and motivates them. Accordingly, it is interesting to not only investigate current knowledge workers needs and preferences at work, but also the knowledge workers of tomorrow.

Other research highlights the contemporary problem that companies face with engaging talent. In total, only 20% of the global workforce is actively engaged at work, meaning they are engaged by their day-to-day workplace experience (Gallup, 2021). This number is even lower for Norway, where research found that only 18% of Norwegian workers feel engaged at work (Gallup, 2021). Due to this trend, most employees globally are therefore either watching the clock or actively opposing their employer, which further generates an impediment on productivity, innovation, and organizational change. According to Gallup (2021), this trend accumulates in an approximate cost of \$8.1 trillion in lost productivity worldwide. Furthermore, mental, and physical health is also constituting an increasing issue at the workplace, where workplace stressors such as high job demands, low job control and lack of social support have proven to lead to poor mental and physical health (Pfeffer, 2018). Subsequently, it has arguably never been more important to understand the drivers and motivators of the leaders of tomorrow, to best facilitate workplace practices that enforces their engagement, mental health, and well-being.

Fueled by the ongoing corona pandemic, companies are increasingly struggling to retain their employees, especially their younger talent, as needs and expectations of the workplace and ways of work are rapidly changing (Randstad, 2020; Microsoft, 2021). Furthermore, a new “war for talent” is argued to be emerging, making it harder for organizations to acquire the best heads in the future (Minahan, 2021). According to Randstad (2020), the so-called *Gen Z* and *Millennials* are approximately three times more likely to change jobs in 2021 than older generations. Some researchers further propose that, in the future, the “competition for the best employees will be as fierce as the competition for customers” (Berthon, Ewing, & Hah, 2005, p. 167).

Corresponding to the contemporary increasing engagement and retention issues highlighted above, it seems relevant to investigate how companies can better meet future knowledge workers needs to motivate and stimulate them. In addition, because firms in general seem to

be aware of the importance of work environment and employee well-being, and actively use this in their branding, it is interesting that disengagement (Gallup, 2021) and stress levels (Pfeffer, 2018) are still disturbingly high. Do perhaps organizations portray themselves as being concerned with people-centric work practices, but in reality, are not? In the current study, we will explore how future knowledge workers respond to organizations that portray themselves as people-centric when they do not live up to these values and ideals.

2.1 Research Questions

In accordance with the background reviewed above, we chose to explore the following research questions in this master thesis:

Research question 1:

What do future knowledge workers need and expect at the workplace when choosing and employer?

Research question 2:

What are the effects of people-centric employer branding, and what are the implications of not living up to such promises when attracting, engaging, and retaining future knowledge workers?

2.2 Structure of Paper

In this thesis, we will first begin with an in-dept literature review of research we view as relevant for the research questions. Next, we will present the choice of methodology for our research before presenting our study findings. Thereafter, we will bring these findings and results into a discussion on how researchers and managers can potentially leverage these insights. Lastly, we will discuss limitations and recommendations for future research and end the thesis in a conclusion, followed by the reference list and appendixes.

3. Literature Review

3.1 Future knowledge workers: Who are They and What do They Want?

Peter F. Drucker, also known as the father of modern management, was the first to formally credit the term “knowledge worker” in his 1959 book “Landmarks of Tomorrow”. Drucker (1999) states that the most important contribution to 20th century management was the fifty-fold increase in manual-labor manufacturing causing a shift from people manufacturing products to people manufacturing knowledge. Due to this labor market transformation, Drucker (2002) argues that the most important issue for the 21st century is a similar increase in productivity for knowledge workers. Hence, modern management must be able to answer the questions: Who are the knowledge workers of the future, and how do we make them more productive?

3.1.1 What is a Knowledge Worker?

When understanding how to increase productivity from a managerial perspective, there should be consensus on the general characterization of knowledge workers. Here, researchers have broadly defined knowledge workers as those with high degrees of expertise, education, or experience in the delivery of competence and knowledge (Drucker, 1999; Darr & Warhurst, 2008; Davenport, 2005). Some examples of knowledge worker professions include business consultants, accountants, lawyers, engineers, and teachers (Darr & Warhurst, 2008; Davenport, 2005).

Turriago-Hoyos, Thoene and Arjoon (2016), describes the attributes prudence, effectiveness, excellence, integrity, and truthfulness as knowledge workers’ main intellectual virtues. Furthermore, practical wisdom, responsibility, cooperation, and courage are moral attributes that knowledge workers tend to embody. Furthermore, it is argued that knowledge workers are generally concerned with the common good, both in a societal and organizational context. Here, it is argued that knowledge workers live by intellectual virtues, emphasized by their moral character for effectiveness and responsibility (Turriago-Hoyos, Thoene, & Arjoon, 2016). In short, this can mean that knowledge workers in general are interested in providing services for organizations and society through contribution of knowledge and integrity.

Knowledge workers are becoming increasingly important as mental competence is replacing physical effort, and industries require a high degree of specialized training and education (Darr & Warhurst, 2008). As knowledge workers and their productivity are becoming increasingly important, so does companies' ability to meet their needs and facilitate performance. Previously, the main motivational factor for facilitating human performance was motivation through paychecks, although Drucker advised that knowledge workers would require a different set of motivational factors, where autonomy was outlined to be one definitive success factor (Drucker, 1999).

The literature is limited and without any clear consensus with regards to what further motivates knowledge workers. Some studies however suggest that work environment, trust and knowledge sharing are of high importance for increasing knowledge workers' performance (Miikka, 2017; Shabnam, 2015; Wang & Noe, 2010). However, before going deeper on drivers and motivators, we will first give a foundational insight on who the future generation of knowledge workers are.

3.1.2 Who is the Next Generation of Knowledge workers?

As society evolved through human innovation and technology, more and better opportunities emerged with better living standards. Consequently, the future generation of knowledge workers have grown up in a rapidly evolving world defined by exponential technological change, shifting living conditions and new social demands and culture (Hicks, Riedy, & Waltz, 2018).

The "Millennial" generation are in 2021 between 26 and 41 years old, where the majority has entered the workplace. According to The U.S. Chamber of Commerce (Seppanen & Gualtieri, 2012), millennials tend to seek jobs that provide experience and opportunity for growth and will resign if the work-setting is unsatisfactory. They are generally more loyal to their personal lifestyle than outside influences, such as work, and are less willing to compromise their core values for a job (Hicks, Riedy, & Waltz, 2018).

"Generation Z" (Gen Z) are in 2021 between 9 and 25 years old, where a small amount of the older cohort has started to enter the workplace. Gen Z grew up with advanced information technology since early childhood, and primarily rely on the internet and videos to receive information versus textbooks and manuals (Pew Research Center, 2014; Shatto & Erwin, 2017). This generation is characterized as being connected, educated, sophisticated,

technological savvy and ready to create their own futures. As most Gen Z are growing up in a world filled with technological development and new opportunities, they have been described as “future entrepreneurs waiting to make an impact with their multitasking technological skills” (Hicks, Riedy, & Waltz, 2018). Due to demographic changes, organizations can expect a shortage of Gen Z talent in the future (Minahan, 2021).

In summary, future knowledge workers can be categorized as late millennials and early Gen Z that are currently pursuing a higher education and will work within the field of knowledge after graduating. Overall, previous research indicates that flexibility, learning, purpose at work and meeting needs for work and personal life is very important for these generations (Minahan, 2021). Future knowledge workers are expected to be inclined towards what serves them and their personal situation the best and seem to be less worried about employer loyalty (Turriago-Hoyos, Thoene, & Arjoon, 2016). As digital nomads and “future entrepreneurs”, in addition to the expected shortage of knowledge workers in the future, it can be argued that the companies who wish to excel down the line are those who are best able to meet this worker groups’ needs and are aware of which factors that best attract, engage, and retain them.

Since most of Gen Z is still young and have just started to enter the workforce, there is a shortage of published literature on the generation. Thus, researchers are mostly extending, comparing, or projecting viewpoints from the Millennial generation onto Gen Z (Hicks, Riedy, & Waltz, 2018). Because meeting the needs and motivating future knowledge workers is argued to be crucial for firms to stay competitive in the future, we will now present research on motivational factors at work.

3.2 Motivational Factors at Work – Monetary and People-centric

In his book from 1959 “The Motivation to Work”, psychologist Frederick Herzberg’s introduce his now acclaimed two-factor theory of motivation. Herzberg (1993) argued that there are two main ways companies can use to motivate their workers; hygiene factors and motivator factors. Hygiene factors are extrinsic to the work itself, such as salaries, fringe benefits, work conditions, job security and vacations. Hygiene factors do not give positive satisfaction or lead to higher motivation by itself, though dissatisfaction results from their absence (Herzberg, Mausner, & Snyderman, 1993). Motivator factors are on the other hand related to what an individual does at work and get intrinsic fulfilment from. Job satisfaction

and happiness arise when motivator factors are present (Herzberg, Mausner, & Snyderman, 1993). Some examples of motivator factors are challenging and meaningful work, recognition, responsibility, growth, and achievement.

Following Herzberg's motivator factors, Deci and Ryan introduced *self-determination theory* (SDT) in 1985. SDT has over the decades been thoroughly researched and addresses issues such as personal development, self-regulation, psychological needs, aspirations, nonconscious processes, and the impact of social environments on motivation, well-being, and behavior (Deci & Ryan, 2008). The SDT framework explains how *intrinsic* and *extrinsic* motivation can lead to very different outcomes. Intrinsic motivation can be defined as the desire to perform an action because of the nature of performing the action, or because the action itself feels satisfactory and rewarding (Deci & Ryan, 1989). In contrast, extrinsic motivation is defined as performing an activity to attain a positive, external outcome (incentives or rewards), or avoiding negative outcomes such as punishment (Deci & Ryan, 1989).

Intrinsic motivation tends to contribute more to psychological health and more effective performance, especially in heuristic activities (Deci & Ryan, 2008). Kuvaas, Buch, Weibel, Dysvik and Nerstad (2017) found that intrinsic motivation was positively correlated to work performance and affective organizational commitment and negatively correlated to continuance commitment, turnover intention, burnout, and work-family conflict. On the other hand, they found that extrinsic motivation did either have negative consequences or no effect for all the same factors (Kuvaas, Buch, Weibel, Dysvik, & Nerstad, 2017). This implies that intrinsic motivation is highly tied to knowledge work, employee performance, engagement, and commitment to the organization.

Contrary to the findings of Kuvaas et al. (2017) on extrinsic motivation, Sittenthaler & Mohnen (2020) found that monetary and fringe benefits had a statistically significant positive effect on performance. This means that incentives, and therefore external motivation had some effect on the participants' performance (Sittenthaler & Mohnen, 2020). Since there are different results in prior research, we note that incentives such as salaries can possibly have mixed motivational effects on performance, whereas the evidence for the benefits of intrinsic motivation appears to be more consistent.

While extrinsic motivation can be provoked by incentives or other direct means, intrinsic motivation must rather be facilitated for through the work environment (Deci & Ryan, 2000).

Findings within research of the SDT-framework suggest competence, autonomy and relatedness are factors yielding enhanced self-motivation and mental health (Ryan & Deci, 2000). In other words, facilitation of workers' intrinsic motivation might be achievable through a good work environment with trusting relations and opportunities for individuals' learning and growth.

To understand the drivers and motivations for future knowledge workers, and to know what Norwegian future knowledge workers might expect in a job, there was used a previous study as comparison. Nordhaug et al. (2010) found the top 5 most important factors for female, elite Norwegian business students when choosing an employer to be: 1) interesting work 2) Good social work environment 3) Opportunities to develop competence 4) Opportunity for personal development and 5) Good personnel policy. Extrinsic hygiene factors such as salary, performance pay and opportunity for fast promotion were rated significantly lower.

In summary, intrinsic motivation seems to have a substantial impact on individual performance, although extrinsic motivation should not be neglected either. Since the primary scope in this thesis is to investigate what motivates future knowledge workers, our focus will mainly be on intrinsic motivation in the form of people-centric work practices.

We have until now uncovered that work environment, trust and trusting relations, sharing of knowledge, as well as opportunities for learning and personal growth seems to be important for facilitating motivation and performance of future knowledge workers. These factors can be seen as highly people-centric, and knowledge firms have begun to see their importance. In accordance with our research questions, the following section will present a view on the employee lifecycle and how people-centric factors can contribute to attracting, engaging, and retaining future knowledge workers.

3.3 The Employee Lifecycle and The Value Proposition of People-centric Work Practices

An employee lifecycle is the cycle from when the employee first hears about a company, applies and gets hired, to its work and career progression until exiting the organization or retiring (Cattermole, 2019). Some researchers such as Cattermole (2019) propose that the employee lifecycle consists of the stages attraction, recruitment, onboarding, development (engagement), retention and separation. In this thesis we will stick to the broader categories

of attract, engage, and retain. In general, previous research shows that companies that have a clear employee lifecycle strategy are better equipped to deliver on its value proposition (Lundby, Lee, & Macey, 2012). Other studies emphasize the benefits of meeting employees' needs at all stages and emphasize people-centric work practices to best attract, engage and retain them (Anitha, 2014; Kahn, 1990; Lundby, Lee, & Macey, 2012).

3.3.1 Attracting Talent – Employer Branding and EVP

If lucrative talent does not know about your company, it's hard to attract them in the first place. In the attract phase of the employee lifecycle, companies must be able to reach out to their target talent and communicate a clear employee value proposition (EVP) that instills an interest for potential hires to apply for positions at the company (Cattermole, 2019). The attract phase is often related to "employer branding", and how companies sell and portray themselves as attractive employers to potential hires (Aubin & Carlsen, 2008).

Employer branding can be defined as the differentiation of a companies' attributes as an employer from those of its competitors, where the brand emphasizes unique aspects of an organization's employment environment or offerings (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004). In their study, Chhabra & Sharma (2012) found a significant positive correlation between a strong employer brand image and likelihood to apply to a firm. Moreover, Chhabra & Sharma (2012) argues that employer branding has emerged as a strategic tool to retain and attract talent, where a positive employer image will improve employer attractiveness.

For companies to successfully attract the right talent, there are several suggested steps that can be taken. First, a company should define a clear employer brand, and do its best to align its external (information portrayed to potential applicants) and internal (information portrayed to employees) brand (Aubin & Carlsen, 2008). Further, companies must be able to reach out to their target talent and communicate a clear employee value proposition (EVP) that aligns with the values and interest of said talent before starting to apply for a position at the company. Through a clear employer branding and EVP, companies seek to market and portray themselves as attractive employers to potential hires (Lundby, Lee, & Macey, 2012). In this phase, it is also important that the company has translated its business strategy into clear talent needs to know the exact skills and competencies they need. Here, it can also be beneficial to identify talent requirements for key roles and ensure that employees that are hired for these roles can deliver on their tasks (Aubin & Carlsen, 2008). In the research literature, the attract

phase generally emphasizes brand marketing and persuading the right talent to choose you as an employer. The question of whether a company lives up to the employer brand promises or not is usually not discussed in employer branding literature.

3.3.2 Employee Engagement

The next phase, engagement, consists of activities such as onboarding, learning and development, team implementation and manager follow-up (Anitha, 2014; Cattermole, 2019). For this to work well, researchers highlight the importance of people-centric work practices that can increase the level of employee engagement, which can further boost talent and organizational performance (Anitha, 2014) and positive word of mouth to new hires (Lundby, Lee, & Macey, 2012). Engagement is also highly connected with the retention step. If companies are not able to engage their talent, it will be hard to retain them (Saks, 2006).

The topic of employee engagement is getting increased traction in the business community. The research community is however torn on how the term engagement fits in the literature. Regardless of which term is used in the literature, researchers agree that understanding how workers thrive and perform in organizations is essential (Drucker, 1999; Kahn, 1990; Anitha, 2014; Hicks, Riedy, & Waltz, 2018). In this thesis the term employee engagement will be utilized as the main concept for describing the attributes of a worker that thrives in the job and is engaged in the organization. This section will present research on the term employee engagement, its link to performance and which factors that contribute to increased engagement.

What is employee engagement?

After a company has attracted the right talent, it is crucial to engage them. William Kahn, the academic parent of the employee engagement movement, established the concept of “personal engagement and disengagement” in the 1960’s. *Personal engagement* is the individuals’ involvement in work by expressing themselves physically, cognitively and emotionally through executing their work role, while *personal disengagement* is individuals being disconnected from roles at work by defensively withdrawing themselves physically, cognitively and emotionally from their work roles (Kahn, 1990). To explain the phenomenon further, Kahn proposed three conditions that together constitute personal engagement: psychological safety, psychological meaningfulness, and psychological availability (Kahn, 1990).

There is tied some confusion and disagreement to engagement in the research community due to its close relatedness to other research constructs such as job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and job involvement (Saks & Gruman, 2014). Furthermore, engagement is also seen as difficult to distinguish from job burnout, as engagement might be the opposite outcome of burnout (Maslach & Schaufelli, 2001). The JD-R-model or “job demand resource model” describes how job resources and job demand influences burnout and engagement through several processes (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007). Here, job resources contribute to intrinsic and extrinsic motivation through facilitating for meeting psychological needs and are necessary for achieving work-related goals (Bakker & Demerouti, 2008; Bakker, Albrecht, & Leiter, 2011). High job demands are related to exhausting employees and increased stress, potentially causing disengagement or burnout (Bakker & Demerouti, 2008). Regardless of definitions, however, there is broad agreement that intrinsic motivational factors such as engagement, has a large impact on modern organizations’ ability to retain and facilitate performance amongst employees.

The link between engagement and performance

The purpose and reasoning behind succeeding at the engagement stage has been well documented. As the body of engagement research continues to evolve, the positive link between job engagement and employee and organizational performance has been extensively documented (Anitha, 2014). Indeed, employee engagement is regarded as one of the key determinants of employee performance, meaning an employee's ability to achieve company goals and objectives (Macey, Schneider, Barbera, & Young, 2009; Moone & London, 2018).

Studies done by Christian, Garza and Slaughter (2011); Fleming, Coffman and Harter (2005); Rich, Lepine and Crawford (2010); Richman (2006); Macey and Schneider (2008); Leiter and Bakker (2010) find that the presence of high levels of employee engagement enhances job performance, task performance, and organizational citizenship behavior, productivity, discretionary effort, affective commitment, continuance commitment, levels of psychological climate, and customer service. Employee engagement seems to not only bring intrinsic value such as job satisfaction and improved mental health for employees, but it is also likely to improve critical performance measures in business.

Factors contributing to employee engagement

In our study, we wanted to test what factors are most important for future knowledge workers when choosing an employer. When developing our descriptive study, we thus found it important to investigate what factors lead to engagement and productivity.

May et al. (2004) found that the factors psychological meaningfulness, psychological safety, and psychological availability were shown to have a significant relationship to engagement. Meaningfulness could be positively influenced by right role fit and job enrichment; Safety was positively related to having supporting supervisor relations and rewarding co-worker relations, and was negatively related to self-consciousness and adherence to co-workers' norms; Psychological availability was positively related to having resources available, although negatively related to participating in outside activities (May, Gilson, & Harter, 2004).

A healthy and supportive work environment, as well as team and co-worker relationships were described by Anitha (2014) as some of the most important factors that determine employees' engagement level. Anitha's research supports Kahn (1990), who found that supportive and trusting interpersonal relationships, psychological safety and supportive teams promote employee engagement. Locke and Taylor (1991) also focused on the need for relatedness and argued that individuals who have positive interpersonal interactions with their co-workers tend to experience greater meaning in their work. Thus, if employees have a supporting work environment and good relationships with co-workers, the engagement levels are expected to be high. Overall, understanding these factors will help us in developing a foundation for our descriptive survey, as well as testing and validating past research findings on how to increase the performance of knowledge workers.

3.3.3 Retention

As a last step in the employee lifecycle, retention of employees is critical for companies to maintain competence, stability, and sustainable operations (De Winne, Marescaux, Sels, Van Beveren, & Vanormelingen, 2019). Retention can be described as a company's ability to preserve talent. As mentioned previously, retention is closely associated with engagement (Saks, 2006; Markos & Sridevi, 2010), where higher turnover can be a consequence of low engagement levels.

In general, it is expensive to rehire, train and integrate new talent into the workplace. Abbasi and Hollman (2000) calculated that the cost of turnover on average is estimated to be around

150% of a worker's annual salary, increasing with levels of education and seniority. In addition, because of the increasingly collaborative nature of jobs and knowledge work becoming more team-focused, it becomes more challenging to plug in new team members into already established teams (Garland, 2016).

Hale (1998) argued that only paying people is not the optimal way to keep and motivate talented employees. The most important reasons were cited to be better opportunities elsewhere and lack of opportunities for advancement and enrichment. According to Hale (1998), 86% of employers said they were having troubles with attracting new talent and 56% have trouble retaining workers once they are hired. Further, Hale argues that there are serious inconsistencies between what employers say is important for attracting and retaining the best talent and what they actually do about the problem (Hale, 1998).

The presence of higher levels of employee engagement might significantly reduce turnover intention (Saks, 2006; Maslach & Schaufelli, 2001). Saks et al. (2006) argues that employees are likely to leave unless the organization provide a sense of meaning. Furthermore, Hellman (1997) found a negative relationship between job satisfaction and intent to leave, implying that satisfied employees are less likely to quit their jobs.

Seeing how attraction, engagement, and retention are tied together, we deem it necessary to explore the effect on all employee lifecycle stages when conducting our experiment. If companies solely wish to attract talent, but neglect engaging them, there will probably be difficulties when trying to retain talent over longer periods.

3.4 Two Channels to Attract Knowledge Workers: Formal and Informal

When it comes to attracting talent, potential employees can generally receive information about a firm through two channels: *Formal* or *informal* communication. Formal communication can come through the employer brand and EVP a company presents through their talent marketing. Informal communication can come from hearing about a company and its reputation through word of mouth from acquaintances or friends (Van Hoyer & Lievens, 2009). As presented earlier, firms can leverage employer branding and a clear EVP to formally attract talent (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004). In the following section, we will present informal communication and the concept *word of mouth*.

As an informal way of exchanging information, *word of mouth* is defined as interpersonal and informal communication, independent of the organization's marketing activities, about an organization or its products (Bone, 1995; Buttle, 1998). According to Ahamad (2019), information through word of mouth is an effective tool that can impact employer attractiveness. Job seekers associate more authenticity and credibility to independent sources, such as word of mouth, as it reduces the chance of information manipulation that might occur when companies formally brand themselves (Ahamad, 2019). Furthermore, in comparison with other ways of communicating a brand identity, word of mouth is more credible, low-cost, and fast paced information that can be up to nine times as effective for generating a response (Ahamad, 2019). Overall, this can imply that word of mouth is a reliable information source for potential hires when deciding to apply or not apply to a firm.

The research on informal information suggest that one should be aware of the important influence of word of mouth. For companies, this implies having awareness of the communication between current employees and potential new hires. The question that begs to be asked is: What will happen if there is a mismatch between what applicants hear through word of mouth and what the firm formally communicates? The answer to this question will be one of the key issues to resolve in our study.

3.5 Implications of False Advertising and Signaling on Company Integrity

If a company has misaligned information between formal and informal communication, there could possibly be damaging consequences for the company integrity. This section presents how companies might find themselves in an unwanted situation if this misalignment is communicated. In this section, we will look at the consequences of hypocritical firm behavior.

Research by Pritchard (2014) illustrates what consequences conflicting perceptions between existing employees and new applicants towards an employer can have. Optimally, as can be seen in Figure 1, a company wish to be a "talent magnet", where both current employees and new hires have genuine strong perceptions of the company (Pritchard, 2014). If, however, the employees have a weak perception of the company while external applicants have a strong perception, the company will be according to Pritchard "falsely advertising" their real employee value proposition. Consequently, this may lead to negative word of mouth from

current employees to new applicants and create unfortunate ripple effects on the company's ability to attract, engage and retain key talent.

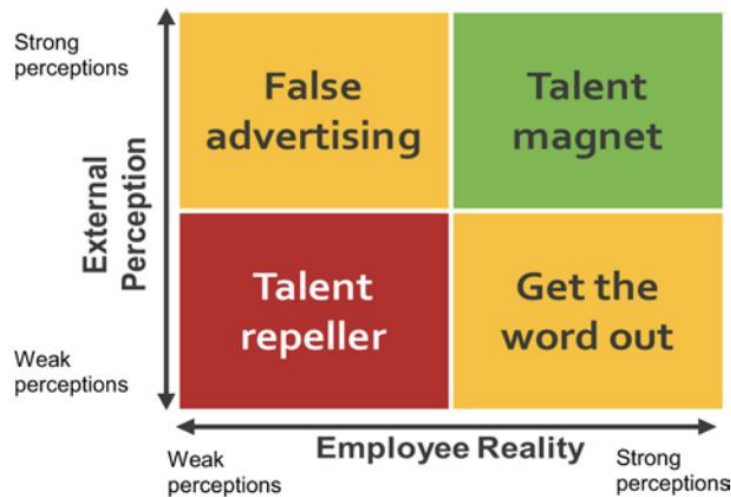


Figure 1 – Implications of false advertising on company integrity (Pritchard, 2014)

In a recent study, Jordan, Sommer, Bloom and Rand (2017) emphasize the effects of false signaling, in the meaning of condemning immoral behaviors while simultaneously engaging in such behavior. In their experiment, people judged hypocrites (those that engage in false signaling) more negatively than those who were doing the same thing without being hypocritical about it. In conclusion, the authors propose that hypocrites are disliked because their actions send a false signal about their personal conduct, deceptively suggesting that they behave morally (Jordan, Sommers, Bloom, & Rand, 2017). In addition, another study found that people react strongest on hypocrisy when there is a mismatch between attitudes and behavior, and when attitudes are publicly imposed on others to appear morally superior (Laurent & Clark, 2019).

As a short summary, people do not seem to like liars and hypocrites. The research presented shows that there ideally should be an alignment between what is said and what is done. Applied to our setting, this suggests that firms seeking to attract new talent should be careful not to brand themselves as something they cannot live up to, since people may react strongly to that type of “false signaling” or “false advertising”. We will therefore examine whether companies’ attractiveness may decline if there is conflicting evidence suggesting hypocritical behavior.

3.6 “Green-washing” Employer Branding

One side of the story is when a firm accidentally or unknowingly shares incorrect information. Another can be when firm’s actively tries to cover up or distribute misleading information. In recent years, appearing sustainable and climate friendly has become a trend for companies, which arguably has led to a lot of false advertising (Furlow, 2010). In this thesis, *green-washing* literature is used as grounds for seeing possible implications of falsely branding people-centric work practices.

“Green-washing” is the use of marketing or public relations practices that create misleading impressions of an organizations environmental conduct. Often characterized by exaggerated positive features while down-playing, or ignoring, any harmful activities on the environment that the organization may be engaging in (Elving, Westhoff, Meeusen, & Schoonderbeek, 2013). Using the green-washing concept with regards to branding people-centric activities is scarce in the literature, although there seems be some transferability, as shown by Takacs (2015).

In her master thesis, Takacs (2015) conducted a study on 20 company profiles and 555 anonymous employee reviews on Glassdoor. Takacs used the term *identity-washing* for explaining how companies “green-wash” their people-centric practices. The results from her thesis showed that organizations engaging in identity washing had lower employee satisfaction and attractiveness. She also found that alignment between employer promises, and employee reality was an important predictor of employee satisfaction and engagement. Therefore, the research concludes that “organizations should be careful when engaging in identity-washing, as it can negatively affect their employees’ satisfaction and retention” (Takacs, 2015). This insight shows how a mismatch between external promises and the internal reality can be consequential for future knowledge workers’ perception of modern organizations.

Cable et al. (2000) found that an organization used product and company information to encourage applicants to hold favorable, rather than accurate, beliefs about the organization’s culture. This practice can be damaging to an organization and may lead to higher turnover rates and lower work performance (Cable, Aiman-Smith, Mulvey, & Edwards, 2000). Evidently, one can argue that retention of employees is closely related to the integrity of a company’s employee branding. Other research shows that retention is crucial not only to keep

employees, but also because customers stay longer where employees stay longer (Einwiller & Will, 2002; Herman & Gioia, 2001).

Finally, the “war on talent” is also argued to be on the rise (Elving, Westhoff, Meeusen, & Schoonderbeek, 2013), where “in the future, the competition for the best employees will be as fierce as the competition for customers” (Berthon, Ewing, & Hah, 2005). Therefore, it seems to have never been riskier for companies to gamble on their integrity towards employees, if they wish to attract and retain the best talent and stay competitive in the long run. It can therefore be argued that companies must be careful with leveraging employer branding only as a marketing tool to attract talent, without living up to these standards in practice. If culture, systems, and processes are not in place to engage and retain talent sufficiently and live up to the employer branding, identity washing may weaken company reputation and create more harm than good for those who wish to succeed in the future (Elving, Westhoff, Meeusen, & Schoonderbeek, 2013).

Summarizing, the literature on green-washing and identity washing is one step further towards giving a fundamental understanding of what will happen to future knowledge workers’ perception of the company if there is a lack of integrity. The general takeaways are that future knowledge workers will likely feel less attracted to the job, be less engaged and stay employed for shorter periods if companies’ identity wash their practices.

The next subchapter shows how companies’ attraction to new employees might be harmed if existing employees are not engaged and retained. This is relevant to see how every aspect of the employee lifecycle is important when managing employees.

3.7 Failing at the Engagement and Retention Stages’ Might Affect the Earlier Attraction Stage

According to Turriago-Hoyos, Thoene and Arjoon (2016), knowledge workers are highly concerned with integrity, truthfulness, and ethics. Furthermore, May et al. (2004) found that psychological meaningfulness and safety have a significant relationship with engagement. Therefore, if companies are not able to meet the integrity standards of knowledge workers, it may negatively affect their sense of psychological meaningfulness and safety, and their engagement levels. Consequently, lack of engagement can lead to reduced ability to retain talent (Anitha, 2013), which might cause negative word of mouth from dissatisfied employees.

In turn, this could negatively affect a company's ability to attract talent (Ahamad, 2019). In summary, failing at the earlier engagement and retention stage, could arguably negatively affect a company's ability to attract critical knowledge talent in the future. Even though there is no specific scientific research proving this direct link, we find it to be a plausible argument based on the combination of research findings presented earlier in this chapter.

In this thesis, we wish to investigate how the needs and preferences of future Norwegian knowledge workers match with research done on people-centric work practices (such as engagement factors), and further affect their willingness to apply to companies. Next, because most of word of mouth research literature is based on the positive aspects of word of mouth, our study will investigate the possible consequences of "false advertising" on attracting, engaging, and retaining future knowledge workers.

3.8 Hypotheses

We will now turn to the hypotheses and research design in our own, empirical study. First, we will use a descriptive survey design to map the preferences and needs of future Norwegian knowledge workers in accordance with employee engagement factors presented in previous research. In the second part of our study, we will use an experimental survey design to test our hypotheses regarding possible consequences of *workplace promises* through formal and informal information channels. This experiment design consists of three groups where participants were randomly assigned to read different versions of a workplace scenario (fully available in the Appendix), before they reported their general impression of the firm in subsequent survey questions:

- *Group A: Control scenario*, is the control group that was presented with general information in a brief text vignette regarding a relevant firm.
 - *Group B: Workplace promise*, is presented with the same text as Group A, but with additional information stating that the leadership in the firm advertises a focus on people-centric work practices characterized by a workplace environment of trust, social support, and personal growth.
- Group C: Broken workplace promise*, is presented with the same text as Group B, but with additional information stating that despite the public image of the organization, a friend that has been working there says the reality is not as good as advertised.

We now turn to our specific research hypotheses for the survey experiment.

H1: Compared to participants in the control condition (A), participants in the ‘workplace promise’ condition (B) will report a significantly higher level of:

- a) Likelihood to apply for the job
- b) Predicted work engagement in the job
- c) Predicted job retention if taking the job (time perspective)

H2: Compared to participants in the ‘broken workplace promise’ condition ©, participants in the ‘workplace promise’ condition (B) will report a significantly higher level of:

- a) Likelihood to apply for the job
- b) Predicted work engagement in the job
- c) Predicted job retention if taking the job (time perspective)

H3: Compared to participants in the control condition (A), participants in the ‘broken workplace promise’ condition (C), will report a significantly lower level of:

- a) Likelihood to apply for the job
- b) Predicted work engagement in the job
- c) Predicted job retention if taking the job (time perspective)

4. Methodology

“Methodology is the theory of how research should be undertaken, including the theoretical and philosophical assumptions upon which research is based and the implications of these for the method or methods adopted”. (Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2019, p. 808)

This part of the thesis explains the choices made with regards to methodology, where we first present our research approach and study design. Thereafter we will present the research strategy, time horizon, context for the study, and data analysis. Finally, we conduct a quality analysis and discuss both practical as well as ethical aspects of the method of choice.

4.1 Research Design and Approach to Theory Development

When choosing a research approach, the main philosophical perspectives are either deductive, inductive, or a combination of the two, an abductive approach. A deductive approach involves the testing of a theoretical proposition by a research strategy specifically designed for the purpose of its testing (Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2019, p. 801). The literature surrounding our research topic supplies sufficient information as to what seems to be important for employees in the employment setting, and our goal is therefore to test whether the existing theories hold true in the setting of this study by utilizing the philosophical approach of deductive reasoning.

The research design can be explained as the framework for collecting and analyzing data for answering the research questions, where the sources, methods and techniques are justified and reasoned for (Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2019, p. 815). There are three main designs: *Exploratory*, *descriptive*, and *explanatory*. An exploratory design seeks to ask open-ended questions and navigate through asking “what” or “how” and explore a less developed research field. Descriptive designs are used for a more precise understanding of people, events, or phenomena through asking “who”, “what”, “where”, “when” or “how”. Often, descriptive studies are utilized as extensions of exploratory research. Explanatory designs are mainly seeking causal relations between variables through questioning “why” or “how” (Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2019).

Regarding the study's objective and research questions, we are seeking to describe and explain what is important to future knowledge workers, and how employer branding and company integrity will impact applicants. To research the questions and hypotheses, this study utilized a design with two parts: A *descriptive design* to map out what the respondents see as the most important factors when choosing an employer, and an *explanatory design* using a survey experiment investigate possible causal effects on the application preferences of future knowledge workers.

Finally, this thesis has a cross-sectional time-horizon, which is a momentary snapshot of the current state of the focal phenomenon of study (Johannessen, Christoffersen, & Tufte, 2020). This suits the goal of the study of understanding the current state of future Nordic knowledge workers' needs and preferences at the workplace.

4.2 Method

The main methods when conducting a research project are qualitative and quantitative, or a combination of these methods (Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2019). The method is based on the nature of the research and is key for the forthcoming methodological choices and evaluation of the results. This thesis utilizes quantitative research, for both the descriptive and explanatory design segments.

Quantitative research seemed like the most doable and logical method to achieve deeper insight on our research topic. The fixed premise of quantitative research also makes for a more reliable and replicable result. Knowing from literature what is viewed important when engaging employees, through quantitative research there is possible to somewhat compare our results to previous results. The quantitative method also suits data collection for the chosen hypothesis-testing deductive approach and the combination of descriptive and explanatory design.

When collecting data, we can utilize *primary data* or *secondary data*. Primary data is the data collected with intention to support the goals of the focal research project, while secondary data is already collected in accordance with other research projects (Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2019). There are a few earlier research papers with data that could support the subject of this thesis, but no specific data with the exact purpose and population intended for testing. We

therefore collected primary data to investigate our research questions. The thesis is, however, using secondary data for supplementation as found in the literature review section.

Surveys are commonly used as a strategy for primary data collection within quantitative research. For this master thesis, we have chosen to conduct a segmented survey of: Part 1; respondents ranking several factors on fixed rating scales and part 2; a survey experiment testing how participants respond to different information about a hypothetical employer. Therefore, there are two main segments of the survey, one descriptive part and one experimental part. According to Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill (2019) this design can be referred to as *multi-method research* since two different techniques for data collection are used.

For study part 1 the goal is to gather information about “what” future knowledge workers value the most from their future employers, and the internal relationship between these variables. This study will rank the answers from the respondents of which factors are viewed as most and least important for current students, and further analyzing the potential differences between monetary factors and people-centric factors.

Part 2 of the study seeks to investigate the effects of firms’ using promises of a good work environment to attract, engage and retain future knowledge workers. We used a survey experiment with different information about the work environment of a hypothetical employer to investigate possible causal effects on the participants willingness to apply for the job, their expected work engagement, and how long they predict to work in the organization. After the participants read through a short text about the firm, given one out of three randomly assigned scenarios, all participants answered the same survey questions on standardized answer-scales. In this way, we can investigate if a firm formally promising people-centric work practices has positive effects, and whether there are negative effects tied to hearing from informal sources that the real work environment does not live up to the formal firm promises.

In Part 2, the analysis mainly consists of a one-way ANOVA that measures variance between groups, combined with the post hoc test Tukey’s HSD (Honestly Significant Difference), for comparing group means to assess simple main effects. The statistical nature of this analysis is relatively simple, due to the experimental design features of *controlled variation* of the independent variable and *random assignment* to condition (Falk & Heckman, 2009), which is the basis for observing potential effects (or null effects) on the outcome variable(s) in this type

of research. Given a decent sample size to provide sufficient statistical power (Johannessen, Christoffersen, & Tufte, 2020), the results from this study will hopefully provide a better understanding of our central research questions and hypotheses.

4.3 Procedure for Data Collection

The process of collecting and ensuring good data quality is essential to secure research validity and reliability. Another aspect is the ethical considerations, whereas data collection poses the biggest threat for violating personal privacy and research practices. For this chapter of the thesis, we will review the procedure for data collection. The most important choices and considerations will be discussed and justified. The complete online survey used in this data collection is attached in the appendix.

4.3.1 Survey Design

Procedure and Material

Surveys are commonly used in descriptive and explanatory research. The data collected for analysis is mainly numerical through the usage of numbered rating scales, which allows for testing correlation and causality (Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2019). There are several ways of distributing surveys for data collection. This thesis relies on an online survey that the authors created through the online platform tool Qualtrics. Qualtrics offers a user-friendly interface and a structured way of creating surveys and allows the opportunity for anonymizing the participants. From the participants side, the Qualtrics survey is easy to access by clicking on an URL link, and a simple interface which is easy to understand.

Tourangeau, Rips & Rasinski (2000) highlights the importance of participants understanding the questions, recalling autobiographical events, as well as judge and respond to the information given through the questions. In this regard, Haraldsen (1999) provides a few fallacies to avoid when constructing a survey: 1) Avoiding too general or leading questions and make sure they can only be interpreted one way 2) Answer-alternatives must be exhaustive and mutually exclusive, and 3) The questionnaires must be self-instructive relevant and clearly formulated. The questions and answer-alternatives in the current study were formulated with these factors in mind.

By a survey with fixed format and consistent use of language, the room for interpretations from the respondents or participants are minimized which strengthens the internal validity of the research (Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2019). The language of this survey is set to both Norwegian and English due to the population of consisting Norwegian speaking students and some respondents of other nationalities. The Norwegian language used in the survey is controlled by the authors, the thesis' supervisor, and two peer master-students who were asked to revise the survey and its questions. For the English translation, the variables from the first part of the survey were already originally English and the remaining were revised by the two peer students.

For testing future knowledge workers and what their preferences are, we have chosen to recruit a participant sample mainly consisting of business students at Norwegian School of Economics (NHH). The study sought to gather data from students in Norway that would be part of tomorrow's business elite within knowledge work, in which students at NHH is one group of particular interest. We also wanted to recruit a broader student sample. After several attempts to reach out to some of the highest regarded education programs outside NHH, there were two other institutions who agreed to be a part of the survey: Students at the Norwegian Institute for Science and Technology (NTNU) within the field of *industrial economics and technology management*, and students from University of Bergen (UiB) within the field of *law*. Seen as a whole, this should provide a combined sample of current students who have a rather high probability of working in top knowledge professions in Norway in the near future.

Sampling of the populations was random within the limitation of who would respond to the survey through anonymized links sent to the students. The main sampling method was through sending emails. We got access to a list containing all students' emails at NHH under the condition of maintaining the rules and guidelines set by GDPR. We also posted the survey in a variety of NHH student organization groups. For collecting respondents from NTNU and UiB, we reached out to the student associations of the respective education programs who distributed the survey by email. Here, we wish to thank the union representative from *Industrial Economics and Technology Management* at NTNU and the leader of JSU (the legal students' student committee) at UiB. Without their contribution in distributing the survey, we would not be able to reach such a broad sample.

When completing both parts of the study, the end of the survey consisted of general information regarding the respondents, such as field of study, institution, gender, and age.

After which the respondents got the opportunity to enter a raffle of gift cards to the Norwegian pastry-store chain “Godt Brød”. By completing the survey, respondents were eligible to choose whether they wished to enter a raffle with opportunity to win 10 gift cards, each valued at NOK 100. By actively answering “yes” to participate in the raffle, the respondents were automatically redirected to a different web site where their address and name were required inputs for a chance to win. If answered “no”, the original survey was finished without redirection. This way of carrying out the raffle ensured no link between responses and personal information, keeping the survey data anonymous.

According to Abbey & Meloy (2017), adding an attention check can significantly improve construct and scale validations. We included an attention check at the end of the survey, where the participants were asked a very simple question on the likelihood of rain in their area the following day. To prove they had read the information, the participants were asked to report the value 0. We chose to exclude the minority of participants who answered incorrectly because this implies that they were inattentive and did not read the questions before answering.

Respondents

The survey was distributed in October 2021 and set for unique answers only through Qualtrics, meaning the respondents were only eligible to answer once. In total, the survey was distributed to a population of approximately 5800 students (NHH=3200, UiB=1900, NTNU=700), whereas 968 students clicked on the survey (response rate \approx 17%). After removing respondents who did not complete the survey (N=218) and those who failed the “attention check” (N=92, fail rate of 13.98%), we were left with a final sample of 658 valid responses from attentive participants (405 female, age $M=22.89^1$). The sample had a total of 591 Norwegian students and 67 students from other nationalities.

Of the valid responses, there were 311 (168 female) business students from NHH, 103 (48 female) students from *Industrial Economics and Technology Management* at NTNU, and 241 (188 female) students from UiB *law*. Because of big outliers in the data for time-use, average time spent was 66 minutes, while the median time use was 207 seconds. Thus, for the median participant, it took them about 4 minutes to complete the survey. In terms of study level, the

¹ One “valid” respondent reported age of 3099. We excluded this answer for age M (if included age $M = 27.58$).

sample consists of 136 bachelor students (NHH=100, NTNU=5, UiB=30) and 519 master students (NHH=209, NTNU=98, UiB=210).

4.3.2 Survey Part 1: Descriptive Overview

The data collection of the descriptive overview serves the purpose to gather information and answer “which factors are the most important to future knowledge workers’ when assessing employers”. The first five variables in the survey are the same as top five most important variables for NHH-students from the article by Nordhaug et al. (2010). The rest are chosen based on a combination of gathered research insights from literature, and our personal curiosity. The full questionnaire and information regarding the variables are attached in the appendix.

The Likert scale provides a numerical scoring of each factor allowing quantitative analyzes. The variables were put into a matrix-table where each variable was a statement by which respondents were asked to rate on importance, ranging from 1 “not important” to 5 “very important”. By structuring the first part in this way, we opened for the opportunity to mainly conduct analyses on the interval level by ranking each factor on importance, and to explore internal relationships between these variables.

This general survey measure was designed to gather information about which attributes of a workplace is the most attractive for future knowledge workers. The same question was used for answering all the 20 variables measured. The following question was asked:

“We will now ask you to rate what factors that are most important for you when choosing an employer to work for after you’re graduating.

Please rate each factor in the list below on a scale from 1 (not important) to 5 (very important). Answer as honest and realistic as you can regarding how important each factor is for you.”

Below this headline, the following set of 20 variables were listed below and rated on the same 5-point rating scale:

1. Interesting work	11. Clear expectations
2. Good social environment at work	12. Focus on mental health and wellbeing
3. Opportunity for personal growth	13. Good culture and values
4. Good personnel policy	14. Have a positive impact on the climate
5. Meaningful work	15. Have a positive societal impact
6. Regular feedback	16. Job satisfaction
7. Professional competence development (learning)	17. Work engagement
8. Autonomy	18. Good starting salary
9. Trust	19. Opportunity for high salaries later in the company
10. Opportunity for flexible workdays	20. Good long-term career opportunities

Table 1 - Descriptive variables for study part 1

4.3.3 Survey Part 2: A Controlled Experiment

Experiment design

An experiment is a method for conducting a study with intent to test hypotheses of cause and effect between variables (Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2019, p. 803). The experiment influences one or more of the researched units with a certain type of impact and seeks to measure the effect of this influence. The type of influence that affects a researched unit is the independent variable, and the effect is measured on a dependent variable (Johannessen, Christoffersen, & Tufte, 2020, pp. 401-402).

There are a few ways of designing an experiment and the goal of the design is to best assess the predictive hypotheses. The commonly used designs are classical experiments, quasi-experiments, and within-subject-designs, each with their advantages and disadvantages. This choice of design is important especially when keeping the relation to control variables and confounding variables in mind (Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2019, pp. 190-193). The experiment utilized in this thesis is of the controlled, classical between-subject design with independent measures. The key difference from a standard classical experiment is testing the impact of two manipulations of the independent variable instead of one, in three groups instead of two. This means the total number of participants needed to be higher than usual to ensure the same level of statistical power and maintain a low probability of type 1 error, due to an extra test group (Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2019, pp. 608-609).

The main design choices for a classical experiment are either a simple variant through post-testing the groups, or to also include a pretest of the groups before conducting the experiment (Johannessen, Christoffersen, & Tufte, 2020, pp. 402-406). For this thesis, the experiment was conducted through the simple variant of post-testing. The reason for this choice is because there were no initial questions the participants were allegeable to answer without first getting the basis information about the firm. Also, if pretesting was possible, it would require a larger time investment from the participants, which probably would impact the response rate and quality of the answers.

Experiment participants

The experiment is based on the same participants as the first part of the survey, with the main difference that each participant was randomly assigned to one of the three groups: *Group A*, *group B* and *group C*. Group A (control condition) had a sample size of $N_A=220$ (133 female), group B ('workplace promise') had $N_B=217$ (130 female), and group C ('broken workplace promise') had $N_C=221$ (142 female) participants. The distribution of participants between the groups from different fields of study, as well as current degree of education (bachelor or master) was also rather even, ensuring no viable reason to suspect differences in groups caused by educational backgrounds or other major factors. Through a relatively large sample size, random placing of participants to each group and having a control group, all with similar distribution, the study will have a stronger basis for relations between cause and effect (Johannessen, Christoffersen, & Tufte, 2020, pp. 402-406).

Experiment procedure – independent variables

Part 2 of the survey, consisting of the experiment, was presented to the participants after completing survey part 1. As stated, the participants were randomly assigned to one of the three groups, either group A, group B or group C. Each group had to read the same context with some systematic variation, before answering the same questions tied to the dependent variables.

Group A, the control condition, was the control group presented with the context of a relevant employer for future knowledge workers. The main goal was to present a general, large firm which typically employ several applicants and workers from the participating population. The participants in group A read the following scenario description:

“Imagine that you are considering applying for your first job after graduating. You are being presented for an acknowledged firm that operates within the field you are most interested in, that offers a starting salary on the average of your particular study profile. The firm is signaling that it's interested in hiring someone like you.”

Group B, the ‘workplace promise’ condition, included the additional variation that the employer management advertised a positive work environment characterized by people-centric work practices. The participants in group B were given the same context as the control group in addition to the following:

“The management communicates that they have a great work environment for new hires with focus on social support and trusting relations. The purpose is to give everyone in the organization the best opportunities for learning and personal development.

Group C, the ‘broken workplace promise’ condition, received the additional variation that the workplace did not practice what they advertised. This was achieved by including informal information from an acquaintance, through word of mouth, that the employer did not deliver on the human-centric workplace environment they had advertised in their external communication. All previous information was kept the same as in Group B, with the following addition:

“Despite this: Someone you know that has recently quit their job from a similar position in the same organization, tell you that the managements' promises are far from the truth that will meet you. In reality, the work environment is characterized by sharp elbows and lack of trust where new hires are more or less left to themselves.”

Experiment procedure – dependent variables

For the dependent variables that were measured right after reading the scenario text, the questions were formulated to assess a general evaluation of work attraction, work engagement, and retention. In other words, the variables are created for testing our predictive hypotheses. The dependent variables will be referred to as *likelihood to apply*, *predicted work engagement*, and *expected job retention*. All dependent variables were measured on a scale from 0 to 10.

Likelihood to apply

Likelihood to apply was intended to measure the perceived attractiveness of the firm. The participants answered on a scale from 0-10, where 0 was “very unlikely” and 10 was “very likely”, and the question was stated as follows:

“How likely do you think it is that you would apply for a long-term position at this firm?”

Predicted work engagement

Predicted work engagement was intended to measure how engaged the workers expected to be when working for the outlined firm. Originally there were two separate dependent variables called “expected job satisfaction” and “expected work engagement”. After considering the high consistency and internal correlation between these two items ($R^2 = 0.77$; Cronbach’s $\alpha = 0.87$), we collapsed these two items into one combined dependent variable. Specifically, the mean of all observations for both original variables was used to create the new variable called *predicted work engagement*².

As explained above, *predicted work engagement* was scored with the two variables *expected job satisfaction* and *expected work engagement*. First, expected job satisfaction was rated by the participants on a score from 0-10, where 0 was “very low satisfaction” and 10 was “very high satisfaction”, where the question was stated as follows:

*“If you were to get accepted for the position and accept the job:
How satisfied do you think you would be at work?”*

Second, for expected job engagement the participants also answered on a scale from 0-10, where 0 was “highly disengaged” and 10 was “highly engaged”. The question stated the following:

*“If you were to get accepted for the position and accept the job:
How engaged do you think you would be in your work position?”*

² More information on “job satisfaction” and “work engagement” are included in the appendix. The results of the hypothesis testing did not differ when analyzing the two items individually.

Expected job retention

Expected job retention was our third and final dependent variable and was intended to measure how long the participant would want to work for the firm. The answer is given on the 0-10 scale, where 0 is “less than 1 year” and 10 is “10 years or longer”. The question was stated as follows:

*“If you were to get accepted for the position and accept the job:
How long do you think you would like to work there?”*

4.4 Methods of Analysis

4.4.1 Preparations of Data Set

Prior to the analysis, the data was controlled and prepared. The first preparations, which are discussed in this subchapter, were made in Microsoft Excel. The main preparations were recoding values, removing invalid responses, and creating summary variables to prepare the data for the statistical analysis.

Next, we recoded values for the attention check and the independent variables in the experiment. All these variables were scored on a scale from 0-10. The attention check was recoded binary to display correct answer as “1” and incorrect as “0”, enabling failed attention checks to be disregarded in the results. Because the dependent variables from the experiment were coded as 1-11 in the Qualtrics software, these were recoded to display the values 0-10 instead.

The second task was removing invalid responses. Qualtrics tracks unfinished responses and in combination with the attention check, this made it easy to remove most of the invalid responses. A new variable “UsableResponse” was created with the requirements of 100% survey completion and a passed attention check. *UsableResponse* was coded binary with “1” as usable, and “0” as invalid.

4.4.2 Preparing the Data for Descriptive Analysis

The descriptive analytics we would like to look at was the data from survey part 1, and general statistics from the survey (respondents’ age, field of study, completion rate, etc.). The easiest solution was to use a pivot-table in Microsoft Excel, which allowed for deeper insight into main statistics of the survey responses. For the descriptive analysis of part 1, a pivot table made it easy and efficient to rank the variables by the value of means and calculate standard deviations. The general statistics were easy to access through a pivot-table by filtering out irrelevant information and drilling through different layers of information.

4.4.3 Statistical Testing

The statistical testing in this thesis were conducted through the statistical software “R”. R provides a complex tool for code-based statistical analysis, with reproducible scripts and a high degree of freedom in customizing tests. For the descriptive data from part 1, we conducted

two tailed t-tests to compare variables associated with salaries to people-centric factors. For analyzing the data tied to the experiment, R was used for descriptive measures (mean, std. dev., and standard error), variance testing with ANOVA and post hoc tests of simple main effects with Tukey's HSD, effect size with Cohen's D, Cronbach's α and reliability testing.

4.5 Research Quality

4.5.1 Reliability

Reliability relates to the consistency of the measure (Heale & Twycross, 2015; Cicchetti, 1994). Heale and Twycross (2015) refers to the three attributes of reliability: *Homogeneity*, *stability*, and *equivalence*, which will be discussed below.

Homogeneity, or internal consistency, is to what degree items in the test measure the same constructs (Heale & Twycross, 2015). For this purpose, the coefficient *Cronbach's alpha* was measured in "R" for testing the internal consistency. When measuring Cronbach's alpha, values above 0.7 are considered fair, values between 0.8-0.89 is good, and values at 0.9 or above are considered excellent (Cicchetti, 1994). For descriptive overview in study part 1, the 20 variables were measured to a Cronbach's alpha of 0.815, which is considered a good internal consistency. For the data in the experiment (study part 2), the value of Cronbach's alpha was 0.815, meaning the internal consistency can be considered as good. In total, the internal consistency of the survey is considered as good (Cicchetti, 1994).

Stability is another attribute of reliability, which can be tested by test-retest and parallel or alternate form reliability testing (Heale & Twycross, 2015). The same participants and respondents were not available for retesting. For part 1 of the survey, due to the large number of factors being assessed it was decided to not implement parallel form testing. The reasoning was that adding questions to the survey would increase the duration of the survey and might have harmed the response rate and quality of responses. As seen in the results from the attention check from our survey, some participants already had trouble paying attention.

The final, important aspect of reliability concerns *equivalence*. This is assessed through inter-rater reliability and regards the agreement between two or more observers (Heale & Twycross, 2015). The main measure utilized for this aspect is standard deviation and standard error. This

gives insight into how consistent the respondents and participants scored the given variables. The equivalence is mostly high between the participants in this study.

4.5.2 Validity

The concept of validity was introduced in 1955 by Cronbach and Meehl but have throughout the years been developed from solely focusing on test score interpretations, into also validating the property of the tests themselves (Borsboom, Mellenbergh, & van Heerden, 2004). This implies discussing the realness (ontology) of the results presented in the study.

Validity of descriptives and correlation

For part 1 of the study, when ranking variables, we assess the construct validity to be high due to the several alternatives related to people-centric workplaces. There is no single extreme outlier in the data collected to imply the results being one time coincidence. For the content of the survey, the broad range of factors tries to assess most of the central aspects of the topic. Also, when it comes to the criterion of other studies in similar concept, the findings seem to support some of the main insights from the article from Nordhaug et al. (2010).

Validity of cause-and-effect relationships

Part 2, which examine possible cause-and-effect relationships, will on the other hand need a discussion of internal validity and external validity. Internal validity is the reassurance that the cause-and-effect relationship is not caused by other factors than the explicit manipulation given. External validity is to what extent the results from the experiment can be applied to reality and generalized (Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2019).

Internal validity of causality has three main criteria: The independent and dependent variables must change together, the treatment on independent variable must precede the change in the dependent variable, and no other external or internal factors can explain the results in the study. The two first criteria are given by the design and results, and for the last factor we have not been able to identify any alternative explanation for the observed effect.

External validity could potentially be more difficult to ensure. The study avoids influencing the participants before they conduct the experiment because of the decision of not pre-testing, but there are two other potential threats: Sampling bias and the Hawthorne effect.

Sampling bias is the risk that the sample differ substantially from the population. In this case, we already know the population of females from “law” at UiB is significantly different from the sample collected for this study. There is also the risk that because the survey was distributed to everyone in the respective fields of study, the ones answering are significantly different from those who chose not to answer.

The Hawthorne effect might also have an impact on answers. This effect is about participants changing their behavior because they are aware of being studied (Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2019). Hopefully there is no incentive for the participants to modify their answers in the current research, as we assured that the survey was anonymous. Also, participants were never directly watched over as this was an online survey. The third thing that speaks against participants being impacted by the Hawthorne effect is that we, the authors, are students – and at the same level as the participants. This might increase the honesty of the answers.

5. Findings and Results

This chapter of the thesis will present the results from the empirical analysis in this study. The findings are divided into a broad insight of; 1) an overview and comparison of what future knowledge workers view as important factors in their future workplace, and 2) the controlled experiment testing for causal-effect relations as outlined in hypotheses H1, H2 and H3.

5.1 Results and analysis for Study part 1: Workplace Preferences

The objective of testing preferences for the workplace was to gain insight into what future knowledge workers view as most important when considering their first employer post-graduation. Secondly, after reviewing the results, it was clear that people-centric factors were among the most important for the students. To make this ranking more informative, we also tested to what extent people-centric factors were rated significantly higher than the purely economic factors of starting- and longer-term salary.

5.1.1 Ranking of Preferences

The ranking of the variables was based on average scores of importance, ranging from 1 “not important” to 5 “very important”.

The top five factors in the current study were *job satisfaction* ($M=4.479$), *interesting work* ($M=4.430$), *good social environment at work* ($M=4.427$), *trust* ($M=4.211$), and *opportunities for personal growth* ($M=4.199$). Furthermore, *work engagement* ($M=4.132$) was ranked as number seven. The factor *good long-term career opportunities* ($M=4.147$) ranked at sixth place as the highest career related factor. Another particularly interesting aspect to note is how high people-centric factors were rated compared to starting salaries ($M=3.494$), long-term salaries ($M=3.427$) as well as social/environmental impact ($M=3.538$ & $M=3.252$). *Autonomy* ($M=3.485$), *regular feedback* ($M=3.429$) and *opportunities for flexible workdays* ($M=3.365$) were ranked the lowest of factors associated with people-centric practices. The complete picture of the variables ranked from highest to lowest (with 1 as lowest and 5 as highest possible score) are portrayed in the table below.

RANK	VARIABLE	MEAN	STD.
1	Job satisfaction	4,479	0,667
2	Interesting work	4,430	0,591
3	Good social environment at work	4,427	0,656
4	Trust	4,211	0,736
5	Opportunity for personal growth	4,199	0,757
6	Good long-term career opportunities	4,147	0,839
7	Work engagement	4,132	0,715
8	Good culture and values	4,111	0,868
9	Professional competence development (learning)	4,033	0,820
10	Meaningful work	3,922	0,892
11	Good personnel policy	3,842	0,838
12	Clear expectations	3,781	0,773
13	Focus on mental health and well-being	3,661	0,980
14	Have a positive societal impact	3,538	1,019
15	Good starting salary	3,494	0,910
16	Autonomy	3,485	0,848
17	Regular feedback	3,429	0,854
18	Opportunity for high salaries later in the company	3,427	1,129
19	Opportunity for flexible workdays	3,365	0,993
20	Have a positive impact on the climate	3,252	1,127

Table 2 - Ranking of preferred workplace characteristics.

5.1.2 People-centric vs. Monetary Factors

Due to the students' low rating of the variables regarding salaries, one question is how high importance people-centric factors have in this sample. For comparing this, the variables "good starting salaries" and "opportunity for high salaries later in the company" was combined through the average value and tested via t-tests.

The t-tests provides an answer as to what extent people-centric factors were rated higher than the combined variable *salaries* (M= 3.46; SD= 0.9). The overview of t-tests between the

combined salaries variable and all other factors is presented in Table 3. The table is ranked in the same order as viewed in Table 2.

Rank	Variables	M-diff	t-value	p-value
1	Job satisfaction	1,018	23.278	P<.001
2	Interesting work	0,970	23.061	P<.001
3	Good social environment at work	0,967	22.221	P<.001
4	Trust	0,751	16.541	P<.001
5	Opportunity for personal growth	0,739	16.082	P<.001
6	Good long term career opportunities	0,687	14.299	P<.001
7	Work engagement	0,672	14.97	P<.001
8	Good culture and values	0,650	13.327	P<.001
9	Professional competence development (learning)	0,573	12.057	P<.001
10	Meaningful work	0,462	9.3389	P<.001
11	Good personnel policy	0,381	7.9451	P<.001
12	Clear expectations	0,321	6.9232	P<.001
13	Focus on mental health and well-being	0,201	3.8621	P<.001
14	Have a positive societal impact	0,078	1.4611	0.1442
16	Autonomy	0,024	0.50374	0.6145
17	Regular feedback	-0,032	-0.65894	0.5101
19	Opportunity for flexible workdays	-0,096	-1.8299	0.06749
20	Have a positive impact on the climate	-0,208	-3.6998	P<.001

Table 3 - Overview of t-tests between all variables and the combination variable of salaries

Rank 1-13 all have significant larger average values on the scoring compared to *salaries*. Rank 14-19 cannot be disregarded as equal to *salaries*, in other words not significantly different in true mean. These can be viewed as close to equally important as *salaries* when choosing an employer. *Have a positive impact on the climate* is rated as significantly less important than *salaries* by the sample. Rank 15 and 18 are missing from the table because they are tied to *salaries*, which is tested against all other variables. This means that most people-centric factors were rated as more important than salaries. Although salaries cannot be considered completely unimportant, the results imply that people-centric factors were relatively more important than salaries.

5.2 Results and Analysis of Study Part 2: Controlled Experiment

Prior to presenting the results and analysis from the controlled experiment we will recap the hypotheses being tested.

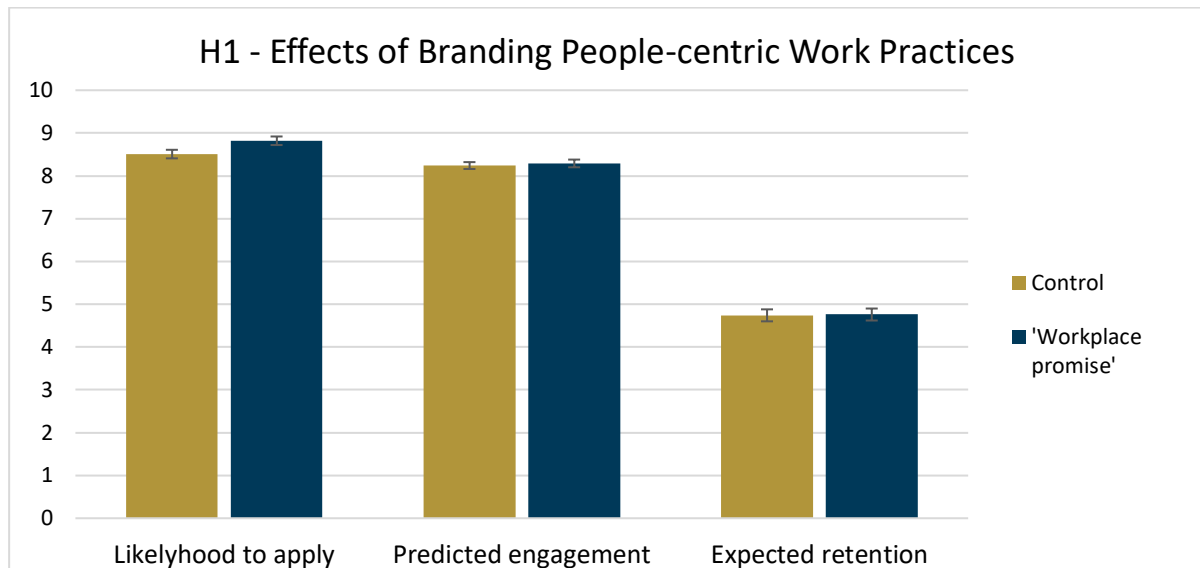
- Hypothesis H1 tested whether the control condition (A) was significantly lower than the ‘workplace promise’ condition (B). Hence, H1 is asking whether branding people-centric factors has a positive effect on students’ predicted attraction, engagement, and retention when considering an employer.
- Hypothesis H2 tested if condition B ‘workplace promise’ had significantly higher results than condition C ‘broken workplace promise’. Hence, H2 tests whether there is a significant negative effect of firms not living up to its word regarding people-centric work practices.
- Hypothesis H3 was expecting higher results in the control condition A compared to condition C with ‘broken workplace promise’. Hence, H3 tested the predicted negative difference between a firm not living up to their promises regarding people-centric factors versus a firm presented with a general relevance for the applicant without any workplace promises at all.

All hypotheses had the dependent variables *likelihood to apply for the job* (attraction), *predicted work engagement* (engagement) and *expected retention* (retention). The variables were scored through a Likert scale from 0 (lowest) to 10 (highest). The observations from the dependent variables were segmented to groups and tested through one way, between groups ANOVA, then Tukey’s HSD for a between group comparison of means. For all hypotheses, the descriptive bar charts with standard error provide a clear image of the respective results. See the appendix (chapter 9.3) for full view on measures from the ANOVA and Tukey’s HSD.

5.2.1 Hypothesis H1: Effects of Branding People-centric Practices

In contrast with hypothesis 1, we did not find that promising a good work environment made a positive difference as compared to the control condition. Specifically, participants in the ‘workplace promise’ condition (B) did not report a higher likelihood to apply ($M = 8.51$, $SD = 1.49$ vs. $M = 8.82$, $SD = 1.43$), higher predicted job engagement ($M = 8.24$, $SD = 1.2$ vs. $M = 8.29$, $SD = 1.33$), or a longer time horizon in the company ($M = 4.74$, $SD = 2.08$ vs. $M =$

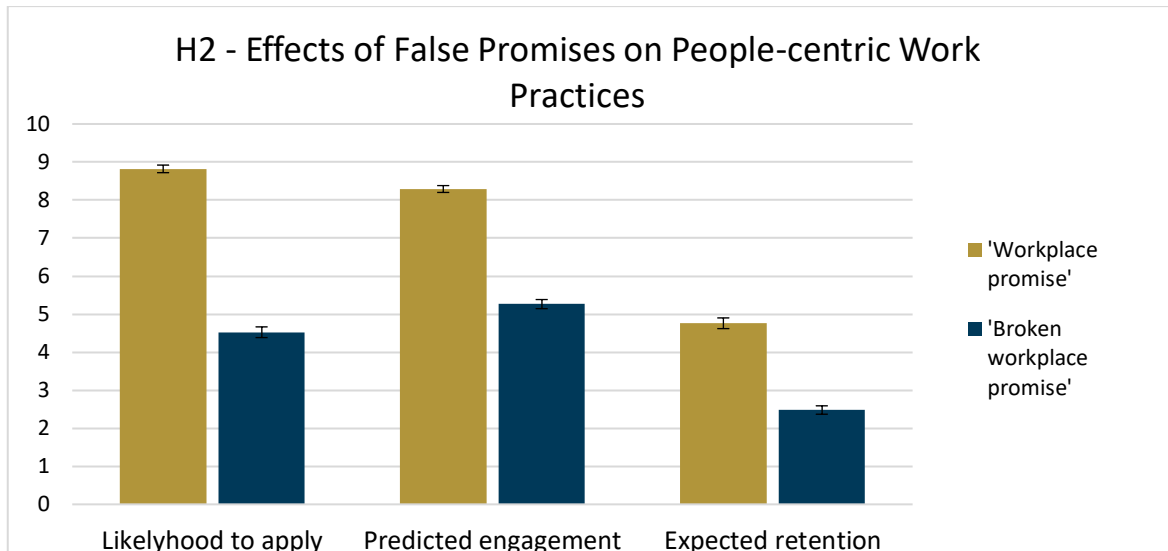
4.76, SD = 2.13) than participants in the control condition (A). None of the minor group differences here were statistically significant ($p = 0.139$, $p = 0.93$, $p = 0.994$).



Bar chart 1 - The workplace promise condition (vs. control) had no significant effect on the three dependent variables

5.2.2 Hypothesis H2: Effects of False Promises on People-centric Work Practices

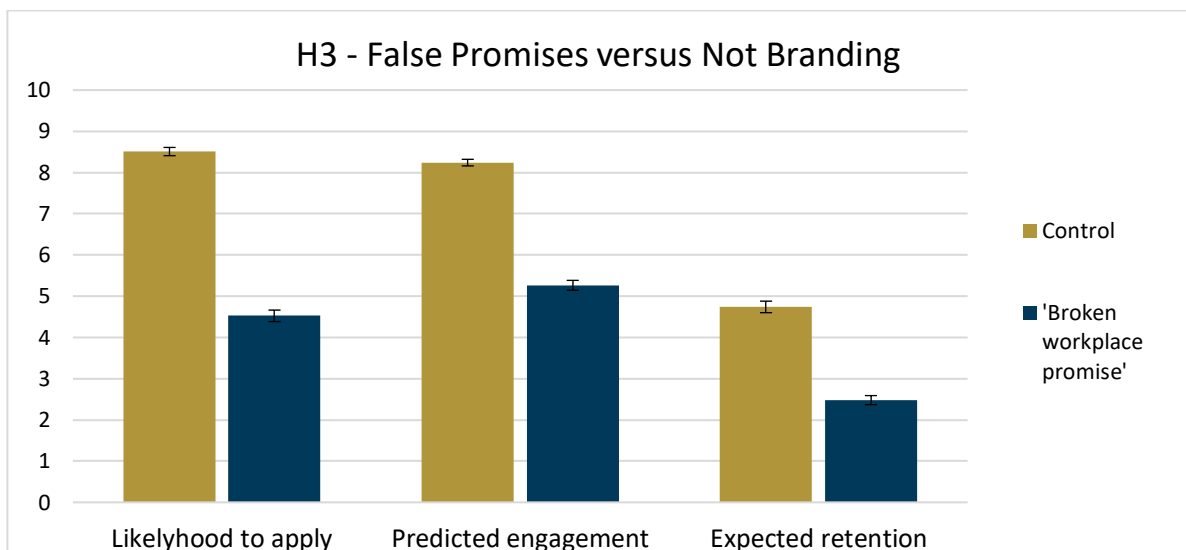
In line with hypothesis 2, participants in the 'broken workplace promise' condition (C) were much less likely to apply ($M = 4.52$, $SD = 2.12$ vs. $M = 8.82$, $SD = 1.43$), predicted lower job engagement ($M = 5.26$, $SD = 1.72$ vs. $M = 8.29$, $SD = 1.33$), and also thought they would stay shorter in the company ($M = 2.48$, $SD = 1.61$ vs. $M = 4.76$, $SD = 2.13$) than participants in the workplace promise condition (B). These differences were all statistically significant ($p < .001$, $p < .001$, $p < .001$), and the effect sizes were large ($d = 2.37$, $d = 1.97$, $d = 1.21$).



Bar chart 2 – The broken workplace promise condition (vs. workplace promises) had a significant negative effect on the three dependent variables

5.2.3 Hypothesis H3: False Promises versus Not Branding

In line with hypothesis 3, participants in the 'broken workplace promise' condition (C) were also much less likely to apply ($M = 4.52$, $SD = 2.12$ vs. $M = 8.51$, $SD = 1.49$), predicted lower job engagement ($M = 5.26$, $SD = 1.72$ vs. $M = 8.24$, $SD = 1.20$), and thought they would stay shorter in the company ($M = 2.48$, $SD = 1.61$ vs. $M = 4.74$, $SD = 2.08$) than participants in the control condition (A). These differences were all statistically significant ($p < .001$, $p < .001$, $p < .001$), and the effect sizes were large ($d = 2.17$, $d = 2.01$, $d = 1.22$).



Bar chart 3 – The broken workplace promise condition (vs. control) had a significant negative effect on the three dependent variables

6. Discussion

6.1 Short Summary of Main Findings: The Big Picture

In the first part of the study, we found that the respondents put significant emphasize on people-centric work factors when choosing an employer, where almost all top thirteen factors where people-centric. We also found that most people-centric factors were significantly more important than salaries and having a positive societal or environmental impact.

We found that the participants reported the same attraction, engagement, and retention levels regardless of the firm portraying itself as people-centric or not, given the condition that it was a relevant firm with average salaries. We found evidence supporting hypothesis 2, as there was a significant difference between the participants in the ‘workplace promise’ condition and the participants in the ‘broken workplace promise’ condition. This implies that if a company brands itself as people-centric but, are not living up to these promises, participants expect to feel less inclined to apply, feel less engaged and quit earlier. Evidence supporting hypothesis 3 was also found, as there was a significant difference between the participants in the control condition and the participants in the ‘broken workplace’ condition. This implies that not saying anything about people-centric factors in your branding is perceived significantly better than falsely advertising people-centric promises.

We will now continue with discussing these implications further in depth for each part.

6.2 Study part 1. Important Work-Related Factors for Future Knowledge Workers

6.2.1 Our Ranking vs. Nordhaug et al. 2010

Nordhaug et al. (2010) provided an overview over most important work-related factors amongst elite Norwegian female NHH business students. Table 4 shows the comparison between their top 5 ranked factors and the results from part 1 of this study:

RANK	NORDHAUG ET AL. (2010) TOP 5 VARIABLES	THIS STUDY'S TOP 5 VARIABLES
1	Interesting work	Job satisfaction
2	Good social environment at work	Interesting work
3	Opportunities to develop competence	Good social environment at work
4	Opportunities for personal development	Trust
5	Good personnel policy	Opportunity for personal growth

Table 4 - Top 5 Ranking variables: Nordhaug et al. (2010) vs this study

Comparing our results to Nordhaug et al. (2010), we can analyze differences in students' preferences from 2010 to 2021. There seems to be no major anomalies when comparing the data, as both results from this thesis and 2010 show a student mass who view people-centric factors as highly important in their choice of employer.

The factors *interesting work* and a *good social environment* was ranked especially high in both cases. These factors are connected to personal preferences, meaning our findings support the research on future knowledge workers' high standing for their own personal values (Hicks, Riedy, & Waltz, 2018; Turriago-Hoyos, Thoene, & Arjoon, 2016; Minahan, 2021). *Opportunity for personal development/growth* was also ranked similarly high in both studies, further amplifying that future knowledge workers are concerned with having the opportunity to learn and grow in their work.

In general, people-centric factors are still ranked important, ten years later. Due to the importance that people-centric practices have had over time; it makes sense that knowledge firms use people-centric practices as a selling point in their job announcements. Also, it is arguably very important that firms deliver on people-centric workplace factors to sufficiently engage and motivate their knowledge workers in the future.

6.2.2 General Takeaways on the Students' Workplace Preferences

The first important takeaway from the results in part 1 is just how important people-centric factors were ranked. The second interesting discovery is how much higher people-centric factors were ranked relative to salaries. Thirdly, it was peculiar to discover the low ranking of both societal and climate impact (see Table 3). The following discussion of workplace preferences will be structured around these three findings.

Importance of people-centric factors

Looking at our study, we find that four out of the top five factors are directly correlated to engagement (Anitha, 2014; Kahn, 1990; May, Gilson, & Harter, 2004). However, engagement itself was ranked as seventh most important. This can imply that there might be some misconceptions among the respondents on the term engagement, although the results clearly suggest that the next generation of knowledge workers are interested in a workplace that stimulate engagement. Furthermore, *opportunity for personal growth* was ranked as number four, which is in support of Hicks et al.'s (2018) statement; that younger generations prioritize their personal and professional learning and development more so than being loyal to an employer. Hence, it seems to be important that firms facilitate for the individuals' personal development to attract, engage, and retain them.

Interesting work, ranked as second most important by the respondents, shows that future knowledge workers are interested in aligning work with their personal interests. This supports both the assumption that younger generations want to cover their personal needs (Hicks, Riedy, & Waltz, 2018), and means that they are interested in being motivated in the long term through intrinsic rewards (Deci & Ryan, 2000).

There are, however, some anomalies from what was expected preferences with regards to the results in this study. Although the research on motivational factors for knowledge workers is limited, Drucker (1999) outlined *autonomy* as a major success factor for productivity. Taking into consideration the general attributes of knowledge workers, the two factors *autonomy* and *flexible workdays* were expected to be ranked higher. Minahan (2021) states that the world of business needs to increase work flexibility to attract and engage the best and brightest talent. As shown in the results, this sample of elite students does however not view autonomy and flexible workdays as that essential, compared to other factors.

As stated in the literature, meeting knowledge workers needs for a people-centric workplace can lead to enhanced organizational performance on several performance dimensions, such as higher profitability, lower turnover, lower absenteeism, and better customer loyalty (Harter, 2020). It seems that future knowledge workers expect their employer to invest in and focus on people-centric work practices. If not, companies will likely struggle to attract, engage, and retain crucial talent and further hurt overall business performance. Being aware of such expectations from young professionals might therefore be a critical success factor for companies.

Why was salaries not ranked higher?

Another interesting finding from our study was that *salaries*³ were significantly less important than almost all the people-centric factors tested. Consequently, one can argue that salaries are not the most important factor when choosing an employer, but more so a basic condition that must be met to prevent dissatisfaction at work (Herzberg, Mausner, & Snyderman, 1993; Gallup, 2021), and keep the employer relevant in the job market. Hence, companies should be aware that offering a competitive salary is most likely needed to attain qualified talent, but that it might prove challenging to leverage salaries as an engagement tool by itself.

Another aspect regarding our findings on salary preferences, is that our sample size is mainly future elite knowledge workers in Norway who can expect relatively high salaries after graduating. According to Statistics Norway (2021), the average salary for highly educated knowledge workers, such as those we have studied, is around 70 000 NOK/month on average. The general average salary for the Norwegian population, however, lies around 48 000 NOK/month (SSB, 2021). According to Kahneman and Deaton (2010), the marginal utility of money on life evaluation and emotional well-being is proven to decline after approximately 58 000 NOK/Month. This means that the average expected salaries of the sample are well above the threshold for when money is expected to marginally decline in contributing to life-quality and well-being. Thus, their high expected salary level should be taken into consideration when analyzing how this group of educated students have ranked workplace preferences.

In accordance with our study group, that is expected to earn on average well above the threshold discovered by Kahneman and Deaton, this aspect can potentially say something about how the students chose to rank the factors in part 1 of our study. If future knowledge workers know that they can expect high salaries after graduating, this might be less of a concern for them. This could further make them more prone to, and have the “luxury” of, prioritizing people-centric factors above salaries.

Does future knowledge workers not care about society and climate?

Furthermore, and interestingly so, the *environmental* and *societal impact* factors in our descriptive analysis ranks quite low compared to most other factors. Even though many young

³ The consisting of the variables “good starting salary” and “opportunity for high salaries later in the company”.

people today are highly engaged in environmental and social initiatives, and that sustainable business practices are undoubtedly important for them, they do not seem to be as important as people-centric factors when choosing an employer.

A possible explanation could be that because of the generally large focus on reaching sustainability goals from media and government, the students could already be expecting societal and climate impact to be high on firms' agendas. On the other hand, knowledge workers are in general considered to be concerned with the common good, both for society in general and in organizational context (Turriago-Hoyos, Thoene, & Arjoon, 2016).

Even though next generations seem to be highly concerned with climate issues and participate in initiatives, it seems that people-centric factors are more important when choosing an employer. It is however difficult to say anything about whether the participants care less about the environment in general, and there should probably be conducted more in dept research on the attractiveness towards sustainable companies.

6.3 Study part 2 – The Impact of False Promises on People-centric Work Practices

6.3.1 H1 – Control Condition vs. Workplace Promise

In Hypothesis 1, the 'workplace promise' condition (group B) was hypothesized to report higher expected levels of attraction, engagement, and retention than the control condition (group A). In our study, we found no statistically significant effect between whether a firm portrayed themselves as embodying people-centric attributes, or not.

According to past research findings, it was expected that H1 would be accepted (Drucker, 1999; Minahan, 2021; Turriago-Hoyos et al, 2016). With this condition, one could assume a significant improvement in attraction, engagement and retention levels of applicants given additional information about people-centricity. Contradictory to what should have been found according to Chhabra & Sharma (2012), our study finds no significant difference when adding a people-centric dimension to the EVP.

As presented in our findings from part 1, people-centric factors seem to be essential for knowledge workers. However, there seems to be little effect whether a firm emphasize these factors in their branding or not. Because people-centric factors are rated so important for future

knowledge workers, it could seem that they simply expect this to be in place at their workplace. Due to the strong inclination knowledge workers have towards people-centric work practices (Nordhaug et al, 2010; Hicks 2018), promoting such practices should in theory have a positive effect. However, in our study, we found no significant effect between people-centric branding and expected attraction, engagement, and retention levels.

Another argument for this finding could be the fact that adequate salaries in fact are enough for future knowledge workers. This would imply that whether a company portrays themselves as people-centric or not, has little effect on the expected attraction, engagement, and retention levels of future knowledge workers, as such factors are after all not important for them. This argument does in turn contradict our findings in part 1.

6.3.2 H2 – Broken Workplace Promise vs. Workplace Promise

In Hypothesis 2, condition B ‘workplace promise’ was hypothesized to imply higher expected levels of attraction, engagement, and retention than condition C ‘broken workplace promise’. In our study, we found a statistically significant effect on all three depended variables on whether a firm portrayed themselves as focusing on people-centric attributes, or falsely advertised such practices. Therefore, a significant negative impact of not living up to your promises was discovered.

Falsely advertising EVP can negatively affect attraction

Our findings support Pritchard’s (2014) research in that not living up to the employee value proposition (EVP) can have big negative consequences on a company’s ability to attract talent. Therefore, if current employees in a firm have a different perception of the company EVP than external applicants, this can in turn lead to negative word of mouth and unfortunate ripple effects, as our study further illustrates. The importance of informal communication and especially negative word of mouth (as the study participants in the ‘broken workplace promise’ condition received), is further enforced by our findings. Evidently, our findings imply that when a company promotes people-centric practices, but does not live what they preach, then future knowledge workers are significantly less inclined to apply for a position. Moreover, our findings illustrate the potential long-term consequences of not focusing on people-centric work practices that might make it difficult to attract new talent. Here, it can be argued that when companies do not engage and retain their talent well enough, resentment, higher turnover

rates and negative word of mouth can occur – further negatively affecting a companies’ ability to attract key talent.

Engagement and retention are also negatively affected by false advertising

As emphasized by Turriago-Hoyos, Thoene & Arjoon (2016), integrity and truthfulness are some of the most important intellectual virtues that knowledge workers embody. Further, they are argued to have a strong sense of responsibility and are concerned with the common good, both in a societal and organizational context (Turriago-Hoyos, Thoene, & Arjoon, 2016). Therefore, embodying such factors as an employer might be important to satisfy and meet knowledge workers “where they’re at”. If the company, on the other hand, does not live up to the moral expectations knowledge workers have towards integrity, truthfulness, and responsibility, this could bear negative consequences. In our study, falsely advertising people-centric work practices that have proven to be important for knowledge workers is found to have a significantly negative effect on how engaged future knowledge workers expect to be. In accordance with their moral values, and concern with trust and integrity, this could explain why the consequences of false promises are so significant.

False advertising involves a form of lying, which might negatively impact the participants’ trust towards the company. Trust is, as Kahn (1990) argues, necessary for psychological safety and hence engagement. Companies might evoke this feeling of a distrusting relation by breaking their promises, and risk to harm the company’s ability to promote engagement and performance (Anitha, 2014).

Our study also finds that false advertising negatively effects participants’ expected retention if they got the job. Consequently, if firms are not able to engage their talent in a sufficient way, this can arguably lead to higher turnover rates, resentment, and negative word of mouth from existing to new employees (Lundby et al, 2012). Therefore, it could be argued that not living up to one’s promises does not only make it harder to attract and retain new talent, but it can also create a downward spiral for existing workers. Hence, a distrusting work environment could potentially breed a bad reputation, and spiral into potentially destructive consequences for applicants’ perception of the firm.

6.3.3 H3 – Broken Workplace Promise vs. Control Condition

In Hypothesis 3, the control condition A was hypothesized to imply higher expected levels of attraction, engagement, and retention than the ‘broken workplace promise’ condition (C). We found a statistically significant effect on all three depended variables on whether a firm engaged in neutral branding or falsely advertising people-centric practices. Therefore, not living up to your people-centric promises is worse than not promising them at all.

Practice what you preach

According to (Aubin & Carlsen, 2008), it is essential that firms understand the values and interest of the talent they wish to acquire, and make sure the value proposition is aligned with both the company and talent. Because people-centric factors are argued to be essential for future knowledge workers (Drucker, 1999; (Turriago-Hoyos, Thoene, & Arjoon, 2016); Minahan 2021), not living up to such standards could be consequential. Interestingly, our study provides evidence that it is better to say nothing about people-centricity if you in reality do not live by such claims. Therefore, companies should be very certain that they practice what they preach before they begin promoting.

Given that firm branding had little to no effect, as seen from testing hypothesis 1, there seems to be high risk and minimal return on branding people centric practices. If a company is unsure about their standing, it seems to be more beneficial to stay away from including false promises than gambling on a potential gap between current employees and applicants’ perception of the EVP, and its potential negative consequences.

Focus on engagement

As argued by Turriago-Hoyos et al. (2016), knowledge workers are in general highly concerned with integrity, trust, and ethical morale. Therefore, not meeting these expectations can have large consequences for their expected levels of engagement when working for a company. Because engagement is an essential part of employee and organizational performance (Anitha, 2013), it seems highly unproductive to risk engagement amongst employees due to false advertising. Furthermore, by focusing on engagement in the first place, it is argued that a company conducting false advertising could have prevented the situation in first place. By engaging current employees, the EVP gap between current employees and new hires could be reduced, and further the likelihood of negative word of mouth spreading. Moreover, higher engagement levels is linked to better retention rates (Markos and Sridevi

(2010). Therefore, again, by putting efforts on engaging current employees, companies could arguably create upwards, instead of downwards spirals – to further reduce turnover, negative word of mouth and likelihood of falsely advertising.

6.4 Managerial Implications

The results discussed previously could be relevant for managerial decisions. Following our insights from the experiment, the research presented could be implemented by managers when looking to attract, engage and retain future knowledge workers. Further, the insight on what is important for future knowledge workers when choosing a job might also benefit managers when designing an employee value propositions (EVP).

The core insight in this thesis is what happens when there is a misalignment between what is said and what is done by firms. Put differently, it can potentially be risky for a firm to falsely advertise people-centric work practices. If the firm wish to stay competitive in the future, and attract, engage, and retain the best future knowledge workers, they should ensure that their employer brand and EVP is perceived the same for current employees as for new applicants. Furthermore, should there be uncertainty amongst managers as to whether there is a mismatch, an objective EVP analysis can be conducted. Here, managers can gather anonymous feedback from current employees on how they can better improve their engagement practices and people strategy. As gaps are discovered, appropriate actions can be taken to improve circumstances.

The results from study part 1 highlights the increasing importance of meeting the needs of employees and offering people-centric practices at the workplace. The participants in this study prefer a workplace that facilitate job satisfaction, interesting work, a good social environment, trust, and opportunity for personal growth. Companies should take these preferences into consideration and strive for a work environment that meets the needs of future knowledge workers to best attract, engage and retain them. Furthermore, meeting the needs of employees is closely related to better performance, which is an outcome prior research claims that firms can expect when focusing on and investing in people-centric factors.

The firms' work environment is communicated through either formal leadership communication, or informal word of mouth. From the research in this controlled experiment, there were no significant impact when the leadership communicated people-centric practices. However, there was a significant, negative effect when an acquaintance portrayed the work

environment worse than promised by the firm. Without giving too much attention to this sub-observation, this further seem to support Ahamad's (2019) argument that informal word of mouth is one of the most genuine and potent sources of information that can have consequential effects on applicants' beliefs about a firm. Managers should therefore have in mind that what their employees communicate about the firm to acquaintances is potentially more powerful than the employer brand and EVP the firm formally depicts.

As portrayed in our study, there was no significant difference between promoting or not promoting people-centric practices, while there were large negative effects if they did not live up to their promised people-centric focus. This can imply that if managers are unsure how the actual work environment is like, not mentioning people-centric practices in their branding can be a hedging strategy to avoid the potential negative consequences of false advertising.

6.5 Limitations

This subchapter presents potential limitations of this study. Firstly, the relatively large sample size in the study speaks in favor of some generalizability towards the larger student population, $M=3.427$) we must be careful not to generalize the findings to students in different fields of education. The following limitations considers these three categories: The literary foundation, the descriptive analysis of future knowledge workers' preferences, and the limitation of the controlled experiment.

The literary foundation has especially three topics with limiting factors. First, the literature on future generations lacks in debt research as to what specifically separates Gen Z from millennials, which in turn makes it difficult to pinpoint a generalizing view on what drives and motivate the coming generation of knowledge workers. Secondly, there was mainly separate literature on attraction, engagement and retention, and no specific consensus of how these factors were connected. In the literature, there was often mentioned links between engagement and retention, but rarely how this would impact attraction. Thirdly, there was a lacking foundation on what effects poor company integrity had on the employees, most of the literature was concerned with customers and stakeholders. It was also difficult to locate literature on the consequences of negative word of mouth.

Part 1 of the study, containing the descriptive analyses of which factors this student sample viewed as most important when choosing an employer, might be limited by the respondents

understanding of each variable. As seen and shortly discussed previously, one example of this is how low engagement was ranked as opposed to job satisfaction. In the literature, these factors are viewed quite comparatively. This could imply that the students who responded had a different understanding of the concepts than the authors. Further, to control for this uncertainty, there could have been utilized another method for data collection, such as questioning over the phone or on paper. This would allow respondents to ask questions and given us, as administrators, more control over the quality of responses. Then again, this process would have been highly time consuming and would have probably reduced the sample size considerably.

Study part 2, the controlled experiments with hypotheses testing, should preferably have used both pre-testing and post-testing of the participants to control for potential unstructured variances in answers. Luckily, the relatively large sample size helped minimize the damages that could have occurred from strong variances. As with part 1, part 2 of the study might also have increased validity in answers if conducted on paper or over the phone, although the Hawthorne effect would possibly be amplified by phone- or paper questionnaires.

Ideally, study part 2 should have had one more group to consider. This could have been a group D ('negative word of mouth' condition), consisting of portraying a firm with solely general information about the position and added the part of an acquaintance saying the firm had a bad working environment (same as group C excluded the information where the company promotes their people-centric practices). By adding a fourth group, we would have been able to test whether the effects seen were caused by the firm not staying true to their word, or if the effects were caused by simply having a bad work environment. Further this could have proven if people-centric factors are important for the participants or not. The reason why this was not implemented was because this would require at least 200 more participants to maintain the reliability, which would have been difficult to acquire.

6.6 Recommendations for Future Research

While writing and analyzing this study, there has been several insights that would have been interesting to investigate in further depth. This thesis's recommendations for further research consists of what we feel could be interesting additions to get a richer insight on the topic of future knowledge workers' preferences. The ideal would be to have enough time to conduct all these additional projects, which would contribute to our understanding of the topic.

Unfortunately, the only thing we can do is recommend these projects for future research, and hope somebody will pick up the baton.

The first and most important connection we would have liked to investigate is whether future knowledge workers were only impacted by a lack of company integrity or if there was an effect associated to work environment exclusively. As explained under limitations, this could be tested by looking at the differences between the control group A and the new group D (same as group C excluded the information where the company promotes their people-centric practices). This could help prove whether offering people-centric work practices in the EVP affect the respondents' answers on attraction, engagement, and retention or not.

The main insight from this thesis is that companies should avoid falsely advertising a people-centric workplace when portraying themselves to potential new employees. This is comparable to how companies can sometime portray themselves as more sustainable than they actually are, also known as greenwashing. Some literatures have already begun implementing the term "identity washing" for this effect of people-centric employer branding, although with little traction. We, the authors of this thesis, supports the use of identity washing and recommend future research to help increase traction on the concept.

A third recommendation for further research is to get an even clearer view on what is important for future knowledge workers when choosing an employer. This could be done through an exploratory approach to the topic, utilizing qualitative data through interviews. Perhaps considering the concept of grounding theories (Sparrowe & Mayer, 2011) for an in-depth conceptual understanding.

Another interesting topic is to figure out what specifically engages the next generation of knowledge workers. This could either be done through the same approach as mentioned above with grounding theories or a case study in association with a company trying to engage their employees. As presented throughout this thesis, engagement is correlated with increased performance, and future knowledge workers seem interested in people-centric factors. Engagement is getting more traction in the business community where firms use services from companies like *Gallup*, *Great Places to Work* and *Eletive* for testing and improving engagement amongst employees, implying businesses probably would be interested in cooperating on further research.

Lastly on generalizability, we can only say that our findings apply to future Norwegian knowledge workers. However, in their research, Nordhaug et al. (2010) found that employer reputation was equally important for Norwegian and Chinese female business students. Therefore, this can indicate that our findings are potentially transferrable to other countries. However, further research should be done to properly validate this hypothesis.

7. Conclusion

Today, the world is moving fast, and so does the changes in the way we work and effectively manage people. Are we able to meet the needs and demands of the future workforce? This paper sought to investigate the needs and preferences for future knowledge workers when choosing an employer. Furthermore, we wanted to investigate how false advertising of people-centric practices affect attraction, engagement, and retention of future knowledge workers. First, research literature from several scientific fields, such as knowledge work, generational studies, employee engagement, green-washing, and word of mouth was presented. Secondly, a quantitative survey was used to gather and descriptively analyze data on needs and preferences, while a survey experiment with three scenarios (control, ‘workplace promise’, and ‘broken workplace promise’) was used to explore the effects of falsely advertising people-centric practices.

Our study found that future knowledge workers are highly concerned with people-centric factors, where job satisfaction, interesting work, good social work environment, trust and opportunity for personal growth was the most important factors when choosing an employer. The descriptive analysis also proved that most people-centric factors were more important than salaries and having a positive impact on the society and environment. Furthermore, the survey experiment tested the effects on attraction, engagement, and retention of future knowledge workers through three hypotheses. Our study finds that whether a company emphasizes people-centric factors (such as work environment, social support, trust and opportunity for personal development and growth) in their branding, or not, showed no significant effects on all dependent variables (attraction, engagement, retention) – given that this organization already was regarded as a relevant employer of choice for the applicant. However, our study found that falsely advertising oneself as people-centric, while not actually conducting such practices, had a significant negative effect on all dependent variables.

Summarizing, the future knowledge workers surveyed in this study reported people-centric practices as important in their choice of employer. In turn, prior research has shown that people-centric practices also facilitate organizational performance and can therefore benefit both parties. Furthermore, firms who falsely advertise people-centric practices might face negative consequences. If companies are unsure about how employees perceive the work environment, it might be beneficial to not mention anything about people-centricity in their branding. In total, it seems that the working world is moving towards a more people-centric

future, and that the companies who are not able to keep their promises and meet the needs of future knowledge workers, might experience difficulty in acquiring, engaging, and retaining necessary talent.

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9. Appendix

9.1 The survey used for data collection

Introduction

This survey takes about 5 minutes to complete on average, where we have 10 gift cards from Godt Brød that you can win, each valued at 100 Kr.

The purpose of this survey is to get a better understanding of your preferences when choosing an employer. Your input is therefore important to map how employers can better meet your generation's needs and preferences for work 💡

The survey is anonymized to secure your privacy 🕵️

Ranking of preferences

We will now ask you to rate which factors that are most important for you when choosing an employer to work for after your graduating.

Please rate each factor below on a scale from 1 (not important) to 5 (very important). Answer as honest and realistic as you can on how important each factor is for you.

	1	2	3	4	5
	Not important	Slightly important	Somewhat important	Important	Very Important
Interesting work	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Good social					

environment at work	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Opportunity for personal growth	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Good personnel policy	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Meaningful work	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Regular feedback	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Professional competence development (learning)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

	Not important	Slightly important	Somewhat important	Important	Very Important
Autonomy	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Trust	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Opportunity for flexible workdays	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Clear expectations	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Focus on mental health and wellbeing	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Good culture and values	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Have a positive impact on the climate	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

	Not important	Slightly important	Somewhat important	Important	Very Important
Have a positive societal impact	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Job satisfaction	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Work engagement	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Good starting salary	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Opportunity for high salaries later in the company	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Good long-term
career opportunities



Control

Imagine that you are considering to apply for your first job after graduating.

You are being presented for an acknowledged firm that operates within the field you are most interested in, that offers a starting salary on the average of your particular study profile. The firm is signaling that it's interested in hiring someone like you.

How likely do you think it is that you would apply for a long term position at this firm?

0 (Very unlikely) 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 (very likely)

If you were to get accepted for the position and accept the job:

How satisfied do you think you would be at work?

0 (Very unsatisfied) 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 (Very satisfied)

If you were to get accepted for the position and accept the job:

How engaged do you think you would be in your position?

0 (Highly disengaged) 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 (Highly engaged)

If you were to get accepted for the position and accept the job:

How long do you think you would like to work there?

Less than 1 year 1 year 2 years 3 years 4 years 5 years 6 years 7 years 8 years 9 years 10 years or longer

Scenario 1 - 'workplace promise'

Imagine that you are considering to apply for your first job after graduating.

You are being presented for an acknowledged firm that operates within the field you are most interested in, that offers a starting salary on the average of your particular study profile. The firm is signaling that it's interested in hiring someone like you.

The management communicates that they have a great work environment for new hires with focus on social support and trusting relations. The purpose is to give everyone in the organization the best opportunities for learning and personal development.

How likely do you think it is that you would apply for a long term position at this firm?

0 (Very unlikely) 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 (Very likely)

If you were to get accepted for the position and accept the job:
How satisfied do you think you would be at work?

0 (Very unsatisfied) 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 (Very satisfied)

If you were to get accepted for the position and accept the job:
How engaged do you think you would be in your position?

0 (Highly disengaged) 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 (Highly engaged)

If you were to get accepted for the position and accept the job:
How long do you think you would like to work there?

Less than 1 year 1 year 2 years 3 years 4 years 5 years 6 years 7 years 8 years 9 years 10 years or longer

Scenario 2 - 'broken workplace promise'

Imagine that you are considering to apply for your first job after graduating.

You are being presented for an acknowledged firm that operates within the field you are most interested in, that offers a starting salary on the average of your particular study profile. The firm is signaling that it's interested in hiring someone like you.

The management communicates that they have a great work environment for new hires with focus on social support and trusting relations. The purpose is to give everyone in the organization the best opportunities for learning and personal development.

Despite this:

Someone you know that has recently quit their job from a similar position in the same organization, tell you that the managements' promises are far from the truth that will meet you. In reality, the work environment is characterized by sharp elbows and lack of trust where new hires are more or less left to themselves.

How likely do you think it is that you would apply for a long term position at this firm?

0 (Very unlikely) 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 (Very likely)

If you were to get accepted for the position and accept the job:

How satisfied do you think you would be at work?

0 (Very unsatisfied) 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 (Very satisfied)

If you were to get accepted for the position and accept the job:

How engaged do you think you would be in your position?

0 (Highly disengaged) 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 (Highly engaged)

If you were to get accepted for the position and accept the job:

How long do you think you would like to work there?

Less than 1 year 1 year 2 years 3 years 4 years 5 years 6 years 7 years 8 years 9 years 10 years or longer

General questions

Which university/college are you attending?

NHH - Norwegian School of Economics

BI - Norwegian Business School

UiB - University of Bergen

NTNU - Norwegian University of Science and Technology

UiO - University of Oslo

Other

Please enter your university/college

Within which field are you studying?

Business and administration

IT / Data science

Law

Industrial economics / Engineer

Other

Please enter your field of study

Which degree are you currently studying towards?

- Bachelor's degree
- Master's degree
- Doctorate's degree
- Other

Gender

- Male
- Female
- Other/ do not wish to say

What is your age?

Are you from Norway?

- Yes
- No

Where are you from?

It's important that everyone who participate in this study read each question before they answer. To confirm that you have read this introduction, please answer the number 0 below.

How likely do you think it is that it will rain tomorrow where you live?

- 0 (Very unlikely) 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 (Very likely)

Konkurransen

You have now completed the survey. Thank you for your contribution!

Do you wish to participate in the raffle of gift cards from the café Godt Brød?

- Yes
- No

9.2 Overview over Why Variables in Part 1 Were Chosen

The variables used in part 1 were mainly based on their links to different research. All variables were chosen out of personal interest, although most are backed by scientific links to specific topics in the thesis. Table 5 below shows a quick overview over why the different variables were included in our research.

Rank	Variable	Reason for including (research backing)	Tied to what theoretical construct?
1	Job satisfaction	Herzberg, Mausner, & Snyderman (1993); Saks & Gruman (2014); Gallup (2021)	Engagement and generational literature
2	Interesting work	Nordhaug et al. (2010)	Knowledge workers and generational literature
3	Good social environment at work	Nordhaug et al. (2010)	Engagement
4	Trust	Kahn (1990); Gallup (2021); Minahan (2021)	Knowledge workers and engagement literature
5	Opportunity for personal growth	Nordhaug et al. (2010); Seppanen & Gualtieri, (2012); Hicks, Riedy, & Waltz (2018)	Knowledge workers, generational, and engagement literature
6	Good long term career opportunities	Authors' own interest	Knowledge workers and generational literature
7	Work engagement	Kahn (1990); Gallup (2021); Anitha (2014) and others	Engagement literature

8	Good culture and values	Turriago-Hoyos, Thoene and Arjoon (2016); Gallup (2021); Cable et al. (2000)	Employer identity, knowledge workers and engagement literature
9	Professional competence development (learning)	Nordhaug et al. (2010); Turriago-Hoyos, Thoene and Arjoon (2016); Hicks, Riedy, & Waltz (2018)	Knowledge workers and generational literature
10	Meaningful work	Saks et al. (2001); May et al. (2004)	Engagement literature
11	Good personnel policy	Nordhaug et al. (2010); Turriago-Hoyos, Thoene and Arjoon (2016)	Knowledge workers
12	Clear expectations	Gallup (2021)	Knowledge workers and engagement literature
13	Focus on mental health and well-being	Gallup (2021); Harter, et al., (2020)	Engagement literature
14	Have a positive societal impact	The authors' own interest	Knowledge workers (wish for fulfillment of common good)
15	Good starting salary	Nordhaug et al. (2010); Herzberg, Mausner, & Snyderman (1993)	Motivational factors for work - literature
16	Autonomy	Drucker (1999); Gallup (2021); Minahan (2021)	Knowledge workers, generational, and engagement literature

17	Regular feedback	Gallup (2021); Anitha (2014); Locke and Taylor (1991); May et al. (2004)	Knowledge workers and engagement literature
18	Opportunity for high salaries later in the company	Nordhaug et al. (2010); Herzberg, Mausner, & Snyderman (1993)	Motivational factors for work - literature
19	Opportunity for flexible workdays	Drucker (1999); Gallup (2021); Minahan (2021)	Knowledge workers, generational, and engagement literature
20	Have a positive impact on the climate	The authors' own interest	Knowledge workers (wish for fulfillment of common good)

Table 5 - Reason for choice of variables in study part 1

9.3 Study Part 2: ANOVA-tests and post-hoc testing with Tukey's HSD (more technical details)

One-way, between groups ANOVA-tests were used to see whether there were differences between the groups (A, B, and C), when comparing participants' answers for each dependent variable. This means the order of testing was to first look at differences in answers for *likelihood to apply*, then differences for *predicted engagement*, and lastly *expected retention*.

The ANOVA results for the variable *likelihood to apply* showed significant differences between all groups [$F(2, 655) = 430.6$; $p < 2e^{-16}$; partial $\eta^2 = 0.57$]. The same was shown for *predicted work engagement* [$F(2, 655) = 321.1$; $p < 2e^{-16}$; partial $\eta^2 = 0.495$], and likewise for *expected retention* [$F(2, 655) = 99.3$; $p < 2e^{-16}$; partial $\eta^2 = 0.233$]. Because all variables had significant differences of variance between groups, Tukey's HSD was used to look at the pairwise differences in means. In other words, the results from Tukey's HSD gives the most detailed picture, enabling us to see which of the hypotheses that held true.

Hypothesis 1, the control condition (A) versus the 'workplace promise' (B) condition did not hold true in any circumstances. The comparison showed the differences in means for *likelihood to apply* was insignificant (M-diff = +0.311; SD= 0.385; $p = .139$), with even less difference when looking at *predicted engagement* (M-diff = +0.05; SD=0.322; $p = .93$), and for *expected retention* (M-diff = +0.019; SD= 0.439; $p = .994$). This implies that there was no doubt students' predicted engagement and retention was insignificantly affected by a firm promoting that they offer people-centric practices. The same is true for the students' likelihood to apply, although this effect is relatively much higher than the others.

Hypothesis 2, the 'workplace promise' condition (B) versus the 'broken workplace promise' condition (C) was accepted, because of higher average value for 'workplace promise'. The testing provided results of significant differences in means for all dependent variables; *likelihood to apply* (M-diff = +4.30; SD = 0.383; $p < .001$), the *predicted engagement* (M-diff = +3.02; SD = 0.322; $p < .001$), and the *expected retention* (M-diff = +2.28; SD = 0.438, $p < .001$). The results show a major difference in average values, which does imply that breaking one's promise has large consequences for the firm's ability to attract, engage and retain talent.

Hypothesis 3 held true, as the average for each dependent variables in the control condition (A) were measured to higher values than the 'broken workplace promise' condition (C). There

was a significant difference in means for the *likelihood to apply* ($M = +3.98$; $SD = 0.384$; $p < .001$), for *predicted engagement* ($M = +2.98$; $SD = 0.321$; $p < .001$), and for *expected retention* ($M = +2.26$; $SD = 0.437$; $p < .001$). These results mean that there is way better for a firm not to promise anything than not keeping a workplace promise. If the firm is unsure whether to promote people centric factors or not, the best solution would according to these results be to not promote at all.

9.4 Study Part 2: Separate Analyses of *Job Satisfaction* and *Work Engagement*

As previously explained, the two variables called *job satisfaction* and *work engagement* were combined into one single new variable called *predicted work engagement*. This decision was made because of the similar results showed for the two factors. There are some differences between the results, they are however small and would not impact the conclusion of the thesis. The following parts, 9.4.1 and 9.4.2 provides a detailed overview on what the results showed for *expected job satisfaction* and *expected work engagement*.

9.4.1 Analysis of Participants' Expected Job Satisfaction:

The one-way between groups ANOVA proved a clear significant difference between the groups [$F(2, 655) = 395.6$; $p < 2e^{-16}$; $\text{partial } \eta^2 = 0.547$] when comparing groups for the dependent variable *job satisfaction*. Meaning there were grounds testing with Tukey's HSD.

For the results regarding H1, comparing the 'workplace promise' condition (B) to the control condition (A), there was a no significant differences in the average for participants ($M\text{-diff} = +0.249$; $SD = 0.335$; $p = 0.18$). However, when looking at comparison of 'workplace promise' condition (B) and the 'broken workplace promise' condition (C), there was significant differences ($M\text{-diff} = +3.58$; $SD = 0.335$; $p < .001$). For hypothesis H3, similar results occurred ($M\text{-diff} = +3.34$; $SD = 0.334$; $p < .001$). implying a significant difference in average values between the 'broken workplace promise' condition (C) and the control condition (A).

Scoring predicted job satisfaction

The respective average score from all the participants in each condition (A, B, C) can be seen in the bar chart below. The results have similar tendencies for the ranking of job satisfaction as our research presented previously; high average for the control condition ($M = 8.04$;

SD=1.26), a high average for the ‘workplace promise’ condition (M=8.29; SD=1.38), and lower average for the ‘broken workplace promise’ condition (M=4.71; SD=1.79). Error bars represent standard error (standard error: A=0.08; B=0.09; C=0.12).



Bar chart 4 - Study part 2 "expected job satisfaction"

The results of Cohens d showed a large effect size on job satisfaction tied to H2 (effect size $d = 2.25$) and H3 (effect size $d = 2.16$). For H1 (effect size $d = -0.189$) there was a negligible effect on job satisfaction.

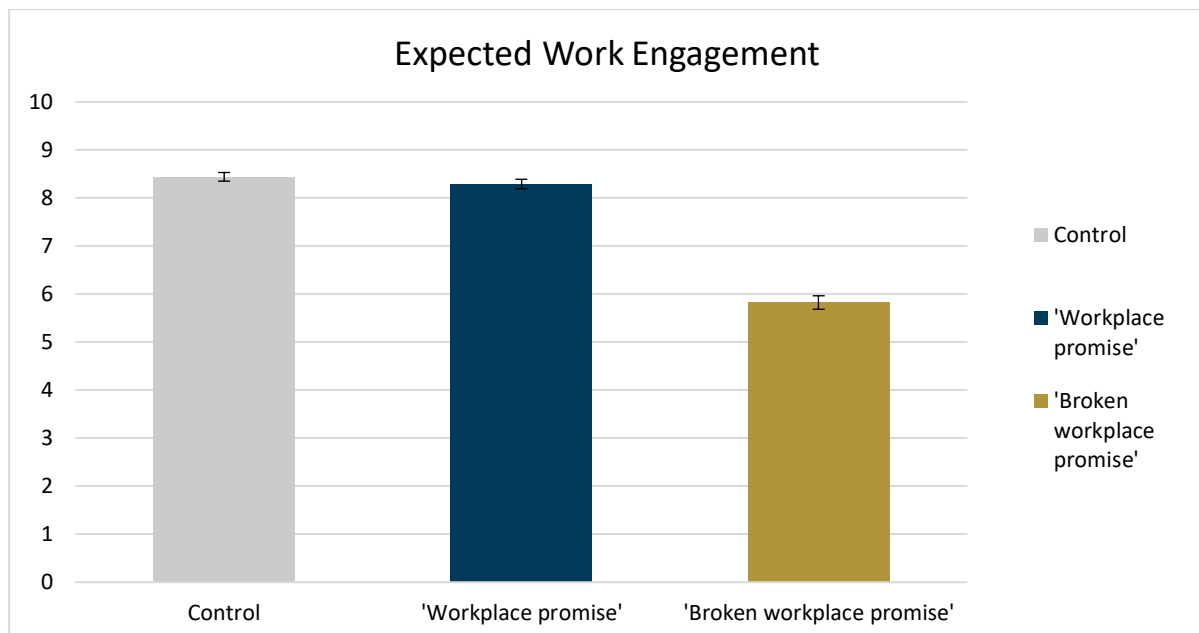
9.4.2 Analysis of Participants' Expected Work Engagement:

The one-way between groups ANOVA proved a clear significant difference between the groups [$F(2, 655) = 167.4$; $p < 2e^{-16}$; partial $\eta^2 = 0.338$] when comparing groups for the dependent variable *job satisfaction*. Meaning there were grounds testing with Tukey's HSD.

For the results regarding H1, between the control condition (B) and the ‘workplace promise’ condition (A). No significant differences in the average for participants (M-diff = -0.151; SD = 0.379; $p = 0.619$). However, when looking at H2, there was significantly higher engagement (M-diff = +2.467; SD = 0.378; $p < .001$) comparing the ‘workplace promise’ condition (B) and the ‘broken workplace promise’ condition (C). For hypothesis H3, similar results occurred implying higher expected engagement in the control condition versus the ‘broken workplace promise’ condition (M-diff = +2.617; SD = 0.377; $p < .001$).

Scoring expected work engagement

The respective average score from each group (A, B, C) can be seen in the bar chart below. The tendencies on *expected work engagement* are much like the effects from *expected job satisfaction*, with similar average for A (M=8.44; SD=1.40) and B (M=8.29; SD=1.51), and a lower average for C (M=5.82; SD=2.06). Error bars represent standard error (standard error: A=0.09; B=0.10; C=0.14).



Bar chart 5 - Study part 2 "expected work engagement"

The results of Cohens d showed a large effect size on job satisfaction tied to H2 (effect size $d = 1.36$) and H3 (effect size $d = 1.48$). For H1 (effect size $d = 0.103$) there was a negligible effect on job satisfaction.