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**EMPLOYEES-AS-CUSTOMERS: COUPLING  
THE EMPLOYEE VALUE PROPOSITION AND  
MILLENNIALS' EXPERIENCE IN THE  
CONSTRUCTION OF THE INTERNAL BRAND**

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# ABSTRACT

Leyla Yacine: Employees-as-customers: coupling the employee value proposition and millennials' experience in the construction of the internal brand

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Employee experience has become a prior concern for organizations, especially since the Covid crisis has compelled them to entirely rethink their ways of working in a strategic restructuring of their workforce. Employee experience goes beyond simple engagement because it is its very source: employees engage with their work through their experiences of what the employer intends to offer them, that is, the employee value proposition (EVP). In this sense, considering employees as customers is necessary to make them feel valued and provides them with meaning at work. The employees-as-customers (EAC) view to human resource management (HRM) shifts the perception of employees from mere human resources to individuals, whose needs, demands, preferences and aspirations should be addressed. This study explores how the EAC approach to HRM can help an organization to better its offering for millennial employees. It addresses the lack of research on millennial experience per se by considering them as internal customers, whose needs and demands must be addressed effectively via the intended internal brand.

The abductive research design conflated literature from the HRM, internal marketing and service design fields to build the empirical framework for the case company, Hilti. The investigation and comparison of the intended internal brand and millennial employees' experience leveraged the transfer of marketing concepts to HRM.

The conduct of this research resulted in the emergence of EVP dimensions, which outline the value intended for employees by the employer, notably: 1) the facilitation of self-development and professional growth, 2) providing a safe, fair and responsible work environment, 3) social and informational value within and across teams, 4) recognition, rewards and benefits. The amalgamation of the EVP dimensions and the official values of the case organization crystallized the intended internal employer brand. The latter was then put in perspective with its experience by millennial employees to seize the internal brand's perceived value and how it affects employee loyalty. Though Hilti's approach to HRM already followed a people orientation, the EAC view to HRM fostered the suggestion of points of improvement for greater employee experience, based on the comparison of the findings with both parties to the employment contract.

This study contributes to research on EVP, internal branding and employee experience. It integrates the means-end chain model adapted to employer brand choice with customer models of value creation to understand how the EAC view can be adopted in the world of HRM and pave the way towards employee experience co-creation by the employer and their employees. It brought in new information as regards to 1) theory on EVP and its construction, internal branding, and the EAC paradigm; 2) the definition and construction of the internal brand; 3) the suitability of two models of customer value creation to evaluate employee experience; 4) and, the co-creation of employee experience at an organizational level, condensed into a framework. This study also confirms previous findings on the millennial segment in the workplace. Finally, this study underscores the relevance, suitability and significant role of the EAC view to HRM in organizations willing to attract, satisfy and retain their workforce and, thus, thrive now and in the future.

Keywords: Employee value proposition, Millennials, Internal employer branding, Employee experience, Human resource management, Employees as customers, Organizational behaviour, Organizational change

The originality of this thesis has been checked using the Turnitin OriginalityCheck service.

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## List of Abbreviations

<b>HRM</b>	Human resource management
<b>HR</b>	Human resources
<b>EVP</b>	Employee value proposition
<b>EAC</b>	Employees-as-customers
<b>AM(s)</b>	Account Manager(s)
<b>RM(s)</b>	Regional Manager(s)

# Terminology

Term	Description
<b>Employees-as-customers (EAC) approach</b>	The EAC paradigm refers to the adoption of a consumer approach with employees, by considering them as internal customers to the organization. This entails that they should be treated in a similar manner to regular (external) customers, that is as human beings whose needs and demands should be considered and addressed effectively. (Rao, 2017, p.6.)
<b>Internal (employer) branding</b>	Internal (employer) branding is employer branding directed towards current employees, as opposed to external branding focused on the attraction of potential new employees. Internal branding is a process that aims at the creation and infusion of a corporate culture of trust between the employer and their employees, or establishing strong corporate moral values, from which can spur employees' pride, or satisfying employees through the fulfilment of their psychological contracts (Sengupta et al., 2015, pp. 308–309).
<b>Intended internal brand</b>	This thesis introduces and defines the intended internal brand as the brand intended for employees by the employer. It encapsulates the EVP and the official organizational values. It equates what ought to be employee experience of the organizational brand, according to my understanding of the employer data gathered and rigorously analysed. Intended internal brand is intentional and constructivist in the sense that it aims at the creation of a certain meaning (one that is positive) with the workforce. It is distinguished from internal brand. It can be conceived as the internal vision the employer has for its workforce, that is the goals they strive to achieve for and with the employees. The intended internal brand dictates the EVP and is recognizable in the organizational values.
<b>Internal brand</b>	The internal brand corresponds to employees' perception of their employer, based on their experience of the intended internal brand offered. It is essentially an image of the employer that results from the employee experience of the intended internal brand. Hence, internal brand is more of a perceptual concept, emerging from what is lived by employees. The internal brand exists only if there is an intended internal brand (including EVP and organizational values) which is experienced by employees.
<b>Employee value proposition (EVP)</b>	The EVP consists of the employer's offering for their employees. It is comprised of employer attributes, that is "employer-extrinsic traits set by companies that constitute an organization's offering to employees" (Ronda et al., 2018, p. 574). The EVP constitutes a fundamental lever in the construction of the employer brand, both internally with employees (e.g., satisfaction, engagement, commitment, performance, loyalty) and externally with potential new hires (alluring workplace). The EVP differs from organizational values as it is more concrete and its deployment is planned to facilitate the delivery of work by employees for external stakeholders (e.g., customers), whereas values can be determined but their instilment is done internally on a more abstract level via the EVP. Thus, the EVP could be an analogue to an internal mission, namely the result that a company or an organization is trying to achieve for employees through its plans or actions (modified from mission in Cambridge Dictionary), it reflects the internal philosophy.
<b>Organizational values</b>	Organizational values constitute key principles guiding organizational and individual behaviour in an organization. They contribute to building both intended internal brand (i.e., organizational culture, setting expectations and conduct) and internal brand (i.e., individual cultural fit and decision-making). They are abstract, yet mentally and socially constructed. They participate in the construction of the intended internal brand by shaping a common ideology across scales and people within the organization. In fact, they transcend the EVP and serve the internal vision in that their definition and interaction describe how the organization impacts the community. Ideally, they reflect the intended internal brand in the EVP.
<b>Employee experience</b>	Employee experience can be comprehended as the overarching employee perception of their interactions (physical, technological, psychological, cultural) with their employer, colleagues, and possibly customers. It is subjective and relativistic, just like the customer experience. It can be positive, neutral or negative. Thus, the idea to adopt the EAC approach in HRM to transfer some marketing/service design notions for the betterment of the employer offering and, therefore, of the employee experience. This thesis prioritizes the study of internal interactions, namely with the employer and colleagues.

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# CHAPTER 1

## Introduction

### 1.1. Research background

#### 1.1.1. The EAC approach to address a changing work environment

The philosophy of ‘employees first, customers second’ has increasingly been spreading amid CEOs of thriving multinational companies which have been able to cope with change through the creation and capture of value both internally and externally (Rao, 2017; HCL Technologies, 2016). Additionally, Jack Ma, CEO of the thriving Alibaba, stated that his philosophy is “customers first, employees second and shareholders third”. These diverging points drove my interest towards the HRM philosophy that perceives ‘employees as customers’ (or EAC) (Bowers & Martin, 2007) in a VUCA<sup>1</sup> context of conducting business (Ulrich, 2016).

The perception of employees as internal customers of organizations is supported by the term ‘labour market’, as well as by the introduction of the concept of ‘internal-customer orientation’ (Matanda & Ndubisi, 2013) and the tenet of ‘Employee/Candidate journey’ (Bandyopadhyay, 2018, p. 49), all stressing the relevance of the adoption of ‘internal marketing’ (Bowers & Martin, 2007, p. 90), a consumer marketing approach in HRM, with employees endorsing the consumer role. This EAC approach in HRM starts with a relevant employee value proposition (or EVP, that is the employer offering) from the very inception of the employee life cycle at the pre-employment stage. Studying the internal value creation by private organizations and their employees is of a certain interest since the purpose of organizations very much lies in the creation of value for and with people. This is notably observable from the growing tendency of people seeking meaning in the workplace, which resonates with the needed understanding of what is meaningful to customers in the process of value creation (Yrjölä, 2015).

In search of a work-life balance and potential fulfilment and dedicating nearly 70% of their lifetime to work, people are increasingly seeking meaning in their experience at work. Personally, attached to finding and sustaining a work-study-life balance, I have noticed that the creation of a valuable experience at work starts from the very integration to the organization and can have tremendous effects on one’s approach and enactment of their tenure, their personal satisfaction and well-being,

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<sup>1</sup> VUCA here stands for volatile, uncertain, complex and ambiguous. Introduced by Bennis and Nanus, the acronym alludes to volatility, uncertainty, complexity and ambiguity of situations in a modern world.

subsequently affecting their will to remain with their employer. A meaningful experience at work can emerge from a state of flow that is more easily reachable when one appreciates their work-life balance, according to a study that purported flow as a fuel to productivity levels, positive moods and emotions, the search for challenges, as well as for reaching greater levels of life-satisfaction and well-being (Mihelič & Aleksić, 2017, p. 399). To Mihelič and Aleksić (2017), the positive perception of one's success in balancing their professional and personal roles entitles them to experience a satisfactory work-life balance (p. 398).

At a time when the attraction of new employees is facilitated through employer branding and technological tools leveraged by organizations in a cross-channel fashion, the significant challenge I perceive to be faced by employers lies more in satisfying the people employed, whose experience of the intended internal brand<sup>2</sup> will determine their engagement in their work and loyalty to the employer. Especially the experience of the employee value proposition (EVP) should meet certain criteria that would fulfil employees' core and evolving needs, expectations and demands. According to my searches and interactions with other people it appears to be a societal phenomenon. The study of the EVP construction, its use and implementation then appear useful to understand how to meet the demand of employees and their needs so that they feel engaged in their work and committed to it, thereby affecting their will to continue working with their employer and their results.

More particularly looking at the current constitution of the global workforce and its foreseen evolution, the segment of the population commonly qualified as "millennials" requires full attention from employers since they account for about 50% of the global labour force in 2020 and are set to represent 75% of it by 2025 (EY, 2015).

### **1.1.2. Millennials, a game-changing generation**

In this section, the millennial segment is introduced more substantially. Millennials constitute a unique generation that disrupts existing workplaces and fosters organizational change. Some general and Finland-specific demographics data on millennials are initially broached, prior to delving into their uniqueness in the organizational world.

Millennials constitute the fastest growing and largest generation of workers in our developed economy (Kuron et al., 2015; Mihelič & Aleksić, 2017). The age span of this generation Y is somewhat unclear since authors alternatively determined their birth date at some point between 1980 and 1994 (ibid.), 1979 and 1994 (Myers & Sadaghiani, 2010), 1977 and 1994 (Eddy et al., 2010), or

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<sup>2</sup> (constituted by the employee value proposition permeated by the organizational values).

even between 1982 and 2004 (Pyöriä et al., 2017), which converges with the definition of the Cambridge Dictionary, that asserts that they are individuals who were born somewhere in-between the 1980s and the early 2000s. This thesis conceives millennials broadly as individuals born between 1979 and 1999, whose age is currently in the 20-40 age range.

Considering the 20-40 age range, calculations based on Statistics Finland data made on date of December 31<sup>st</sup>, 2019 estimate that they today represent nearly 25% of the population (aged between 0 and 100 years old) in Finland and over 40% of its population in age of working permanently (starting from 15 years old according to the Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment of Finland, and until the national retirement age stated by the Finnish Centre for Pension rounded up from 63 and 3-6 months to 64). According to Statistics Finland projections, these numbers are called to slightly increase over the upcoming years with millennials composing around 44% of the labour force in age of working permanently in Finland both in 2025 and in 2040, in spite of the little decrease to 42% in 2030. Their segment representation will gradually augment over time as compared to the overall population of Finland, and they will still hold a strong presence in the local labour market in 2050.

Table 1 (below) shows the significance of millennials in the workforce in Finland in 2019. The overall millennial employment rate was nearly 75% in Finland, with disparities found depending on the age and gender of individuals. In effect, it is noteworthy to acknowledge the higher rate of male employment, except in the 20-24 age segment. Men also represent a bigger portion of the workforce than women in Finland. Additionally, there is an overarching tendency observable within each gender group based on the age group: the older people grow, the higher their employment rate.

**Table 1. Millennials employment rate in Finland in 2018. Statistics Finland, 2019.**

	Population, 1,000 people			Workforce, 1,000 people			Employed, 1,000 people			Employment rate, %		
	Females	Males	Total	Females	Males	Total	Females	Males	Total	Females	Males	Total
<b>Age group</b>												
<b>20-24</b>	150	167	317	102	116	218	90	99	189	60.2	59.3	59.7
<b>25-29</b>	172	183	356	135	158	292	126	146	272	73	79.6	76.4
<b>30-34</b>	170	180	350	135	163	298	126	154	280	74	85.4	79.9
<b>35-39</b>	174	184	358	144	172	316	137	164	300	78.5	88.9	83.8
<b>People in age of working permanently (15-64)</b>	1,685	1,743	3,428	1,290	1,379	2,669	1,209	1,278	2,487	71.8	73.3	72.6
<b>Total for the millennial segment (20-39*)</b>	666	714	1381	516	609	1124	479	563	1041	71.425	78.3	74.95
<b>Percentage of millennials (20-39)</b>	39.53%	40.96%	40.29%	40.00%	44.16%	42.11%	39.62%	44.05%	41.86%			

\* people aged 40 composed another age group (40-44) in the Statistics Finland database, thus not included in this table.

Although the millennial segment in the labour force may not be as important at the local scale than at the international scale, it indisputably holds an appreciable position in the labour market in Finland. The number of employed millennials has been augmenting throughout the past three years and demographic forecasts foresee a continuation of this rise with millennials equalling more than 40% of the population in age of working permanently in Finland as of now and until 2040. The decisiveness of their understanding thereby appears striking for their successful integration in organizations and positive experience at work.

Secondly, the millennial generation has become synonymous of change in comparison to the two other generations that are also involved in today's workplaces, namely baby boomers – born during the post Second World War baby boom (Cambridge Dictionary), today aged 56-74 – and the Generation X – comprising individuals born in the 1960s and 1970s (Cambridge Dictionary), today aged 40-55.

The intergenerational gap between millennials, the generation X and baby-boomers has indeed paved the way for some sort of conflictual atmosphere that complicates the working environment and negatively affects organizations, as they do not use their full potential (Myers & Sadaghiani, 2010; Pyöriä et al., 2017; Kuron et al., 2015; McGuire et al., 2007, Stauffer, 2017; Eddy et al., 2010). The generation Y approach to work and life indeed diverges from previous generations – today holding more powerful (management/leadership) positions in organizations (Myers & Sadaghiani, 2010; Pyöriä et al., 2017) – as a result of different developmental experiences in radically different contexts (Kuron et al., 2015). When baby boomers and generation X workers have prioritised work, focused on personal advancement through hardworking and had nearly no idea of the sense of work-life balance (McGuire et al. 2007; Stauffer, 1997; Myers & Sadaghiani, 2010; Eddy et al., 2010), millennials hold different expectations. Eddy, Schweitzer, and Lyons (2010) assess the five predominant “millennials’ career-related expectations” that can be summarized as a preference for a work-life balance facilitated by means of a flexible career that offers them access to good pay and benefits, opportunities for rapid advancement, and meaningful work experiences that emerge from interesting and challenging tasks in a nurturing environment.

This “want it all and want it now” approach to work from millennials has generated qualifications such as “Generation Me” (Twenge, 2006), “Nexters” (Zemke et al., 2000) among researchers, to emphasize their disloyalty to employers, their self-centredness and thirst for climbing the organizational ladder (Myers & Sadaghiani, 2010; Pyöriä et al., 2017), all characteristics that do not render them appealing to employers, whilst the latter greatly need them to effectively run their

activities in this transitional era, wherein millennials constitute key stakeholders both inside and outside organizations (Alonso-Almeida & Llach, 2019). In fact, millennials are simultaneously consumers, investors and employees, who can positively impact this critical moment in history, embedded in internationalization and digitalization fostered by advanced technological developments, a diversification of the population and of the workplace due to migration and an aging population in developed countries, climate change calling for a global mobilization across scales, disillusionment vis-à-vis political institutions and representatives, and driven by a need to redefine global governance and educational systems to address our needs and demands sustainably (ref. UN sustainable development goals).

In their quest to have their expectations and values met and through their fresher stance pertaining the workplace, opportunities and challenges, the generation Y workers can foster organizational change for the better at a societal scale (Alonso-Almeida & Llach, 2019; Myers & Sadaghiani, 2010; Eddy et al., 2010). To these authors, millennials tend to embrace diversity of ethnicities and backgrounds more than their elders, are highly knowledgeable on advanced information and communication technologies and feel at ease using them, on top of which they greatly value relationships and social interactions, in such manner that they feel more comfortable with teamwork than their elders. In this sense, they have the potential to spark organizational change from within by making management consider ways to improve communication, productivity and satisfaction levels across generations to allow them to fit in (Myers & Sadaghiani, 2010). Management and HRM people efforts to integrate them will benefit organizations, especially because millennials have been trained on how to achieve sustainability through an interdisciplinary lens, one which proves beneficial in the foresight, prevention and resolution of present and future wicked problems (Alonso-Almeida & Llach, 2019). Furthermore, considering the high-achievers profile of millennials – whose strong skills provide a competitive advantage – and their readiness to change job, employers are incentivized to drive the shift towards more sustainable practices and behaviours in the workplace, epitomized by the adoption of corporate social responsibility strategies. Alonso and Llach (2019) argue that employers who adapt their EVP can increase their level of attractiveness as compared to their competitors by offering an employee experience that is satisfactory enough to engage and retain millennials. Such compelling and satisfactory EVP encompasses the continuous providing of feedback, opportunities of development and advancement through challenging and interesting tasks. Ideally millennials would be allowed to craft their job in an environment sufficiently flexible for them to reach a satisfying work-life balance and feel committed to their co-workers, etc. This can reduce

the likelihood of having millennials leaving their employer for another, who offers a more alluring EVP.

## 1.2. Research objective and research questions

The research attends to respond to the following question: **How can the ‘employees-as-customers’ (EAC) approach to HRM help an organization to better its offering for millennial employees?**

Goals are fivefold: 1) The advancement of the EAC approach as relevant and an absolute benefit to organizations; 2) The testing of the existing value proposition framework and models of customer value creation to the data collected from the case study participants; 3) The extension of the existing theory on the EVP, its construction and relation to internal branding through the exploration of employees’ experiences of it; 4) The extension of the existing theory on employee experience and internal brand, including a differentiation between intended internal brand and (actual) internal brand; 5) The development of an organizational experience co-creation framework. The EAC approach to HRM to better the construction of the EVP according to millennial experience of internal branding builds on previous research on millennials, EVP, internal branding, and service design with customers. In particular, customer models of value creation coined in service design are integrated to the other fields aforementioned in the research framework. In this respect, the framework that emerged from the literature review (see Figure 6) endeavours to transfer and tailor these models to the HRM world by considering employees as internal customers. Its purpose is to offer an overview and understanding of the employee experience of an employer’s offering (i.e., EVP).

The case study attends via the generation of knowledge from the participants under study to the development of new theoretical constructs that could be “tested or generalized to other contexts or to theory” (Mills et al., 2010, p.94), such as for instance other employers in Finland or elsewhere.

The empirical research consists of a study that compares the intended internal brand<sup>3</sup> of a single firm, Hilti, and millennials’ experience of it to better the employee experience in the workplace, by using the EAC philosophy as a means to make the EVP and millennials’ experience of it match in a manner that would benefit both parties. In particular, this research investigates millennial Account Managers (AMs)’ experience – that is the perceived value – of the intended internal brand at Hilti, putting an emphasis on how the employer’s intended internal brand affects the millennial segment at work. On the basis of the results, the adoption of the EAC view is advanced to better the construction and deployment of the EVP of Hilti, according to millennial AMs’ experience of it, with the goal to meet

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<sup>3</sup> Comprised of the EVP transcended by the official organizational values of the employer intended for their AMs.

millennial expectations, needs and demands. This allowed for the formulation of propositions for an enhanced consistency between the internal employer brand strategy enacted and the internal employer brand experienced by millennials, which could benefit Hilti. It could indeed be yielded by them to enhance their internal employer brand through the alignment of their EVP with the way it is experienced (or perceived) by millennials, thereby strengthening millennial AMs' engagement, commitment, and their will to continue working there. Further, the research results could also be instrumentalized by other employers of millennials in Finland.

There are two main points of exploration in this study, (1) and (2), that lead to the formulation of an area of future development in (3). (1) and (2) correspond to empirical questions whereas (3) comes as a research outcome question addressed according to the results.

**(1) How is the intended internal brand<sup>4</sup> constructed at Hilti?**

- a. What is the EVP offered by Hilti and what are its key components?
- b. What is the intended internal brand constructed at Hilti?
- c. What is the impact of the HRM priorities on Hilti's EVP and employer branding<sup>5</sup> intended for AMs?
- d. Are millennials' expectations, needs, preferences and demands considered in the construction of the EVP at Hilti?

**(2) What is millennial AMs' experience of Hilti's intended internal brand?**

- a. What is millennial AMs' experience of Hilti's official organizational values?
- b. To what extent do millennial AMs consider that the identified EVP dimensions actually create value in their daily work?
- c. How and to what extent does millennial AMs' experience affect their will to continue working at Hilti?

Because prescriptive knowledge flows from descriptive knowledge (Schallehn et al., 2019), the point (3) builds prescriptions according to the results gathered in (1) and (2).

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<sup>4</sup> Internal brand: the "employees' perspective of the brand" (Hankinson, 2004, p. 84). Here, Hilti's intended internal brand equates what ought to be AMs' experience of the organizational brand, according to my understanding of the employer data gathered and rigorously analysed.

<sup>5</sup> Employer branding is here used because the findings cover both internal employer branding with current AMs and external employer branding with potential new AMs.

**(3) How can the ‘employees as customers’ approach to HRM allow Hilti to improve their EVP<sup>6</sup> to meet millennials’ expectations, needs and demands in Finland?**

### **1.3. Research scope**

This thesis explores the construction of the internal brand at Hilti from both the lens of the employer, represented by HRM and Brand leaders, and the perspective of their employees who shared about their experience of the employer’s offering. To be more precise, the experience of the intended internal brand (see Terminology) by employees who are already involved and working with Hilti is studied, thus not considering external branding activities with potential employees.

As a matter of fact, the findings and conclusions resulting from this exploratory case study, are representative of local millennials and their employer, Hilti. They are tailored to this population and its environment, working remotely yet highly connected in a developed country, wherein there is a noticeable aging of the population, which heightens the critical role of millennials at work in a knowledge-based economy. More precisely, the sample of participating millennials has been selected based on their tenure as Account Managers (AMs) at Hilti because this position is the most held by millennials working there, thereby making millennial AMs most representative in terms of numbers of the millennial population employed by Hilti. In fact, 70% of Hilti’s AMs are millennials, that is 65 employees. This sample of millennials do not represent the entire population of millennials working there, nor all millennials in Finland. Further, the main criteria of selection of the organization investigated consists of its ranking respectively as the 2019 20<sup>th</sup> and 2020 16<sup>th</sup> Best Workplace among medium-sized companies in Finland (Great Place to Work, 2019-2020) and their employment relationship with local millennials in Finland. Hilti (Suomi) Oy was found with the help of Heikki Leskinen, founder of The NextGen Project – an innovative Finnish consultancy offering transformative reverse mentoring programs for senior executives willing to level up their game to ensure their organizations’ relevancy in a rapidly changing world.

The advancement of the EAC approach in HRM to better the EVP intended for employees is based on millennials’ experience of the intended internal brand (made of the EVP instilled with the organizational values) is drawn from past research on millennials, EVP, internal branding, employee experience and internal brand and, more prominently, on service design with customers. The findings in service design have led to the coin of customer models of value creation, integrated to the other

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<sup>6</sup> The focus is set on the elements of the internal brand which can realistically be adjusted, and these are enveloped in the EVP. The organizational values are not mentioned here because they correspond to overarching principles that guide conduct across the organization, they permeate the EVP, and are rarely changed (e.g., re-branding).



fields of research mentioned with the aim to create a research framework. In this sense, the framework emerging from the literature reviewed (see Figure 6) attempts to transfer and tailor these models to the HRM domain by looking at employees as internal customers. It aims at the providing of a comprehensive overview and understanding of the employee experience of an employer's offering and was utilized for the empirical study.

## **1.4. Philosophical considerations**

At the foundational phase of this research, philosophical considerations that drive research logic and inquiry techniques must be ascertained. The interpretivist philosophical paradigm is focal since this study aims at the exploration of multiple views from different research participants, who are either part of the HRM team or millennial employees of Hilti. Rashid et al. (2019) argue that such paradigm stresses "human complexity with regard to how people understand the phenomena" and the understanding of human realities is a necessary condition to understanding the world (p. 4). In fact, this interpretivist lens serves the understanding of social phenomena under study by means of a subjective epistemological stance. This entails the reliance on qualitative research methods to proceed in the data collection and analysis based on the words expressed by research participants in the conveyance of their own experiences and beliefs.

The use of the EAC approach indeed initiates an exploration of individual (employees') perspectives. They hold their own particular stance pertaining the occurrences and modalities that bind them to their employer throughout the employer-employee relationship. The investigation of employees' view demands to dive into their subjectivity regarding the EVP in a context of value co-creation. The latter underpins that value is co-created between a provider and a customer, it is created "in-use" (Grönroos, 2017), an idea which fits well in the study of the employer-employee relationship based on what is experienced from the offering (i.e., EVP) by employees (i.e., employees' experience). From the employees' viewpoint, it relates to the customer service logic that is entrenched in the receipt of the employers' offering to "create value for themselves in their everyday practices when using resources provided by a firm together with other resources and applying skills held by them" (Grönroos, 2017, p.299). The employers' stance relates to the provider service logic and is ingrained in the employer strategy and its deployment with employees. Though the employer's viewpoint is investigated to identify and understand their offering and goals, it is through the study of millennials' experience of their current intended internal brand that Hilti could question and adjust their offering as an employer.

Such an endeavour therefore draws from an abductive approach, comprehended by Rashid et al. (2019) as an “approach to produce knowledge, which occupies the middle ground between” deductive and inductive research (p. 4). Deduction tests arguments of existing theory. Induction begins with “subjective accounts of lived experiences on which theory is built inductively” from the field. Abduction aims at the “exploration and understanding of a social phenomenon through the lens of social actors” via the systematic combining of three elements that evolve simultaneously: theoretical framework, empirical framework, and case analysis. This process indeed “goes back and forth between empirical material and literature”, thus providing the flexibility necessary for the researcher, who “interprets the empirical material and provides rich descriptions based on participants’ views.” (Rashid et al., p. 5).

In this regard, this thesis first treats the literature prior to moving on to theoretical application and interaction with the empirical study of the intended internal brand and its experience by employees. This could then be harnessed to prompt the conceptualization of the EAC model of employee experience co-creation by employees and their employer.

## **1.5. Research significance**

The present research constitutes a ground-breaking approach to the study of the employer’s offering by coupling concepts of EVP, internal branding, employee experience and internal brand, and models of customers value creation with the goal to attend to promote the adoption of the EAC approach in HRM. The exploration of the intended internal brand of a local employer located in Espoo through the lens of millennials can benefit multiple actors in society: millennial employees partaking in the research, Hilti, as well as other organizations seeking to better understand professional millennials. There are at least six noteworthy positive outcomes that could unfold:

My research should first and foremost contribute to Hilti and their millennial AMs. The mechanical puzzle of this study will allow the participant organization to gain a better comprehension of their millennial employees demands in relation to their current HRM behaviour and their possible evolution to sustain the competitive advantage of their intended internal employer brand. In effect, this research can come as an eye-opening lever for Hilti to understand the benefit of a revision of their EVP in such a way that their perception of employees would shift towards seeing the latter as their internal customers through the adoption of the EAC view to HRM. This standpoint seems to constitute a key to achieving employees’ satisfaction through the offering, deployment and delivery of an EVP that can better their experience, and thereby their engagement and loyalty to the employer. Especially with millennials, who tend to easily change jobs if not fulfilled at work, such forward-looking

approach could instil the significance of a positive employee experience – and therefore, positive internal brand – within their existing employer.

Moreover, it will confer on Hilti the role of a responsible actor and model in the formulation, development and deployment of a dynamic offering for other organizations. Through their intention to better their HRM approach, employers can indeed increase employee retention by leveraging internal branding and gain in attractiveness for future employees. I greatly hope that other organizations would be interested in Hilti's recognition in succeeding in the creation of a favourable workplace environment and conditions of work, thus encouraging others in considering the worthiness of the EAC philosophy as an upgrade to their HRM approach, or on how they could enhance and hone their current internal employer brand so as to become more engaging with their existing labour force through the reviewal of their present EVP, thus subsequently rendering them also more attractive in the labour market.

Third, the EAC paradigm may well address the challenge of integrating younger generations into workplaces, and spur, guide and support the shift toward more sustainability in organizations, which ought to become more socially responsible from the very within when aiming at continuing their operations in the best conditions now and in the future. Millennials should be effectively and efficiently integrated in existing workplaces, mostly comprised of individuals representatives of older generations (Baby boomers and Generation X), to sustain the current levels of activity while boosting innovation and growth. For this purpose, the EVP of established employers must be delivered in a manner that considers millennials' profile, as compared to their elders, with the ultimate goal of integrating them satisfactorily. Their integration can be eased with the necessary tools, resources, guidance, support and training, that can facilitate their enactment of a job that should be sufficiently interesting, challenging and flexible when considered in their entire humanity, and not only as human resources. The establishment, development and sustaining of a real human relationship is needed for them to feel like they are valued, thereby allowing for the achievement of a meaningful experience with their employer.

Fourth, this study depicts how an organization can adapt its EVP for remote work of their employees. At a time when the Covid crisis has disrupted work systems and impelled organizations to switch to remote work, Hilti's case exemplifies a successful adaptation since the population studied essentially works remotely.

Fifth, this study can result in the refinement of the EVP definition, as well as in the development of a theoretical framework that relates EVP, internal branding and employee experience in the process

of adopting the EAC perspective with millennials, and perhaps even the people employed at large. The latter could map out the implications from both the employer and their employees' stances.

Last but not least, the project's goal lies in the harvesting of the research to diversify The NextGen Project current offering in the consultancy market, by extending their services to research and insights for their B2B customers.

# CHAPTER 2

## Literature review and Theoretical framework

The literature reviewed is divided into two main sections that build the theoretical framework of the present research. The first establishes the theoretical background of the core concepts tangled with the EAC view. Another section secondly builds a reasoning thread that revolves around three determining notions to this research, namely millennials, the adoption of a consumer approach to HRM (i.e., the EAC standpoint) through internal branding, and models of customer value creation, still not applied with employees (except the means-ends model) while they present characteristics which, today more than ever, could facilitate the adoption of the EAC approach to HRM.

### 2.1. Theoretical background

This section first introduces the context of an emerging and spreading idea that considers employees as customers before pursuing with the identification and definition of some key concepts relevant to such approach. These are the employee value proposition (EVP), employer branding contrasted with the more specific term of internal (employer) branding, internal brand and employee experience, as well as employee engagement.

#### 2.1.1. The employees-as-customers (EAC) paradigm

Rao (2017) asserts that the EAC paradigm shifts the perception from employees as mere human resources, workers, to employees as individuals because they are at the foundation of any organizational activity. In other terms, employees are perceived as key assets and associates to accomplishing organizational goals and objectives. They can literally become brand ambassadors when treated humanely. Such shift in paradigm depends on the idea of keeping people before profit, profit flowing from an engaged workforce who feels valued and has achieved a certain degree of work-life balance thanks to initiatives undertaken by organizational leaders.

*When we look at chief executive officers (CEOs) [of thriving multinational companies], who kept people before profit, Richard Branson of Virgin Group, Jack Ma of Alibaba Group, Frederick W. Smith of FedEx Corporation, Herb D. Kelleher of Southwest Airlines, John Mackey of Whole Foods, Craig Jelinek of Costco Wholesale Corporation, and Danny Meyer of Union Square Hospitality Group come to our mind. (Rao, 2017, p. 6)*

All of them have led a profound change within their organizations by preferring people over profit in their strategy.

They pinpointed that the core of the company's success lies in human behaviours, which confer a competitive advantage in both labour and industry-specific markets. CEOs and senior leaders play a central role in igniting the 'People-Service-Profit' philosophy – a triad introduced by Frederick W. Smith, FedEx CEO, which places employees first, customers second and shareholders third in an innovative, ethical and sensible manner – around which they build a strong vision that has the power to spark enthusiasm, encouragement and inspiration for their workforce. A unique culture of trust emerges and feeds off this soft leadership mindset, skillset, toolset and practices that overhaul the HRM approach. (Rao, p. 7–8.)

*Soft leadership can be defined as the process of setting goals; influencing people through persuasion; building strong teams; negotiating them with a win-win attitude; respecting their failures; handholding them; motivating them constantly; aligning their energies and efforts; recognizing and appreciating their contribution in accomplishing organizational goals and objectives with an emphasis on soft skills. (Rao, 2017, p. 8).*

Rao (2017) pledges in favour of soft leadership development programs that should be designed by senior leaders to mitigate the intergenerational gap between them, oftentimes baby-boomers, and younger generations such as generations X and Y.

Cardy, Miller and Ellis (2007) envisioned employees as internal customers, whose lifetime value must be central to effective management and retention. Therefore, they transferred the concept of customer equity to HRM to create the employee equity framework. This framework is prompted as a means to address organizational changes that spring from information and technology innovations, reorganizations and delayering and which can affect organizations unprecedentedly (Cardy et al., 2007, p. 140). The shift from job role ascription to project and team structures that focus on competencies challenges the ancient HRM view of employees as workers and evidences the EAC approach as an upgrade in HRM. All the more so as employees incline to remain mobile in the labour market, no longer expecting "lifetime employment at a single firm" (p. 141). Perceiving employees as customers thus becomes necessary to stand out from the myriad of employers to successfully attract, engage and retain employees. An EAC orientation can help unleash people's full potential since it affects their behaviours, and behaviours drive performance. The employee equity framework identifies three core tenets: value equity, brand equity, and retention equity (Figure 1, following). First, value equity can be understood as employees' perception of the trade-off in benefits and sacrifices/costs implied by their employment. It is thereby influenced by their personal perception pertaining convenience and service at work. Value equity increases whenever an employee is satisfied in terms of compensation/benefits, work-life balance and work environment (p. 143). Second, brand equity depicts employees' "subjective and emotional judgements concerning an organization" according to

their experiences with and within it (p. 144). It is driven by the organizational identity and culture, individual lifestyles, affective and ethical considerations and can reduce attrition through the strengthening of the psychological contract with employees. Retention equity then comes third as people’s tendency to stay with their employer depending on their relationships with the organization and its members. It revolves around socialization and training, the seniority benefits unlocked, employee development programmes and performance appraisal (p. 144).

<b>Value equity</b>	Compensation/benefits
	Work/family life balance
	Work environment
<b>Brand equity</b>	Employee perception of the organization
	Celebrations
	Ethics
<b>Retention equity</b>	Socialization and training
	Benefits and privileges based on seniority
	Employee development
	Performance appraisal

**Figure 1. The employee equity framework. Cardy, Miller and Ellis, 2007.**

This employee equity scheme comes as a comprehensive tool that describes the different aspects of the EVP in any organizational setting. It can be relied upon for employee segmentation decisions according to their lifetime value to the organization, with subsequent implications on how employees should be treated (Cardy et al., 2007, p.145–147).

Hence, the EAC approach to HRM appears to depend on the adoption of a progressive soft leadership mindset (Cardy et al., 2007, p.144–145) which encompasses five elements to be presented hereafter: the EVP, internal employer branding, the internal brand, employees’ experience of it, and employee engagement.

### **2.1.2. The five core tenets to the EAC philosophy**

It is argued in this thesis that the employees-as-customers (EAC) philosophy depends on five interrelated concepts (all defined in the Terminology): 1) the *EVP*, defined in parallel to the employer brand, 2) *internal (employer) branding*, differentiated from external (employer) branding, 3) *internal brand*, one built via the EVP and *organizational values*, 4) *employee experience*, and 5) *employee engagement*. The workforce experiences the employer’s offering (or EVP) transcended by the

organizational values across the internal branding process. From this experience, which is simultaneously individual and collective, stems the internal brand. All these notions are defined and described further in this sub-section.

First, the *EVP* is the value proposition offered by an organization as a potentially attractive employer to both current and potential employees of the organization. It encompasses “the totality of the organization's way of life, frameworks, mentalities, and employee relationship alongside urging people to grasp and share objectives for achievement, efficiency and fulfilment both on individual and professional levels” (Pawar & Charak, 2015, p. 1196). It thereby emerges from the organizational culture and environment of the workplace constructed for and with employees to achieve organizational goals. In other words, the EVP is central to the employer brand conveyed by an organization for current and potential employees to commit to it throughout the employee life cycle, which encompasses six stages: pre-employment, introduction, growth, maturity, decline and post-employment (App, Merk, & Büttgen, 2012, p. 270–274).

The employer brand corresponds to an organization’s image with a variety of stakeholders (Sehgal & Malati, 2013). It can be separated between external and internal employer brand. In particular, internal employer brand centres on activities provided to support employee development within the organization (Özcan & Elçi, 2020, p. 2). Employer branding then consists of the branding procedure constituted by an organization’s endeavours that aim at the conveyance of an alluring work environment to their existing and prospective workers (Pawar & Charak, 2015, p. 1196). It builds on the EVP to stand out from other employers.

Dabirian, Kietzmann and Diba (2017) identified seven employer branding value propositions that import to current, former and future employees at IBM Watson (Figure 2). These propositions include (1) social elements of work, (2) interesting and challenging work tasks, (3) the extent to which skills can be applied in meaningful ways, (4) opportunities for professional development, (5) economic issues tied to compensation, (6) the role of management, and (7) work/life balance. (Dabirian, Kietzmann & Diba, 2017).

SOCIAL VALUE	INTEREST VALUE	APPLICATION VALUE	DEVELOPMENT VALUE	ECONOMIC VALUE	MANAGEMENT VALUE	WORK/LIFE BALANCE
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Is this a fun place to work with talented people and great organizational culture?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Is this an interesting place to work, with challenging but achievable goals?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Is the work meaningful and does it invite the application of knowledge and skills?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Are there opportunities for employees to grow and advance professionally?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Is work rewarded appropriately through salaries, benefits, and perks?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Are managers good, honest leaders who inspire, trust, protect, enable and respect employees?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Are work arrangements flexible enough to achieve success on and off the job?</li> </ul>

**Figure 2. Seven employer branding value propositions. Dabirian, Kietzmann and Diba, 2017.**



Because the acquisition of new employees is costlier than the retention of current employees (Dabirian et al., 2017, p. 204) – which resonates with the logic applied to customers, it is more expensive to conquer new customers than existing leads – the focus should be placed on the satisfaction and retention of current employees. Notwithstanding employer branding is often used interchangeably with internal branding (Saleem & Iglesias, 2016, p. 43), internal (employer) branding activities should specifically be strengthened to encourage employees to keep working with the company.

*Internal branding is the process through which organizations make a company-wide effort within a supportive culture to integrate brand ideologies, leadership HRM (human resource management), internal brand communications and internal brand communities as a strategy to enable employees to consistently co-create brand value with multiple stakeholders (Saleem & Iglesias, 2016, p. 50).*

Whilst employer branding relates to the reputation of an employing organization both with its potential and existing staff, it has been argued to be more relevant with potential hires since it aims at a differentiation from other organizations as a potential workplace (Saleem & Iglesias, 2016, p. 53). Moreover, with regards to internal branding as a facilitator of value co-creation between employees and other stakeholders, it is ascertained to be mainly oriented towards current employees (p. 52). This is also outlined by the two subcategories of employer branding that have been distinguished by Sengupta, Bamel, and Singh (2015), viz. external employer branding and internal employer branding.

*Internal employer branding* accounts for the creation and infusion of a corporate culture of trust between the employer and their employees, or establishing strong corporate moral values, from which can spur employees' pride, or satisfying employees through the fulfilment of their psychological contracts, whereas external employer branding is incorporated to corporate external branding – which “includes the moral practices of leaders, organisation's activities towards fulfilling the social responsibilities, building trust, and trustworthiness to shareholders and customers by being authentic” – (Sengupta et al., 2015, pp. 308–309). In this research, the employer brand is approached and scrutinized from the internal perspective in conformity with previous definitions of internal branding.

Third, derived from the definition of internal branding by Sengupta et al. (2015, pp. 308–309), an *internal brand* refers to the culture of trust between employer and employees, or the strong corporate moral values, or the satisfaction of employees through the fulfilment of their psychological contracts. Otherwise, an internal brand is determined in the employee viewpoint of the brand (Hankinson, 2004, p. 84). Due to their broad definition among researchers, the internal (employer) brand and the EVP can be seen as overlapping concepts. Perhaps the distinction between the two can better be conceived

when looking at the means-end chain model adapted to employer brand choice modified from Ronda et al. (2018, see Figure 3). Whilst the internal brand can be conceived as an abstract concept, the EVP dwells more in the elements concretely provided by an organization or perceivable for its workforce. The EVP is comprised of employer attributes, namely “employer-extrinsic traits set by companies that constitute an organization's offering to employees” (Ronda et al., 2018, p. 574). The internal brand consists more of an image of the organization that is mentally and socially constructed through the EVP and the organizational values (more details about the internal brand in 2.3.). The latter refer to the core principles that guide both organizational and individual conduct, they constitute an ideology instilled in the organization across people and scales by means of the EVP (further details about organizational values in 2.3.). The EVP differs from organizational values owing to its concreteness and its deployment, planned to facilitate the delivery of work by employees for external stakeholders (e.g., customers), whereas values serve as an internal ideology to be instilled via the EVP and recognized on a more abstract level by stakeholders. This explains the focus on the EVP to better the employee experience in this thesis.

Fourth, as previously posited, the employer brand can be encapsulated in the *employee experience* of the EVP and official organizational values at the organization. Whether an organization is perceived as a “good workplace” in the labour market (ref. external employer brand) and with their employees (ref. internal brand) depends on their internal branding to strategize their EVP in alignment with their organizational values, for both directly reflect the organization’s ability to build and sustain trust, establish commonly shared values and satisfy employees. In this regard, the internal brand is contingent on employees’ experience(s) of the EVP and organizational values. Employee experience stems from “people’s perception of the sum of their interactions with (an) organization that lead to their feeling — their thinking — influencing their behaviours and their performance, according to Stephanie Denino, employee experience manager at Accenture in Montreal”, who attended the Employee Experience Summit Canada in Toronto (2015). Employee experience can be approached through people’s experience of three interrelated organizational main areas that are the physical, technological and cultural environments (Morgan & Goldsmith, 2017). Yet, it is essentially subjective and depends on a set of multiple variables.

Whilst internal branding ensures that employees’ brand vision, values, beliefs and goals are congruent with those of the organization (Matanda & Ndubisi, 2013, p. 1033), its effect on employees and whether they adopt brand-supporting attitudes and behaviours vary depending on demographics such as the age, length of service, educational background (Punjaisri & Wilson, 2011, p. 1531) and cultural

background (Sengupta et al., 2015, p. 308). In fact, individual values differ throughout the employee life cycle, which impacts the perceived person-organization fit.

Punjaisri and Wilson (2011) stress that internal branding impacts brand identification and performance for employees over thirty, whereas it relates more strongly to brand commitment and loyalty with younger workers (p. 1530). In addition, the more educated employees are, the more internal branding is needed to reinforce their brand loyalty. Likewise, the longer employees have been involved with the organization, the greater the impact internal branding has on the reinforcement of their brand identification, loyalty and performance (p. 1531).

Moreover, the EVP model coined by Sengupta et al. (2015) identifies six different sets of values in their study of employees' preferred values among Indian organizations and reveals that all of them may differ depending on the gender and hierarchical position.

- (1) Career potential values encompass quick growth, recognition of potential, skills utilisation, continual training and development and challenging and interesting work dimensions.
- (2) Justice values are embedded in fairness and morality to create harmonious relationships through transparent company policies, moral practices of managers, the scope of contributing to the organizational objectives, and the working environment constructed through relationships with peers and supervisors.
- (3) Employee engagement values cover the feeling of emotional connection with the organization and the job, transferability of the job, stretched assignments and the scope of diversified learning.
- (4) Feel-good values infuse trust, security and balance in employees' life and can be achieved through work-life balance, job security, and depend on whether the organizational promises are kept.
- (5) Comfort values are relative to the working time and the office infrastructures.
- (6) Lastly, esteem values emerge from organizational branding, one's hierarchical position and the competitiveness of the pay and facilities; they confer social distinction through the establishment and reinforcement of status and identity.

The authors find that all of them could be used to shape the value proposition through internal branding in India.

Fifth, *employee engagement* is ignited by employee experience and spurred by the EAC approach to HRM. Employee engagement stems from the understanding and commitment to the success of the business strategy and goes beyond mere job satisfaction because it “incorporates aspects of

commitment, pride and advocacy about the organization's products and brand" (Khan, 2014, p. 27). It results from the realisation of one's value to the organization, enabled through meaningful and dedicated work that meets one's need for autonomy, intrinsic rewards and influence (Osborne & Hammoud, 2017, p. 52). Employee engagement is experiential, it is the result of employees' experience of the organization. Internal branding thus proves relevant in sparking employees' engagement since it provides them with meaning in their work and belief in the employer brand, with subsequent commitment emergence and development (Khan, p. 27). This statement suggests that internal branding – through the leverage of the EVP and the organizational values – consists of an essential lever of employee engagement throughout one's employment, thus influencing their retention and performance.

The consideration of the subjectivity of one's experience of the EVP-organizational values bundle and its dependency on demographics, such as age, length of service, educational and cultural background (as previously mentioned), alongside the entrance of younger generations in the workforce, induced the decision to focus on a specific generation, the generation Y, within the frame of this research. The generation Y is also labelled and widely recognized under the term millennials. In particular, millennials' approach to work may radically differ from previous generations and their effective integration within workplaces today appears critical to any organizations to ensure a successful transition towards more sustainable practices and behaviours in the best conditions.

## **2.2. Towards the adoption of the EAC approach with millennials**

This section provides an overview of the existing literature covering three core notions to this research and their related features. First, the body of literature on millennials' expectations, values and their influence at the organizational level is introduced to provide information on the target segment of this study. Second, the adoption of a consumer approach in HRM (i.e., the EAC perspective) through internal branding is brought forth as a lever to attract, engage and satisfy employees in the workplace effectively. Third, attention is directed towards the literature on models of customer value-creation, which are yet to be applied with employees to investigate their experience, to remain cohesive with the growing trend of perceiving employees as customers, and possibly develop it further in the HRM domain. Fourth, a research framework is developed to rely on the EAC view to HRM for the empirical study.

## **2.2.1. Millennials, their characteristics and influence at the organizational level**

Research on millennials has focused on investigating their career expectations, behaviours, values, ideas and interests, how they influence millennials in the workplace, and how much they differ from previous generations, thereby affecting the workplace and overall organizational functioning.

Pyöriä, Ojala, Saari and Järvinen (2017) address the common notion that younger generations value work less than their elders in Finland according to four variables, namely their age, their gender, educational level and family status. The data collected from StatisticsFinland's Quality of Work Life Surveys, conducted under the form of face-to-face interviews with a sample of millennials and some younger peers (all aged between 15 and 29), shows that there has been a steady value attributed to work and workplace commitment among young Finns over time. Attitudes of people of the same age in 1984, 1990, 1997, 2003, 2008, and 2013 remained similar with regards to the "value attributed to work, home and family life, and leisure" and to their "readiness to change jobs in either the same or different occupational field" (p. 3). This could be contingent on the widespread youth early entrance in the working life aside of their studies, along with the rise of unemployment levels, regardless of whether young people hold a higher education degree (pp. 7–8, 10). Overall, the more people earn, the more they value work, although surprisingly, those with the highest incomes and having pursued with a higher education proved to value more leisure (pp. 8–9). Another finding of utmost importance lies in the decline of both the value attached to family and work in case of dissatisfaction in the workplace (p. 9). More specifically, monotony and threats to employment security increased the readiness to change job, an observation dependent on the job nature and content (pp. 9–10). On the contrary, young Finns show greater commitment to their employer whenever they identify with the work community (p. 10). The fear of unemployment and losing their lifestyle may also add to the value attributed to work among the youth.

In their article published in 2015, Kuron, Lyons, Schweitzer and Ng found that "interesting work, achievement, good co-workers, doing work that helped people and salary" (p. 991) remains relatively steady as Canadian millennials gain experience in the workplace and over time, even though the school-to-work-transition "may impact one's self-efficacy and outcome expectations, including work values" owing to a change in the nature of feedback, from academic to professional (p. 994). Whereas pre-career millennials are enrolled in higher education and are still exploring career possibilities, working millennials are establishing themselves in the workplace, according to the career decisions they made to find employment and the feedback they received from their external environments. To

Kuron et al. (2015), on one hand, HRM should promote an “interesting, meaningful work, a collegial work environment and a socially responsible culture” (p. 1002) with pre-career millennials. On the other, working conditions and pay could attract experienced millennials better. Furthermore, the salience given to both practical aspects, such as “salary, supervision, job security and hours of work”, and intrinsic aspects of work, such as “continuous learning, advancement and using one’s abilities”, is inclined to grow the more work experience one has (p. 1001). Kuron et al. concluded on the organizational need to consider and revise the entire EVP to stay relevant to the “right” employees. Among other suggestions to succeed in attracting, engaging and retaining them, job crafting and flexibility appear essential to any employer willing to stay in the game with millennials and the generations to come, all in search of a work-life balance (Kuron et al., 2015, p. 1003).

While trying to address millennials’ values and expectations, another type of enhancement of the EVP can also stem in the communicational realm. Myers and Sadaghiani (2010) shed light on this possible organizational shift through the examination of millennials’ characteristics when tangled with communicational dynamics. They focus on five areas of utmost relevancy to today’s organizational relationships and performance, namely:

- (1) The socialization process and membership negotiation
- (2) The development of relationships at work according to employment expectations. When millennials may expect to rapidly see their needs met, their seniors may need some more time to build a climate of trust with them (p. 230). This can lead to millennials’ dismissal, a climate embedded in a lack of trust, or even a shift of responsibility for whatever negative performance outcomes onto millennials, as they are perceived as over-confident by the leadership – oftentimes represented by baby-boomers, whose set of work values differ from millennials (p. 228). Yet, millennials bring about some changes that connote positive implications when looking at their needs for continuous, regular, and constructive feedback; the establishment and sustaining of close and strong relationships with their supervisors; their expectation for transparency from supervisors, to stay motivated by observing and understanding the bigger picture (p. 229). Millennials’ appeal for teamwork can play the role of a facilitator in establishing and building trust among colleagues and integrating newcomers successfully since teamwork fosters a system of open communication, feedback and “develops a shared sense of responsibility for the team’s success” (p. 231). However, questions of conformity, power in decision-making and performance can arise from a heterogeneous team constitution (age, seniority, and influence) and should be researched.

- (3) The use of advanced information and communication technologies (ICT). It makes room for virtual social contacts, teleworking, a potential for a rise in group participation – regardless of the place and time – as well as a flattened hierarchy. Millennials’ expertise with ICT can be leveraged to build a competitive advantage as they can endorse the title of lead users, who advise and mentor their elders about ICT, a phenomenon which could “influence intergenerational relations and the communicative attitudes and behaviours of organizations”, and perhaps even millennials’ own attitudes pertaining technology (p. 232). As a result, young workers could find more meaning in their work and feed their high achievement orientation.
- (4) Reactions to the job market and the implications of a full-time employment.
- (5) Millennials’ achievement-orientation and their aspirations for engaging in leadership (p. 226). Millennials’ attributes can contribute to the redefinition of the EVP from a communication perspective, to the extent that they can urge organizations to revise their entire business model through a more sustainable lens.

Such influence of millennials’ expectations and attributes on their perception of a (prospective) workplace and their possible beneficial impact regarding sustainability issues is similarly observable from the study of Alonso-Almeida and Llach (2019). The latter demonstrates that millennials are attracted to sustainable companies, wherein, once employed, they contribute to the adoption and reinforcement of sustainable organizational behaviours in the daily, simultaneously strengthening both their personal sense of accomplishing a meaningful work and their societal value as primary stakeholders (pp. 238–239). The generation Y career decisions are made on the basis of their set of individual values rather than only work values and economic expectations (p. 244). This drives them to prefer working in responsible organizations where their personal values resonate with those of the employer, thus leading to person-organization fit and effective development in the tenures they hold – as compared to other places where a mismatch might be felt due to conflictual values and behaviours.

In effect, previous research on millennials has prioritized the study of their values, expectations, attributes and behaviours, and related influence both in the workplace and on organizational behaviour, yet without really exploring their direct experience of the intended internal brand offered by their employer. Whilst they have broached the significance of reshaping the EVP to attract, integrate, engage and retain millennials in the workplace and their potential impact at the organizational level, turning organizations into sustainable actors, none has explored millennials’ employee experience *per se* by considering them as internal customers, whose needs and demands must be addressed effectively. This research should fill this gap.

### **2.2.2. The EAC view to integrate and satisfy millennials in the workplace**

Drucker's idea (1953) that employees must be considered in their entire humanity (Van Marrewijk, 2004, p. 136) resonates with today's importance given to building a true meaningful connection with customers by considering them as persons more than mere consumers. This makes room for the adoption and implementation of the EAC view to HRM through internal branding as a lever to integrate and satisfy millennials effectively in the workplace, which corresponds to the second main point of this literature review. In addition, HRM practices are nowadays more than ever expected to meet requirements of internal consistency in putting people first, allowing active interactions between employees and management up to the point that the gap between them is being filled through a unique culture, which builds a community, wherein all "take pride in their job, their team and their company" (Van Marrewijk, 2004, p. 140).

Punjaisri, Wilson and Evanschitzky (2008) purport that internal branding draws on internal communications and HRM practices in shaping the organizational environment experienced by employees. Marketers add value to internal communications through their knowledge of the brand and understanding of "people's motivation, needs, desires, and weaknesses" used to shape employees' perceptions (Punjaisri et al., 2008, p. 411). The coordination of their efforts to those of HRM managers ensures the conveyance of a congruent, compelling, and engaging brand message internally (p. 412). In this respect, the existence of internal branding at the overlap between HRM and marketing elements suggests that it needs to be approached in relation to the specific work environment, wherein the coordination between internal communications and training on employees' commitment to a well-identified brand positively affects their delivery of the brand promise (Punjaisri & Wilson, 2011). Hence, the creation of employees' experiences, by means of the collaboration between marketers and HRM managers, is needed and stresses the adoption and enactment of the EAC view by the organization.

The association of the internal customer orientation (that is the EAC view) and internal branding advanced by Matanda and Ndubisi (2013) fosters and supports the person-organization fit of employees – defined as the "needs–satisfaction match and compatibility between individual employee and organisational values" – in their research conducted with Australian employees of a major local retail chain (Matanda & Ndubisi, 2013, p. 1032, 1036). Not only does internal customer orientation nurture the match between employees and the organization with subsequent positive effect on employee involvement, commitment and loyalty, but it also guides employees' attitudes and behaviours in their delivery of quality to other employees (p. 1036) and delivery of the brand promise



to external customers (p. 1047). The EAC philosophy can thereby be harnessed in a context of value co-creation with millennials, who's fit in the organization is nowadays essential.

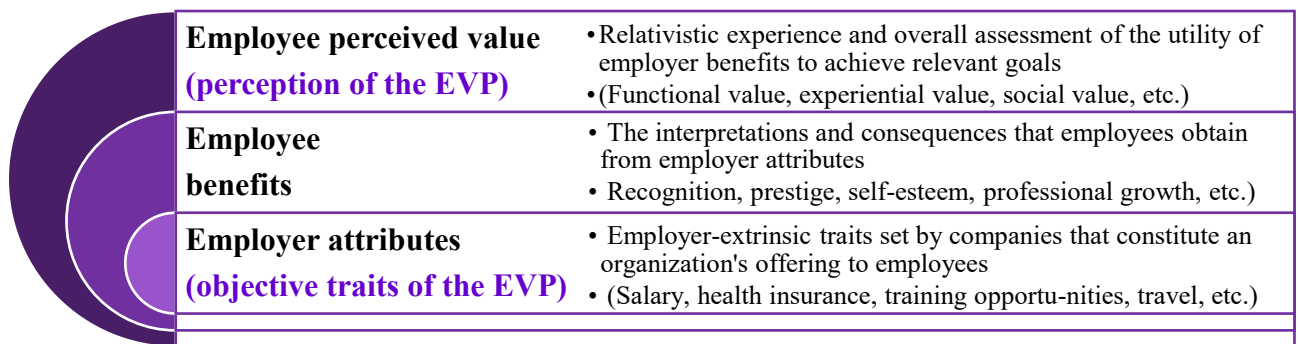
To Matanda and Ndubisi (2013), an internal customer orientation indeed infuses a culture of understanding of internal customers' requirements that affects external customer needs and preferences through the increase of internal customer benefits, subsequently resulting in the creation of additional buyer value (p. 1034). They therefore support the need for a holistic customer-orientation by organizations, with both internal and external customers. They outline internal branding from Einwiller's and Will's definition (2002), as "the systematically planned management of behaviour, communication, and symbolism utilised by an organisation to attain a favourable and positive reputation with target audiences for an organisation" (p. 1033). They further the salient role of organizations in the facilitation of internal brand building via the initiation and facilitation of behavioural changes that are consistent with the desired brand identity. Then, internal branding must align personal and organizational values by means of an internal communication programme, which inspires and motivates employees (p. 1034). In fact, communication of information about the brand rises employees' comfort in communicating brand values to customers since they can perceive a goal congruence "in the implementation of marketing and branding strategies" (p. 1047) and esteem that they contribute to the success of the brand (p. 1035). Moreover, the feeling of obtaining support from both their colleagues and supervisors "through recognition schemes and certain degrees of perceived autonomy" is positively associated with employees' belief of an effective and efficient delivery of the brand promise (p. 1025). The combination of a supportive and inspiring internal communication programme to training programmes therefore prompts employees' job satisfaction, person-organization fit, just as their intention to remain with their employer (p. 1035). In this regard, the authors highlighted the need for future research to investigate employees' perception of their work environment by taking into account their singularities, which implies that internal branding does not impact everyone equally within an organization (p. 1031).

*"Internal branding literature show that although the brand is a customer experience concept (Mac Laverty, McQuillan and Oddie, 2007), its effective management requires to coordinate it with employee experience, that is, delivering a brand promise to employees before delivering it to the customers (Azizi, Ghytasivand, Fakharmansh, 2012; Foster, Punjaisri and Cheng, 2010; Punjaisri and Evanschitzky and Wilson, 2009)." (Khan, 2014, p. 27)*

Recalling employee experience defined as "people's perception of the sum of their interactions with (an) organization that lead to their feeling — their thinking — influencing their behaviours and their performance" (Stephanie Denino, employee experience manager at Accenture in Montreal, 2015), the adoption of the EAC view demands to examine employees' experience of the intended internal

brand – composed of the EVP infused with the organizational values – of their employer. Specifically, the internal customer orientation requires to look on differences in employees’ perception of the EVP in a similar way to what is done with external customers.

Ronda, Valor, and Abril (2018) coined an employee-centric framework to follow when strategizing employer branding with reference to consumer-centric paradigms (Figure 3), a first in the realm of HRM. Accordingly, they argue in favour of “employee benefits as a direct source of perceived value” from their examination of previous literature on employer brand attractiveness through the lens of the means-end chain models adapted to employer brands, which distinguish employer attributes, employee benefits and the perceived value by employees (p. 579). Hence, consumer attributes, benefits and perceived value are respectively translated into employer attributes, employee benefits and employee perceived value. Means-ends models seem suitable in the context of the employer-employee relationship since Lanning (1998) postulates that “the value that matters is the value in the customer’s experience not the value in the product. He maintains that the customer’s resulting experience is the essence of the value proposition” (Khalifa, 2004, pp. 653–654).



**Figure 3. Means–end chain model adapted to employer brand choice. Modified from Ronda et al., 2018.** The text added to the original figure is coloured in purple.

Employer attributes refer to objective and controllable variables of measurement of objective traits and characteristics of the EVP (i.e., offering). Four types were identified: organizational attributes (general organizational characteristics and corporate image), job attributes (job specific), workplace attributes (features associated with the infrastructures, aesthetics and sensorial aspects of the workplace) and CSR attributes (relative to the employer’s concern with socio-environmental issues) (p. 577). Then, the variables of measurement of these attributes’ implications for employees consist of employee benefits, all subjective and categorized under three groups: functional (source of convenience), experiential (source of feelings of excitement, challenge, interest, creativity, social connection, appreciation and support, as well as person-organization fit), and symbolic or psychological benefits (sources of “pride from membership”, “self-esteem enhancement”, “feeling of

belonging, direction and purpose”) (p. 577) – It is nevertheless noteworthy to mitigate the authors’ position on the subjectivity of employee benefits that can be articulated from the employer attributes because they have become increasingly predictable. In fact, it is possible to uncover certain benefits when constructing the EVP because they result from the attributes. For instance, a laptop allows employees to access, research, collect, organize and manage data (convenience), communicate within and inside-out of the organization (social connection, belonging, support, sense of purpose), access the company intranet, reduce costs and separate work from private sphere. – From employee benefits the workforce develops a perception of the EVP, that is the employee perceived value, which crystallizes the internal brand (see Figure 6).

Past research had mixed employer attributes and employee benefits, extensively focused on attributes rather than benefits as a source of perceived value with some authors advancing models that achieved the disentanglement of attributes and benefits yet approaching them simultaneously, while their effects on employees’ decision-making should be drawn from separate analyses in the perspective of Ronda, Valor, and Abril (2018). The latter eventually determined the employee perceived value as the value perceived from the employer attributes and benefits that allow employees to achieve their needs, goals and desires (p. 579). The perceived value of an organization’s EVP therefore is individualistic and relativistic; it refers to the individual experience of a certain situation, under specific conditions, in comparison to other offerings by other employers. It can evolve over time owing to shifts in “perceptions, preferences and evaluations” in different stages of employment (Ronda et al., 2018, p. 579). In this sense, the resort to a framework built with reference to a consumer-centric stance appears relevant in the field of HRM. More precisely, the EVP can and should be approached from a marketing stance to successfully differentiate workers and segment them in the employee market, a process whereby addressing employees’ needs, desires, expectations and demands can be bettered.

### **2.2.3. Application of models of customer value creation with employees**

The adoption of a consumer centric stance in the field of HRM points to the application of models of customer value creation with employees (i.e., internal customers), and more precisely, with millennials considering their predominance in the current labour market. A model of customer value (or customer value model) is a configuration that seeks to build connections between different elements of the value proposition when aiming at understanding the value creation phenomenon. Diverse customer value creation models have been developed because of the ambiguity conveyed by the term of value and its multidimensionality. Gallarza et al. (2011) indeed stress the still ambiguous

meaning of the concept of value due to the existence of a scattered literature whose examination remains utterly multivocal and ambiguous (p. 182). Perceived value (also qualified as consumer value) has been differentiated from customer value in that the first refers to the possession-consumption<sup>7</sup> of products and services, whilst the second encompasses the overall assessment of opting for a brand and its offering as compared to others. However, the two cannot be segregated when pondering over the ultimate goal of building a sustainable competitive advantage through branding. (Gallarza et al., 2011, p. 183.) In that sense, value has been tied to “three key strategic marketing principles – market segmentation (Tellis and Gaeth, 1990); product differentiation (Heskett et al., 1997); and brand positioning (Gale, 1994; Arvidsson, 2006)” (Gallarza et al., 2011, p. 182). This sub-section introduces the two integrative models of customer value creation considered useful and relevant to this research as they seemingly confer the dynamism necessary to study the employee experience of the EVP. These are the model of value dynamics creation and the customer value build-up model.

On one hand, the value build-up model (Figure 4, following) draws from the means-ends model of customer value to address the value equation by focusing on the benefits of the value proposition, presuming that they surpass the customer sacrifices (Khalifa, 2004, p. 656). From the EAC stance, this means that the benefits of the EVP exceed employees’ sacrifices in their experience of the EVP. The value build-up model posits that four factors affect customers’ perception of value: the view of the customer, either as a consumer or as a person; the view of the relationship by both the company and the customer, more transactional or interactional; the view of customer needs that the company intends to satisfy, more utilitarian or psychic; and the view of customer benefits, more tangible or intangible. Customer value builds up when the customer feels being addressed to as a person more than just as a mere consumer and when his needs are satisfied. The customer’s evaluation of the value created is contingent on a “a rich set of criteria, which can be either objective or subjective or a combination of both” depending on the customer perceived type of relationship with the company, the type of needs (utilitarian or psychic) he intends to satisfy, and whether he is treated as a consumer or as a person. (Khalifa, 2004, p. 657.)

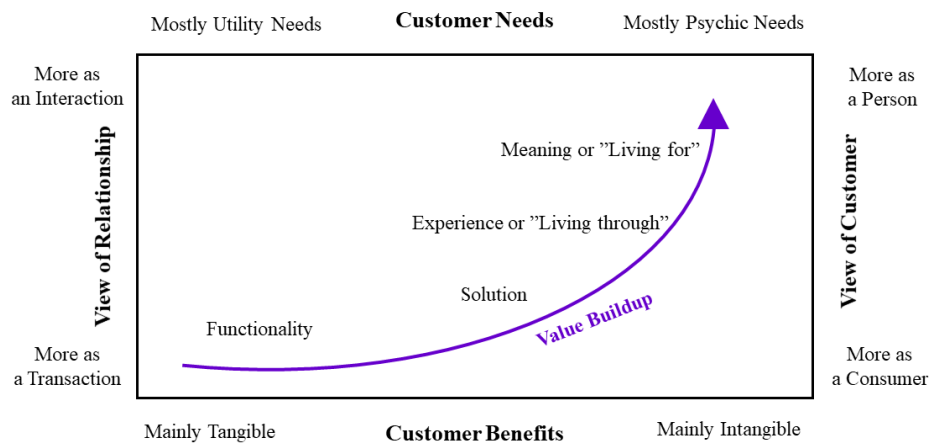
*“The customer value accumulates as the satisfied needs advance from utility to psychic, as the customer benefits offered transcend tangibles to intangibles, as the nature of the relationship between the customer and the supplier develops from transaction to interaction, and as the customer treatment shifts from being a consumer to being a person” (Khalifa, p. 657).*

Transferring the sentence above to the HRM field may help in understanding the shift that the EAC philosophy can spur in the HRM field. In effect, the internal customer value accumulates as the

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<sup>7</sup> Or, in today’s changing world, the access to-use of products and services more than their possession-consumption.

satisfied needs advance from utility to psychic and move situation-wise, as the employee benefits transcend tangibles into intangibles, as the nature of the relationship between the employee and the employer develops from contract to genuine human interaction and collaboration, and as the employee treatment shifts from being a mere human resource to being a person. This personal reformulation might make more sense when broaching the four distinct forms of value that are functionality, solution, experience and meaning – whose levels are arrangeable from low to high (Khalifa, 2004, p. 657). Functionality is relative to the facilitating features of the offering. Solution extends the offering by including some support features which can perform some of the activities usually performed by the customer. Experience entails adding intangibles to the tangible offering, thereby involving the customer, including both his rational and emotional expectations, in the transformative process of the value proposition rather than considering him only as a recipient of it. In this regard, the value build-up model could suit within the frame of the study of employees’ experience of the internal brand. On top of that, meaning – the fourth form of value that emerges from the value build-up model – is reached whenever the worth to the experience is amplified, by correlating “the immediateness of the experience to the durability of strongly held personal philosophy”. (Khalifa, 2004, p. 658.) When thinking of employees’, and especially millennials’, need to find meaning in their work, the value build-up model represents an analysis tool that is potentially transmissible from the consumer world to the realm of HRM.

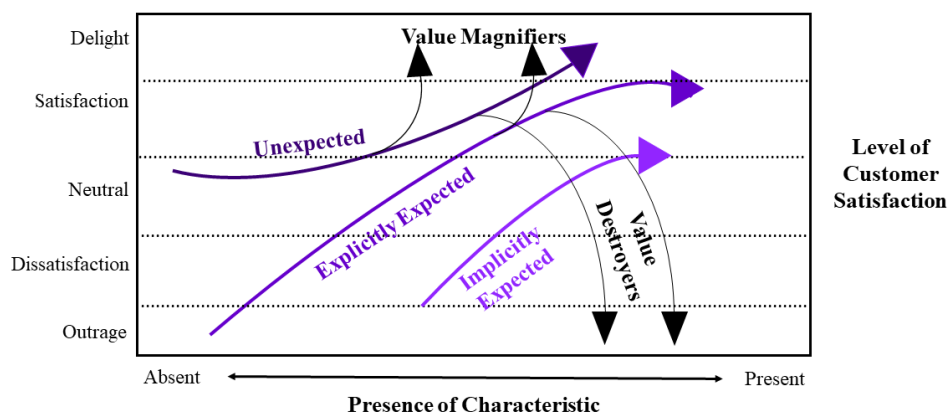


**Figure 4. Customer value build-up model. Khalifa, 2004.**

On the other hand, the model of dynamics of value creation (Figure 5, succeeding) reflects the dynamics that influence customers’ evaluation of a company’s total offering by presenting a taxonomy of elements of customer value divided into five categories: satisfiers, dissatisfiers, excitors, value magnifiers, and value destroyers. It evaluates the level of customer satisfaction based on the presence of certain characteristics in the value proposition that lead to different states of satisfaction,

from outrage, to dissatisfaction, neutralism, satisfaction, and ultimately delight (Khalifa, pp. 658–659). When satisfaction and dissatisfaction are relative to the offering basic attributes, delight and outrage emanate from the interaction between the company and customers, who want to be treated as persons more than mere consumers (Khalifa, p. 659). Value magnifiers consist of interaction features which have the power to satisfy customer core needs of security, justice and self-esteem according to Schneider and Bowen (1999). On the contrary, value destroyers are interaction features that utterly dissatisfy these customer core needs. (Khalifa, p. 659) Regardless of the degree of satisfaction reached through the product/service attributes, a poor treatment by the company may destroy one’s experience of their offering. Conversely, magnifiers add to the already perceived value by allowing customers to enhance their self-esteem or reach self-actualization. (Khalifa, 2004, p. 660.) Such categorization helps the management in the design of service offerings by primary directing their attention toward the satisfiers, excitors and value magnifiers, in parallel of the maintenance of a limitation or reduction of the dissatisfiers and value destroyers (p. 662).

Because the value dynamics model attends to evaluate customers’ experience of a company’s total offering by presenting a taxonomy of elements of customer value (involving different states of satisfaction) which are influenced by the relationship between customers and the organization, its transfer could suit into an internal marketing approach with employees. Similarly to external customers with the customer value proposition, employees can indeed gauge the EVP characteristics according to whether they are expected, unexpected, or implicitly expected, magnifying or conversely destroying their experience with and within the organization.



**Figure 5. Customer value dynamics model. Khalifa, 2004.**

It is noteworthy that models of customer value creation belong to the domain of design-led service management, described as a “‘human-centered, holistic, creative, and iterative approach’ (Patrício et al., 2018, p. 6) to finding, creating and refining service offerings that benefit others or oneself” (Schallehn et al., 2019, p. 215).

Because employees' experience of the internal brand is bound to their interaction with their employers, employees can be simultaneously/interchangeably qualified and perceived as customers and consumers with their employers. In their study, Schallehn et al. (2019) distinguished the terms customer and consumer. Whereas the customer directly interacts with the provider to purchase an element of the offering, a consumer seeks the gain of a consumption experience, that is, benefit(s) from the use of the offering (Schallehn et al., 2019, p. 217). In this thesis, employees are advocated as being internal customers to the firm, thus stressing the long-term approach to their relationship to their employers, yet it is their experience of the EVP instilled with the organizational values which is under study. However, since employees' experience of the offering is dependent on their relationship and interaction with their employers (and other employees), it can be argued that the tenet of employee experience can be conceived as a long-term phenomenon punctuated with and contingent on a myriad of punctual and ongoing interactions between employees (internal customers) and the EVP (offering), parallelly to interactions between employees and their employers (service provider). Punctual interactions may occur during team building events, innovation challenges, meetings, etc. Ongoing interactions may be project- and/or team-based, across spaces and facilitated by technology.

### **2.3. Summary of the theoretical framework**

Whereas past research has been orientated toward the study of millennials' values, attributes and behaviours, the EAC approach to HRM emphasizes the need to study them in relation to the intended internal brand (defined in the next paragraph) offered by their employer to possibly gain an effective understanding of millennials in the setting of their workplace and the labour market by and large. In particular, the coupling of internal branding to the internal customer orientation suggests that there exists a need for research on millennials' experience of the intended internal brand by means of the EAC view.

Because employer and employees have different standpoints, this thesis distinguishes intended internal brand from actually experienced internal brand, also referred to as internal brand in this document. On one hand, this thesis argues that the *intended internal brand* is the one aimed at by the employer through internal branding, and which can be reconstructed from the conjunction of the EVP and the official organizational values. Pawar and Charak (2015) posit that the EVP is affected "by the organization's values, society, initiative, environment, talent, and reward programs" (p. 1197). Thus, the notion of intended internal brand must include the consideration of the official organizational values since the latter transcend the entire organization's functioning and, in this way, affect the EVP and how the latter is experienced by employees. Expressed otherwise, the EVP

comprehends the employer attributes that reflect the organizational values, are influenced by them, and mould the employee experience. The *organizational values* are here comprehended as the core guiding principles that influence behaviours, attitudes, programs and all systems within an organization (Lencioni, 2002, p. 114). At most, they somewhat determine a preferred and expected trajectory line of conduct across the organization. At least, organizational values capture the socially and culturally acceptable, that is that in the workplace, which is aligned with them, thereby consistent with the intended internal brand. They contribute to building both intended internal brand (i.e., organizational culture, set expectations and conduct) and internal brand (i.e., individual cultural fit and decision-making). They are abstract, yet mentally constructed. “Values initiatives have nothing to do with building consensus—they’re about imposing a set of fundamental, strategically sound beliefs on a broad group of people” (Lencioni, 2002, p. 121). Thus, they participate in the construction of the intended internal brand by shaping a common ideology across scales and people within the organization. In fact, they transcend the EVP and serve the internal vision in that their definition and interaction describe how the organization impacts the community. Ideally, they reflect the intended internal brand in the EVP. All aspects of the EVP should be congruent with the organizational values in a continuous process of internal branding.

*“...your core values need to be integrated into every employee-related process — hiring methods, performance management systems, criteria for promotions and rewards, and even dismissal policies. From the first interview to the last day of work, employees should be constantly reminded that core values form the basis for every decision the company makes” (Lencioni, 2002).*

On the other hand, this thesis asserts that the (*actual*) *internal brand* refers to the overarching perception of the organization by employees, according to their experience of the EVP (see Figure 3) and the organizational values. The internal brand depends on employees’ experience of the intended internal brand in that the first emerges from the employee experience of the EVP, in which core values are woven. Thus, this thesis contends that the construction of the internal brand with employees (or actual internal brand) depends on the EVP and organizational values deployed by the employer. Whilst the EVP is instrumentalized and implemented in accordance with the employer’s intended internal brand, it is employees’ experience of the bundle comprised of the EVP and the official organizational values that constitutes the internal brand. This also implicates that the internal brand could not spring if there were no EVP planned and offered by the employer, nor any employee experience of the EVP. Hence, the need to study the employer’s EVP and organizational values to be able to reconstruct the intended internal brand, whose experience by employees concretizes the internal brand. Furthermore, because the values are woven in the EVP experienced by employees, the research gives proud of place to the study of the EVP. This thesis presupposes that the adoption of



the EAC approach to HRM includes employees through their experience in the design and framing of the intended internal brand throughout their employment, according to what works or doesn't with them. Accordingly, employees' experience should participate in the continuous revision of the internal branding strategy and the shaping of the EVP<sup>8</sup> by the employer to achieve the latter's intended internal brand.

The present study responds to the encouragement of the aforementioned authors who have manifested an interest in internal branding to dig into organizational internal branding activities in other settings (industries and cultures) than those already explored so as "to enrich internal branding knowledge in the wider service sector" (Punjaisri & Wilson, 2011, p. 1532). More importantly, none of these studies has been oriented towards the research on the intended internal brand (formed by the EVP and the organizational values) and employees' experience of both with millennials exclusively. Hence, this work fills the existing gap in research on internal branding by exploring millennials' experience of the intended internal brand of their employers with the aim to enhance employee experience and internal branding through the adoption of the EAC view in HRM. Models of customer value creation were considered in the application of the EAC view to HRM with the case company.

Figure 6 (subsequent) reflects the research framework adopted for the empirical study, one that spans three phases of research. In phase 1 with the employer (ref. RQ1), internal branding is investigated through the lens of the EVP – comprised of employer attributes – and the official organizational values of the case organization, Hilti. The process of internal branding determines both the EVP and organizational values which, once correlated, create the intended internal brand. As previously distinguished from internal brand, the EVP is comprised of employer attributes, namely "employer-extrinsic traits set by companies that constitute an organization's offering to employees" (Ronda et al., 2018, p. 574). The internal brand then refers to the all-encompassing perception of the intended internal brand by employees. And since employee perception of the intended internal brand necessitates them to experience the EVP transcended by the organizational values, the internal brand is reconstructed from employees' experience of the intended internal brand. Accordingly, the experience of the intended internal brand by employees corresponds to the overall image of the employer with employees. In this regard, the internal brand depends on employees' experience of the intended internal brand (comprised of the EVP and official organizational values) in that the first emerges from employees' experience of the intended internal brand. This clarifies why the intended

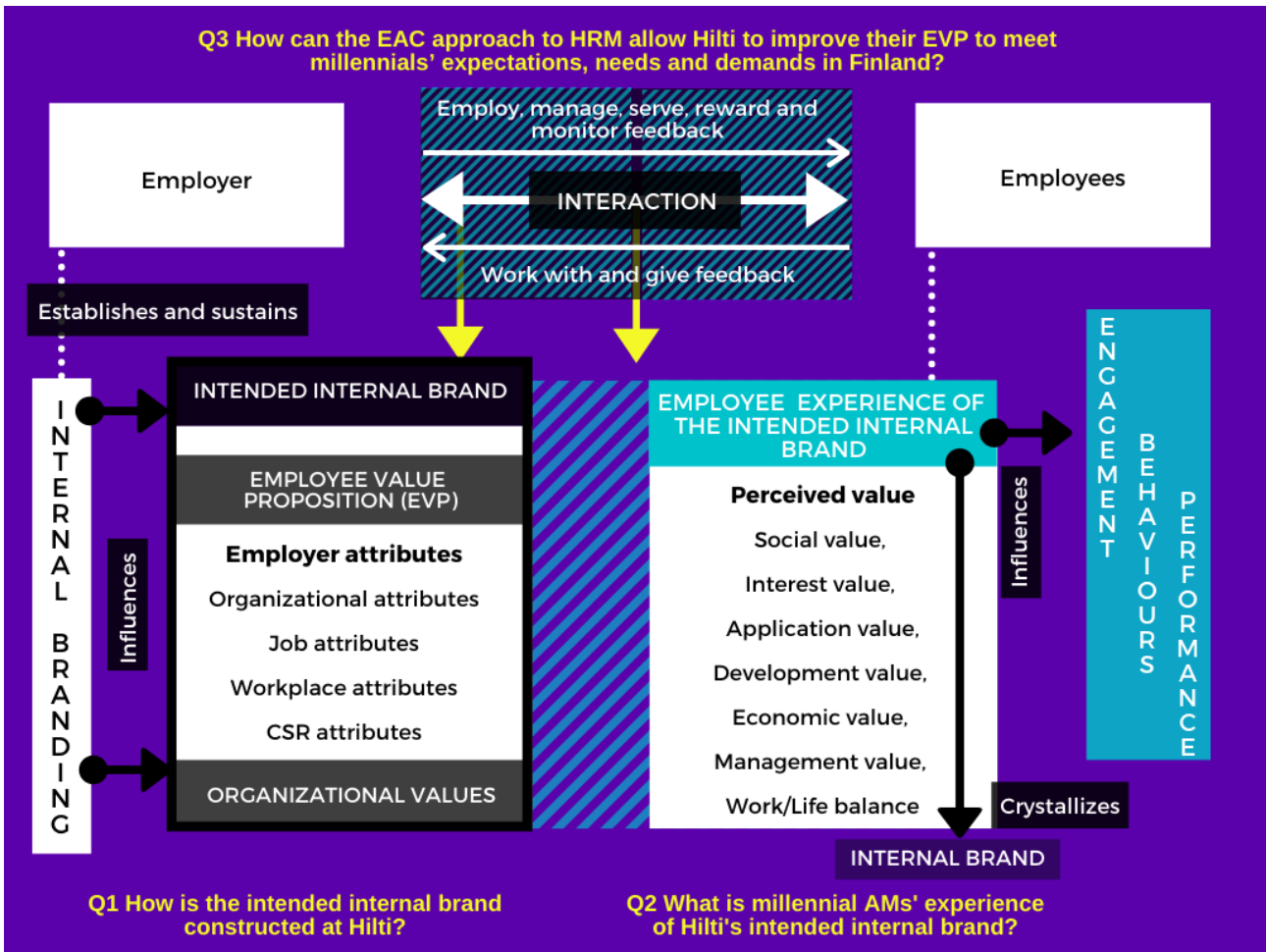
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<sup>8</sup> The organizational values are not here mentioned because they are woven in the EVP. Moreover, contrarily to the employer attributes that form the EVP, organizational values are usually set in concrete and are not (or very rarely) amended by the employer, unless the latter opts for a re-branding strategy.

internal brand was firstly outlined. In phase 2 with employees (ref. RQ2), employee experience – that is the perceived value – of the intended internal brand is captured according to that framed with the employer. The internal brand emerges from employees' experience of the intended internal brand (formed by the EVP and the official organizational values). Figure 6 emphasizes the importance of employee experience due to its influence on both employee behaviours (including their commitment, engagement, and willingness to continue working with the employer) and performance. In green are highlighted parts experienced by employees. Both employer attributes in phase 1 and perceived value in phase 2 are inspired from the means-end chain model adapted to employer brand choice by Ronda et al. (2018, see Figure 3). Though Figure 6 demonstrates that the perceived value was initially classified according to the seven employer branding value propositions delineated by Ronda et al. (2018, see Figure 2), another order emerged from the data, as noticeable in Chapter 3. Khalifa's model of dynamics of value creation (2004, see Figure 5) was instrumentalized to sort the employer attributes experienced into value magnifiers and value destroyers. Additionally, I sought to determine some sources of motivation, commitment, fun, interest and excitement, and sources of pride among millennials to have a more comprehensive perspective on their will to pursue with their employment at Hilti. Phase 3 aimed at the elaboration of suggestions for improvement of the current EVP and enhancement of the employee experience (ref. RQ3) in line with Khalifa's model of customer value build-up model (2004, see Figure 4), one that conceives the relationship between employer and employees as a long-term dialogue, that transcends tangibles into intangibles over a multitude of interactions. The yellow arrows indicate what are the elements that benefit from the interaction between employer and employees, by and large at the organizational level. These are the intended internal brand and the employee experience. Parallely, this very research harnesses the putting in perspective of employer and employee data to uncover ways to create more value for employees by reviewing the current EVP<sup>9</sup> of the case organization.

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<sup>9</sup> Only the EVP and not the entire intended internal brand that comprises the organizational values, because the latter correspond to an ideology that guides organizational and individual conduct and, therefore, they are not elements that can be revised concretely for an enhancement of the employee experience.



**Figure 6. Framework for the investigation of millennial AMs' experience at Hilti.**

# CHAPTER 3

## Methodology

### 3.1. Exploratory research design

As aforementioned, the project consists of a case study with comparative design of Hilti's intended internal brand – comprised of the EVP and organizational values – on one hand, and millennials' experience of it on the other hand, with the goal to better employee experience in the workplace. Especially the EVP is under study in this research. For this purpose, the EAC philosophy is used as a means to make the EVP and millennials' experience match in a manner that would benefit both parties. The overall aim of this empirical study is thereby twofold. First, the comparison between organizational and employee perspectives seeks to unveil whether there is a (mis-)match between the intended internal brand offered by Hilti and millennials' experience of it in Finland. Drawing from this comparative investigation, the second aim is the exploration of how the EVP can be constructed through internal branding and with consideration of millennials' experience, using the EAC approach to HRM as a means to improve the offering vis-à-vis millennials involved at Hilti in Finland.

An exploratory research design was adopted under the form of a case study with regards to this project overall aim. A case study design consists of a strategy for doing research, which involves the exploration of a particular contemporary phenomenon within some particular context using various data sources and conducting the investigation through various lenses to unveil multiple facets of the phenomenon (Rashid et al., 2019, p. 2). Aiming at exploring the intended internal brand from the perspective of both of the parties involved in its construction and implementation, namely employees and HRM and Brand leaders, the exploratory comparative case study fits the present research. Moreover, both the case study and exploratory research designs have proved useful when testing the applicability of a specific theory or model in the real world and possibly extend methodologies (Mills et al., 2010, p. 94). This aligns with the resort to the EAC paradigm and the deployment of customer models of value creation to approach and enhance the EVP through internal branding and employee experience.

In particular, HRM internal branding practices, behaviours and processes that influence the intended internal brand from the standpoint of Hilti were researched and studied and consecutively put into perspective with these millennials' experience of such internal branding activities, laying emphasis on how they affect them at work. Because a comparative design discovers contrasts, similarities or

patterns across instances of specific phenomena, such design is used to compare the data collected with HRM and Brand leaders at Hilti on one hand, and with millennials on the other. The pursuit of a more or less similar design in broaching and studying the intended internal brand is contingent on the respective roles in the two groups of actors investigated and their relation to one another. HRM leaders create and deploy the intended internal brand through internal branding whereas millennials are assumed to be the direct beneficiaries of the intended internal brand through their experience of it. In this regard, the measurement of the offering and its experience follows a method tailored to both HRM people and millennials separately, prior being compared with the objective to unveil whether there is a (mis-)match between the intended internal brand offered to Account Managers at Hilti in Finland and millennials' experience of it.

The research follows an abductive process in that it “goes back and forth between empirical material and literature” (Rashid et al., 2019, p. 5) across three phases of analysis: (1) an initial phase with the HRM and Brand leaders to identify and analyse their intended internal brand – which envelops the EVP and the official organizational values – with regards to millennials they employ, (2) a second phase investigating millennial experience of the intended internal brand at Hilti from a sample of their Account Managers (AMs), (3) a third and last phase dedicated to the formulation of suggestions for the company based on the comparison between employer standpoint on their offering to AMs and employee experience of it (see Table 4). This last part could end in the creation of a framework that encompasses the core concepts to this research, viz. internal branding, intended internal brand, employee experience leading to the internal brand, and employee engagement and related behaviours.

The research design is based on qualitative research methods conducted with both the employer, including HRM and Brand leaders, and employees of the company who are AMs, approached from a naturalistic perspective. Such an approach to the case study aims at the generation of practical and detailed knowledge “to reveal the authentic nature of a social phenomenon or the detailed elements of a causal process by getting as close as possible” by means of “thick descriptions, narratives, and process tracing as adequate means to analyse and document the evidence”, which should be ascertained by common sense (Given, 2008, pp. 69–70).

### **3.2. Empirical data**

An organization, Hilti Suomi Oy, was selected to proceed with the empirical study due to their recognition as a Best Workplace in Finland in 2019 and 2020 consecutively<sup>10</sup>. The identification of

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<sup>10</sup> Ref. Great Place To Work (GPTW) ranking of medium-sized companies.

the accessible population was the first step. First, the employer stance could be determined in the HRM team members, who are the best placed to talk about Hilti's HRM strategy and its deployment in comparison to employees' experience of it. The Brand leader complemented the employer stance owing to the position's expertise on internal communications and branding. Second, the employee viewpoint was studied from the actual sample of millennials working as AMs, a position mostly held by millennials at Hilti.

### **3.2.1. Outline of the case organization and employer, Hilti Suomi**

Hilti was founded in 1941 in Liechtenstein and has now grown into a multinational company operating in the construction and energy industry for which it develops and commercialises cutting-edge products, systems and services. Hilti employs over 29,000 people in no less than 120 countries. Their aim is to "build a better future" for their customers with rippling effects for local communities worldwide. They have determined four core organizational values: integrity, teamwork, commitment and the courage to face change. Accordingly, Christoph Loos, fifth CEO of Hilti since 2014, is committed to sustainable value creation through leadership and differentiation, set as the "Champion 2020" corporate strategy. Their global innovation centre got erected the same year in Schaan, Liechtenstein, where research and development engineers develop advanced technologies. In 2015, Hilti was rewarded by the iF Design Awards and they got recognized in the Fortune 100 Best Companies to Work For, just as the second private company for leadership development.

In Finland, Hilti's headquarters is located in Espoo. Hilti (Suomi) Oy promotion stresses a human workplace, where everyone is held responsible for pluralism at work. Hilti (Suomi) Oy has been awarded the 20<sup>th</sup> rank of the Best Workplaces in Finland in 2019, and 15<sup>th</sup> rank in 2020. Hilti Suomi Oy employs 236 employees, among which about 140 are millennials.

### **3.2.2. Selection of the Hilti's HRM and Brand informants**

Especially respondents of the company who act as HRM and Brand leaders were approached and endorsed the role of key informants in this research conducted through a theoretical sampling strategy. Informants selected all share common criteria of having a particular point of view on the construction of the intended internal brand, its deployment and control. They all are either part of the team that sets the HRM strategy and drive its deployment, or in charge of the internal brand and communications at Hilti (Suomi) Oy. From their relevant stances, meaning can be drawn. In fact, HRM and Brand leaders open the access to the knowledge and opinions necessary to grasp the

offering and internal branding of their organization, in a comprehensive fashion, including both objective elements and their subjective interpretation as key decision-makers who shape it.

Purposive sampling was used to investigate the HRM perspective on their intended internal brand and internal branding: participants were selected due to their knowledge on HRM and Brand matters (Allen, 2017, p. 1545). Hilti Suomi Oy's HRM team counts four persons: an HR Director, an HR Business Partner, a Talent Acquisition Specialist and an HR admin. In their tenure, they work hand-in-hand to set the HRM strategy and its deployment at Hilti. Two of them replied to the invitation and participated in online interviews in April 2020: (1) the Talent Acquisition Specialist, responsible for employer branding (done together with the Marketing and Communications Team) and all recruitment in Finland, including strategic planning, marketing, candidates' interviews, candidates' assessments for the recruitment sourcing or accounting, as well as some other recruitment administrative tasks; (2) the HR Business Partner, incumbent on all HRM tasks for the core sales division, which is the biggest sales division at Hilti. All staff issues, onboarding of new employees, occupational health services for the whole company, and a lot of various different HRM topics fall under her umbrella. Additionally, the need for data about internal communications was met through the online interview of their Brand & Communications Specialist, in charge of internal and external brand management.

### **3.2.3. Selection of Hilti's millennial Account Managers (AMs)**

From the employees' side, two main criteria of selection were considered first-hand: their simultaneous belonging to the millennial segment (targeted by this research) and Hilti's workforce to meet the requirements unfolding from the research questions.

Therefore, research participants are all millennials who hold the Account Manager (AM) tenure. These millennials were chosen because they represent about 70% of Hilti's AMs in Finland, namely 65 people out of 93, therefore representing a consequent and representative portion of AMs. The latter have become difficult to attract by Hilti, which explains why they constitute the subject of the employee experience study. The lack of attraction may be the by-product of an unsatisfactory experience at work, thus turning the study of AMs' experience into a possible means of understanding the underlying reason(s) behind such lack of attractiveness. If not, the company could still harness the benefits of their insight approached from a third-eye party.

Though ten of these 65 millennial AMs were initially supposed to participate in the research due to time constraints for both myself as the researcher and the population investigated, only six actually

participated. They were selected using two-stage cluster sampling. In the first sampling stage, AMs were shortlisted by Hilti's HR people based on their location, either it be in Tampere, Helsinki, or Southern Finland, and their belonging to a specific team that works in one of these three geographical areas. Six teams were pre-screened, with two teams per area, accounting a total number of 23 AMs, all led within their own team by a Regional Manager (RM). In a second sampling stage, those pre-screened were selected with regards to the size of their team, considering that entire teams should be interviewed across areas to meet the set goal of 10 interviews with AMs while reducing the number of preliminary interviews of RMs. In fact, AM stances needed to be investigated upon interview of their respective RMs, because the latter contribute to shaping their team members' employee experience in the daily. This means that I strived to make the data collection as relevant as possible, considering the differences in team leading, and thus employee experience, between different teams. It would not be relevant to interview an AM working under an RM who has not been interviewed, since the reference points would not be the same, indubitably distorting the analysis and interpretation of the population data and rendering the research invalid. Eventually, the sample of AMs was selected to represent each of the geographical areas that are Tampere, Helsinki and Southern Finland. This criterion ultimately influenced the decision of which team to focus on. However, only six AMs responded to the interview invitation. Across all the three areas, two members of the same teams and their respective team leader were interviewed between June and August 2020.

### **3.3. Data collection methods**

Hereafter are presented the collection methods for each of the three phases of the present research.

In the first phase of data collection with the employer (ref. RQ1), comprising HRM and Brand leaders, the intent was to establish a construction model of the intended internal brand (encompassing the EVP and the formal organizational values) they offer. Textual data was gathered and may include "interview transcripts, recorded observations, narratives, responses to open-ended questionnaire items, speeches, postings to listservs, and media such as drawings, photographs, and video" (Given, 2012, p. 121). This research leveraged three one-shot interview transcripts. Qualitative interviews of HRM and Brand leaders took place to directly derive their interpretations of the intended internal brand offered to AMs at Hilti in Finland. Qualitative interviews have been analogised to "guided conversations" during which the researcher questions a respondent on a topic of interest and listens to his answers "so as to hear the meaning' of what is being conveyed (Rubin and Rubin, 1995:7)" (Given, 2012, p. 85). Virtual research was used to collect data from the company's official webpage(s)



in parallel to Hilti's internal employee survey results with the aim to understand the institutional construction of their employer brand online and its internal experience by current employees.

In the second phase of data collection, in-depth, semi-structured interviews of Account Managers (AMs) about their working experiences of the intended internal brand. In-depth, semi-structured interviews were run with AMs and relied upon to collect data about their experience because they seek “‘deep’ information and understanding” (Johnson, 2001, p. 106). They relate to a conversation in that they require two individuals<sup>11</sup> to have an open, honest and relaxed discussion on a topic of mutual interest, from which the researcher attends to obtain the most possible amount of information out of the questions asked to the interviewee<sup>12</sup>, who possesses the knowledge necessary to answer the research questions. They offer flexibility for the exploration of the lived human “experience or perception, to uncover” (Johnson, 2001, p. 106) some information that may never have been discussed or even thought about by interviewees (Morris, 2015, p. 4). In this regard, they fit well to access employees’ “reflections, motives, experiences, memories, understandings, interpretations and perceptions” (Morris, 2015, p. 5) relating to the intended internal brand.

In-depth interviews were instrumentalised for responding to RQ2, including the three sub-questions 2A, 2B and 2C. The collect of data from different millennials employed ensured maximum representativeness of AMs’ experience with the organization. Similarly to the first phase of research with the employer, the second phase of collection of employee perspectives was approached through an abductive approach. Questions asked to millennials were aligned with those asked to those intended for HRM-Brand leaders, whose responses contributed to the shaping of adequate interrogations with regards to Hilti’s offering. To be more precise, the questions (Appendix 2) were also inspired by both the four types of employer attributes and the seven employer branding value propositions delineated by Ronda et al. (2018, see Figure 2 and 2.2.2. p. 32).

All interviews were conducted online via Zoom, audio-recorded and transcribed via Temi automatic transcription services, prior verification and modification based on the listening of each recording.

Table 2 (Appendix 1) helps visualize all the data utilized in the present research.

### **3.4. Data analysis**

Below is described the data analysis process across the three phases of the research previously announced in 3.1. The initial phase with the HRM and Brand leaders allowed to identify and analyse

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<sup>11</sup> (i.e., a researcher and an interviewee).

<sup>12</sup> (i.e., the employee).

their intended internal brand with regards to millennials they employ. The second phase investigated millennials' experience of Hilti's internal brand, covering both the EVP and the official organizational values, and its effect on the sample of Account Managers (AMs). The third and last phase led to the design of suggestions for the company based on the comparison between employer standpoint on their offering to AMs and employee experience of it.

### **3.4.1. Phase 1: Employer data analysis**

In the first phase, content analysis helped in processing both textual and virtual data to identify the express HRM priorities of the organization and comprehend the employer's internal branding strategy and its deployment with Account Managers (AMs). Several points could then be evaluated: a. the EVP offered by Hilti and its key components (ref. RQ1A); b. the construction of the intended internal brand (ref. RQ1B); c. the impact of HRM priorities on Hilti's employer brand intended for AMs (ref. RQ1C); d. the consideration of millennials' expectations, needs, preferences and demands in the construction of the EVP<sup>13</sup> at Hilti (ref. RQ1D).

The four types of employer attributes by Ronda et al. (2018) were used to imagine and sort interview questions upstream. This taxonomy covers organizational attributes (general organizational characteristics and corporate image), job attributes (job specific), workplace attributes (features associated with the infrastructures, aesthetics, and sensorial aspects of the workplace) and CSR attributes (relative to the employer's concern with socio-environmental issues). Some more HR oriented questions were addressed to the HRM leaders (see Appendix 3), whereas questions related to internal branding and communications were addressed to the Brand leader (see Appendix 4), so as to gain an accurate depiction of the internal branding practices and processes at Hilti.

Answers to the standardized interview questionnaire not only helped in building an objective and generalizable idea of the intended internal brand, but also aimed at the derivation of the meaning they associate to their "experiences and life worlds" (Warren, 2001, p. 83). However, the intended internal brand remains a theoretical concept, which means that all the findings regarding this tenet (and its constitutive EVP) consist of outcomes of the analysis process I conducted. The findings do not correspond to the intended internal brand as defined and used in the organization by the informants.

The construction of the intended internal brand and its deployment was determined according to the coding of the data collected with the three informants. Coding corresponds to the operation of

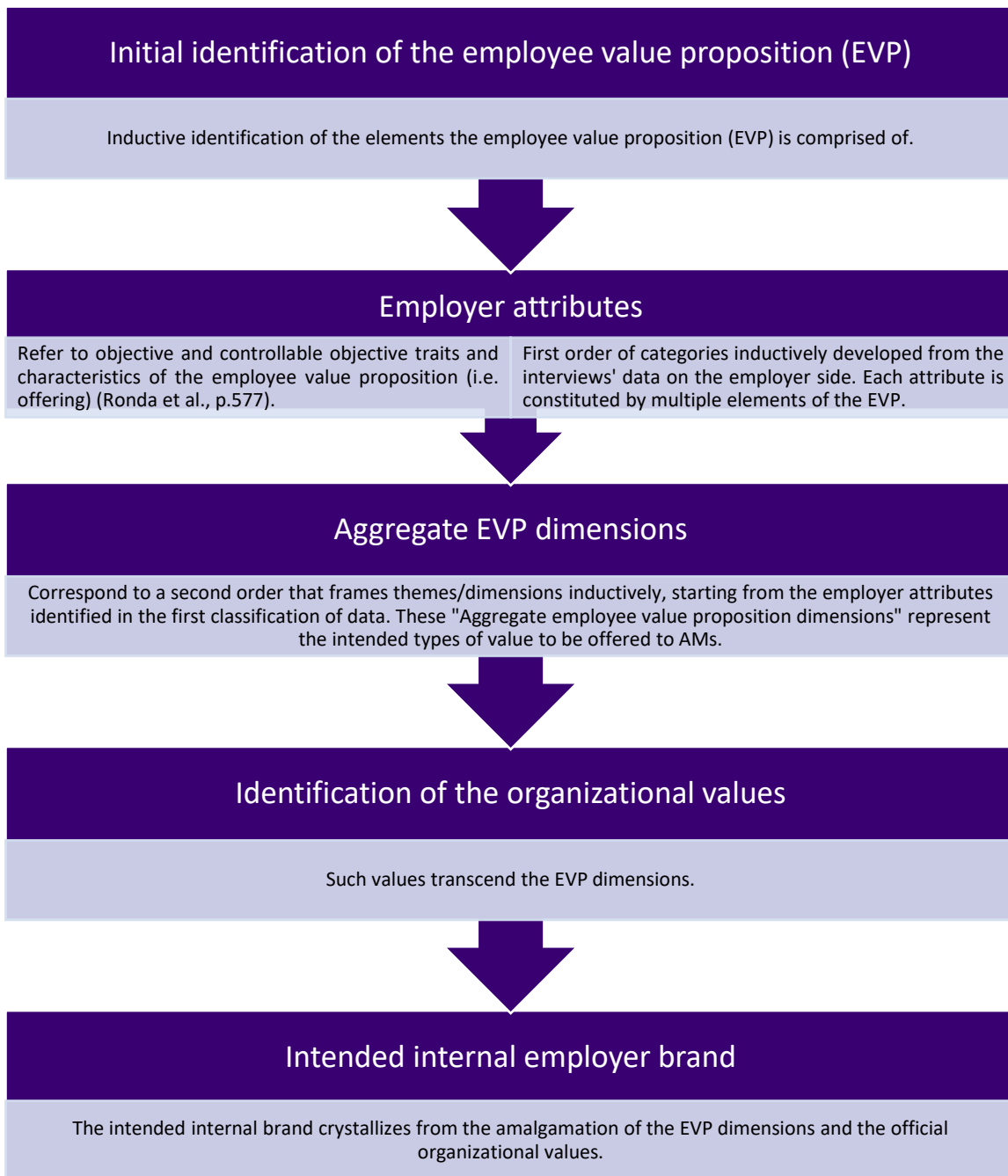
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<sup>13</sup> The organizational values are not here mentioned because they are not elements that the employer could adjust to better the employee experience.

identifying segments of meaning in data and their labelling with a code, “which can be defined as ‘a word or short phrase that symbolically assigns a summative, salient, essence-capturing, and/or evocative attribute for a portion of language-based or visual data’ (Saldaña, 2015, p. 3)” (Skjott Linneberg & Korsgaard, 2019, p. 260). In other words, similarities, divergences and patterns were examined to extrapolate the needed information on the intended internal brand at Hilti Oy. To be more accurate, inductive coding was performed.

In this phase, a construction model of the EVP and another of the intended internal brand offered by the employer were established with an abductive approach. The EVP model was inspired by the "Means–end chain model adapted to employer brand choice" (see Figure 3), the four types of employer attributes, and the seven employer branding value propositions (see Figure 2), all highlighted by Ronda et al. (2018). Yet, the findings from the data collected led to the design of a theoretical framework that considers employer elements constitutive of the employer attributes, themselves aggregated into EVP dimensions, which once amalgamated to the official organizational values, crystallize into the intended internal brand with employees (see Figure 7, succeeding) .

Figure 7 (hereafter) demonstrates the thematic coding process of the data on the employer side. Elements the EVP is comprised of were identified inductively from the data collected with the HRM and Brand leaders. A first order of categories was framed inductively based on these initial elements to delineate employer attributes. The latter were then reorganized by proceeding inductively from the employer attributes into a second order of themes, or “Aggregate EVP dimensions”, that emerged from the research of similarities and differences between all the employer attributes. These three steps are illustrated in Appendix 5. Because organizational values transcend the EVP dimensions, their identification was needed to capture the intended internal brand. The official organizational values were shared by the informants and discussed during the interviews as they are woven in the EVP. In fact, the intended internal brand crystallizes from the amalgamation of organizational values and the EVP dimensions.



**Figure 7. Framework for thematic coding of the interviews' data on the employer side.**

### **3.4.2. Phase 2: Employee data analysis**

Similarly to the second phase of data collection with employees, the employee data analysis was approached through an abductive approach. Downstream, millennial AMs' answers were categorized in a first order depending on the subject they covered, with reference to the findings with the employer. Hence, 14 Excel sheets were created to cluster the data: Profiles, Values, Culture, Communication, Job, Feedback, Elements with positive impact on AMs and their experience,

Elements with negative influence on AMs and their experience, Team leader, Training & Development, Team, Feelings, Continuance, CSR. Table 3 (Appendix 6) shows this taxonomy. During the interviews, the internal brand was defined as the image interviewees have of their employer. The analysis of data from different millennials employed verified the consistency between different experiences of the same intended internal brand, and further identify patterns tied to the identified EVP and organizational values (RQ1) experienced by AMs. The data collected with them was then utilized to respond to the research question (2) and corresponding sub-questions about their experience of Hilti's intended internal brand<sup>14</sup>, the influence of the organizational values and the EVP on their experience, and the way such experience affects their work continuance with Hilti. To be more precise, the characteristics of the employer's offering obtained from the first phase of investigation were presented to employees for them to recognize (or not) and assess the intended internal brand in accordance with their own personal experiences with Hilti. For this purpose, Khalifa's model of dynamics of value creation (ref. 2.3.3.1) served as a means to classify these attributes into value magnifiers or value destroyers. Moreover, the perceived value of the EVP, the elements indicated to have the best impact on their experience and those indicated to negatively affect it, sources of motivation, sources of commitment, sources of fun, sources of interest and excitement and sources of pride all aided the understanding of their will to continue working at Hilti.

### **3.4.3. Phase 3: Comparison and recommendations**

In the third and last stage of research, suggestions were framed building on the comparison between employer and employees' views in accordance with the EAC paradigm. Hilti's intended internal branding could be seized in parallel of millennials' experiences of the Account Manager (AM) tenure. The evaluation of the consistency between the intended internal brand deployed through the EVP infused with the organizational values and their experience by millennial AMs draws on the comparative research between both the employer and employees' perspectives. Such comparison entails the evaluation of the similarities, differences, and associations (Given, 2012, p. 101) between them. The research suggestions (RQ3) then build on this comparison by leveraging the EAC paradigm to enquire how the internal brand experienced by AMs can better be aligned with the intended internal brand strategically aimed at by means of internal branding. Especially the EVP was of concern for such alignment as it is made of elements which are realistically adjustable and fit the need uncovered at Hilti. The organizational values were not deemed a priority in this research since they are abstract

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<sup>14</sup> This experience of the intended internal brand corresponds to the internal brand with millennial AMs, based on their perceived value of Hilti's intended internal brand (constituted by both EVP and official organizational values).

and woven in the EVP. Besides, they were not identified as points of improvement considering the research findings on both employer and employee sides.

The earlier use of the customer value dynamics model coupled to the customer value build-up model help in the interpretation of employee experiences, while also allowing the formulation of suggestions for possible internal branding alternatives worthy of being adopted by the employer to meet both present and future needs of their workforce. The harness of current employees’ experiences enabled by the reliance on these models of value creation should indeed provide the firm with possible answers to meet millennial’s unsatisfied needs, their expectations and demands for greater employee experience, thereby ensuring the yield of positive conditions and factors affecting their engagement and commitment in the workplace, just as their will to pursue their employment contract. This could increase and improve employee commitment to their work and the organization, conversely enhancing their experience and developing greater employee engagement.

Table 4 (beneath) encapsulates the three phases of the research and demonstrates the abductive research design. It matches the research questions with the respective literature and concepts used to answer them, as well as the corresponding frameworks developed at each phase of study.

**Table 4. Research framework.**

<b>Phase 1 with the employer</b>		
<b>RQ1</b>	<b>Literature and concepts used</b>	<b>Frameworks developed</b>
<p>a. What is Hilti’s EVP and its key components? b. What is the intended internal brand constructed at Hilti? c. What is the impact of the HRM priorities on Hilti’s EVP and employer branding intended for AMs? d. Are millennials’ expectations, needs, preferences and demands considered in the construction of the EVP at Hilti?            → Analysis of HRM and Brand leaders' interviews to grasp how the intended internal brand is orchestrated at Hilti. Results of 2019 employee satisfaction surveys were also accessed to assess the degree and specificity</p>	<p>Figure 2. 7 employer branding value propositions (Dabirian et al., 2017).            Figure 3. Means-end chain model adapted to employer brand choice, and relative types of employer attributes (modified from Ronda et al., 2018).            All of these elements helped in the framing of the interviews’ questionnaire upstream.</p>	<p>Table 5 structures employer’s data (employer elements, employer attributes and aggregated EVP dimensions).            Figure 7 shows the framework for thematic coding of the interviews’ data on the employer side.            Figure 8 identifies elements of the EVP to be categorized under employer attributes categories.            Figure 9 frames the EVP dimensions for AMs at Hilti. These dimensions are comprised of the employer attributes isolated in Figure 8.            Figure 10 crystallizes Hilti’s intended internal brand with AMs.</p>

of internal knowledge about millennial AMs.		
<b>Phase 2 with millennial employees</b>		
<b>RQ2</b>	<b>Literature and concepts used</b>	<b>Frameworks developed</b>
<p>a. What is millennial AMs' experience of Hilti's official organizational values? b. To what extent do millennial AMs consider that the identified EVP dimensions actually create value in their daily work? c. How and to what extent does millennial AMs' experience affect/influence their will to continue working at Hilti?</p> <p>→Analysis of millennial AMs' interviews with respect to the intended internal brand identified in RQ1 with the employer, to understand how they experience it.</p>	<p>Figure 6. Customer value dynamics model (Khalifa, 2004). More specifically, value magnifiers and value destroyers were applied to employees' data. Table 5, Figure 8, Figure 9, and Figure 10.</p>	<p>Table 3 represents the classification of millennial AMs' collected data. Table 6 captures millennial AMs' experience of the EVP dimensions. More precisely, the most and least liked featured of the job were classified under the corresponding EVP dimensions as value magnifiers and value destroyers. Figure 11 represents the organization of the EVP dimensions.</p>
<b>Phase 3 – Suggestions for improvement</b>		
<b>RQ3</b>	<b>Literature and concepts used</b>	<b>Frameworks developed</b>
<p>How can the EAC approach to HRM allow Hilti to improve their EVP to meet millennial AMs' expectations, needs and demands?</p> <p>→Comparison (similarities, differences, associations) between employer and employee stances to evaluate the level of consistency between their perspectives on the EVP and the intended internal brand.</p>	<p>Figure 5. Customer value build-up model (Khalifa, 2004). Figure 3. Means-end chain model adapted to employer brand choice, and relative types of employer attributes (Ronda et al., 2018). Table 3, Table 5, Table 6, Figure 8, Figure 9, Figure 10 and Figure 11.</p>	<p>Table 7 summarizes how the EAC approach to HRM can be leveraged by Hilti for improvement of their EVP and internal branding to meet millennial AMs' expectations, needs and demands in Finland. Key points of improvement and suggestions to address the latter were made. Figure 12 constitutes an EAC framework or blueprint for organizational employee experience co-creation. With reference to Figure 3, employer attributes of the EVP and the perceived value of the internal brand are compared for adjustment on the employer side to enhance employee experience.</p>

### 3.5. Research ethics

Honesty, integrity, respectfulness, impartiality and compassion are virtue-based ethics guiding principles (Given, 2012, pp. 274–275) which my research followed. Though the research agreed upon

with Hilti entails the duty of completing this work with the aim to serve them, as a researcher, I critically analysed and distinguished what information might be biased on their part, so as not to modify or dismiss the data deemed negative to focus only on positive information.

Informed consent was obtained for the run of interviews with the HR and Brand leaders of Hilti, just as with their employees. Their consent presupposes their understanding of the intent of the research as explained by me as the researcher or a consent letter, that ascertains their protection from any practice deemed unethical, such as “invasion of privacy, breaches of confidentiality or anonymity” (Warren, 2001, p. 89). Yet, my understanding of the intent of the research may differ from the interviewees’ (p. 89). In this regard, their consent was sought after in the form of a written consent letter stating the purpose and modalities of the interviews (notably their recording, date and place) prior running them and confirmed orally at the beginning of each interview recorded on phone. This double-checking ensured that the reasons and modalities of the interviews’ recording was clear to the participants and minimized the odds of having an interviewee refusing to respond to questions or to be recorded on the interview day.

Especially employee experiences ought to be gathered to effectively proceed in the establishment of tendencies based on their real feedback about their experience of the intended internal brand and in conversation with the observation of their interaction with it. To protect them from any type of abuse of power from the employer, which could occur in the case that they would express their discontent regarding some topic or point out some negative element, their feedback was kept anonymous (their identity was hidden from the reporting and presentation of the results of the research) as stated in the consent letter they read and signed prior being interviewed. The consent letter openly informed them as to what is involved in the research and their participation and shall respect their refusal to participate or divulge their identities (Given, 2012, p. 275), or any other type of limitations they might bring forth regarding their privacy and confidentiality of the information collected from them.



# CHAPTER 4

## Research findings

### 4.1. Hilti's intended internal brand

This section presents the research findings with the employer on how the intended internal brand is constructed (ref. RQ1). It is important to recall here that the EVP remains a theoretical concept, which means that all the findings regarding this tenet consist of outcomes of the analysis process by the researcher. The findings do not correspond to the EVP as defined and used in the organization by the informants. HRM and Brand leaders' quotes are referred to a numerical order: L1, L2 and L3.

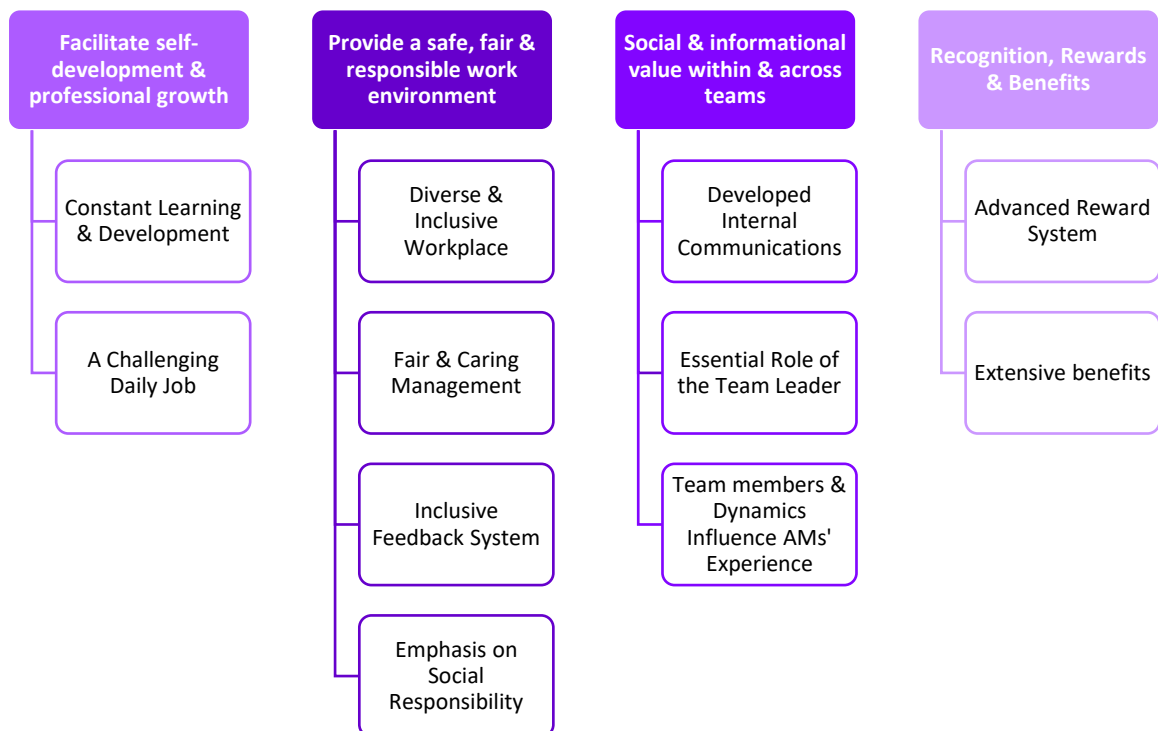
#### 4.1.1. Hilti's EVP

Figure 8 (subsequent) identifies Hilti's EVP and its key components (ref. RQ1A). As a reminder, the EVP is constituted by employer attributes, that is "employer-extrinsic traits set by companies that constitute an organization's offering to employees" (Ronda et al., 2018, p. 574). All of them are controllable by the employer in that they are established and framed by Hilti, although human aspects such as relationship dynamics cannot be controlled by the company. Overall, Hilti provides a safe, fair and responsible work environment since it offers a "Diverse & Inclusive Workplace", instilled with "4 Strong Employer Values that Determine Cultural Fit" by a "Fair & Caring Management", which leverages an "Inclusive Feedback system". The employer facilitates AM's self-development and professional growth by means of "Continuous Learning & Development", a strategy reinforced via the "Challenging Daily Job" of AMs. At Hilti, social and informational value for AMs is built within and across teams through the "Developed Internal Communications" (including the feedback system), furthered by the "Essential Role of the Team Leader", as well as by the "Team members & Dynamics", which all influence AMs' experience. Eventually, the edges of the AM position were classified into "Advanced Reward System" and "Extensive Benefits" categories. Figure 8 stands for elaboration on each of these twelve categories. All these EVP categories emerged from the careful data analysis compiled in Appendix 5.

<b>Employer attributes categories</b>	<b>Diverse &amp; Inclusive Workplace</b>	Two HR priorities: employees evolve in an inclusive and multicultural environment with colleagues from various backgrounds, which enriches them and benefits in terms of innovation.
	<b>4 Strong Employer Values Determine Cultural Fit</b>	Four strong official values ( <b>Integrity, Teamwork, Commitment, Courage</b> ) are sought after from the recruitment phase and nurtured throughout the employee life-long cycle. AMs are hired for cultural fit, which can positively influence their level of satisfaction in their job.
	<b>Developed Internal Communications</b>	Developed internal communications system across scales. AMs' participation in the construction of their work experience.
	<b>Fair &amp; Caring Management</b>	Fair employer practices that effuse care for their people.
	<b>Inclusive Feedback System</b>	Inclusive feedback system. AMs' participation in the shaping of the employee value proposition. Innovations and adjustments were made thanks to the feedback received from millennial AMs.
	<b>Continuous Learning &amp; Development</b>	Extensive and thorough development and training programs made available and accessible to AMs, both for their career development on their current job and possible future roles (ref. internal recruitment system based on referrals), and for their personal development through trainings and the daily work-life.
	<b>Advanced Reward System</b>	Advanced reward system comprised of monthly salary, commissions, yearly pay raises, punctual rewards for good teams performance, punctual rewards for the best peers, etc.
	<b>Extensive Benefits</b>	Abundance of extended benefits in both functional and economic terms, such as work laptop, car, attire, health coverage, insurance scheme, annual leisure/cultural budget.
	<b>A Challenging Daily Job</b>	A challenging daily comprised of a variety of tasks and responsibilities that require AMs to master planning, social skills, problem-solving and products/services knowledge for demonstrations, with the goal to perform at their best and potentially meet their set targets.
	<b>Essential Role of the Team Leader</b>	The team leader delivers locally on the employer brand, decisions and initiatives, and develop strong relationships with AMs within his team. Greatly influences AMs' employee experience in the daily. Ensures motivation and commitment levels remain high both within their team and on an individual level.
<b>Team &amp; its Dynamics Influence AMs' Experience</b>	Team members and their dynamics greatly influence AMs both in the daily of their employee experience and in the long run, by affecting their engagement levels as well as their will to pursue in their tenure. The social bond established, nurtured and sustained between AMs is crucial to their engagement and commitment. Happenings on a team level are mostly out of the scope of the employer because dealt with locally by AMs and their respective RM.	
<b>Emphasis on Social Responsibility in Finland</b>	Hilti CSR in Finland prioritizes employees and has the vision to develop sustainably the construction industry through the mission that consists of the development of innovative and eco-friendly services and tools.	

**Figure 8. Employer attributes categories, developed from HR and Brand leaders' interview data, and that constitute the EVP offered by Hilti to AMs.**

Parallely, Figure 9 (below) reflects the EVP dimensions for AMs at Hilti on the basis of the taxonomy of employer value attributes categories (ref. Figure 8), based on a rigorous analysis of the themes that HRM and Brand leaders addressed in their interviews. Generally, Hilti’s EVP revolves around: 1) the facilitation of self-development and professional growth; 2) the providing of a safe, fair and responsible work environment; 3) social and informational value within and across teams; 4) recognition, rewards and benefits. All these dimensions exist simultaneously and morph over time according to both the internal and the external environments of the company, in relation to the management decisions made and the daily implementation of work.



**Figure 9. Aggregate EVP Dimensions for AMs at Hilti, according to HR and Brand leaders’ interviews.**

Classified under four overarching dimensions that were developed through a meticulous data analysis, all the employer attributes (Figure 8) contribute to shaping and fortifying their corresponding dimensional value with millennial AMs. Constant Learning & Development and the Challenging Daily experiences on the Job facilitate AMs’ self-development and professional growth. Diversity & Inclusion, the Fair & Caring Management, the Inclusive Feedback System and the Emphasis on Social Responsibility build a safe, fair and responsible work environment. Social and informational value is created and sustained within and across teams by means of Developed Internal Communications, the Essential Role of Team Leaders, and the Influence of Team Members and Team Dynamics on AMs’ Experience. The Extensive benefits of the position added to the Advanced Reward System shape the Recognition, Rewards & Benefits dimension.

#### 4.1.2. Hilti's intended internal brand with millennial AMs

To understand what the intended internal brand constructed at Hilti is (ref. RQ1B), the recall of its definition in the context of internal branding seemed essential. According to previous literature, internal branding is the “process through which organizations make a company-wide effort within a supportive culture to integrate brand ideologies, leadership HRM (human resource management), internal brand communications and internal brand communities as a strategy to enable employees to consistently co-create brand value with multiple stakeholders” (Saleem & Iglesias, 2016, p. 50). Derived from the definition of internal branding by Sengupta et al. (2015, pp. 308–309)<sup>15</sup>, an internal brand refers to the culture of trust between employer and employees, or the strong corporate moral values, or the satisfaction of employees through the fulfilment of their psychological contracts. Otherwise stated, an internal brand consists of the employee viewpoint of the employer brand (Hankinson, 2004, p. 84). Since perception stems from experience, the internal brand emerges from the employee experience. Because employee experience couldn't be obtained on the employer side, the focus was therefore orientated towards the recognition of Hilti's intended internal brand, that is the internal brand they aim at creating and infusing with their AMs. The intended internal brand is comprised of both the EVP and the organizational values, considering that the organizational values transcend the EVP dimensions. Such intended internal brand could subsequently be utilized as a reference point to reconstruct the actual internal brand when analysing employee data in the section 4.2.

In this case, it seems that the organization's intended internal brand can be recognized from the combination of its EVP identified – based on the data collected with HRM and Brand leaders –and the four official organizational values of Hilti – based on these same data. Here, Hilti's intended internal brand equates what ought to be AMs' experience of the organizational brand, according to my understanding of the employer data gathered<sup>16</sup> and rigorously analysed. On one hand, Hilti's EVP covers the aforementioned leadership HRM under the “Provide a safe, fair and responsible work environment” dimension, as well as the aforementioned internal brand communications and internal brand communities under the “Social and informational value within and across teams” dimension. On the other, the aforementioned brand ideologies were recognized in Hilti's four official organizational values, that are Integrity, Commitment, Teamwork and Courage, because it has been understood from the interviews with HRM and Brand leaders that Hilti's official organizational

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<sup>15</sup> Internal employer branding leverages the EVP to create, infuse and sustain trust between the employer and their employees, or establish strong corporate moral values – from which can spur employees' pride – or satisfy employees through the fulfilment of their psychological contracts.

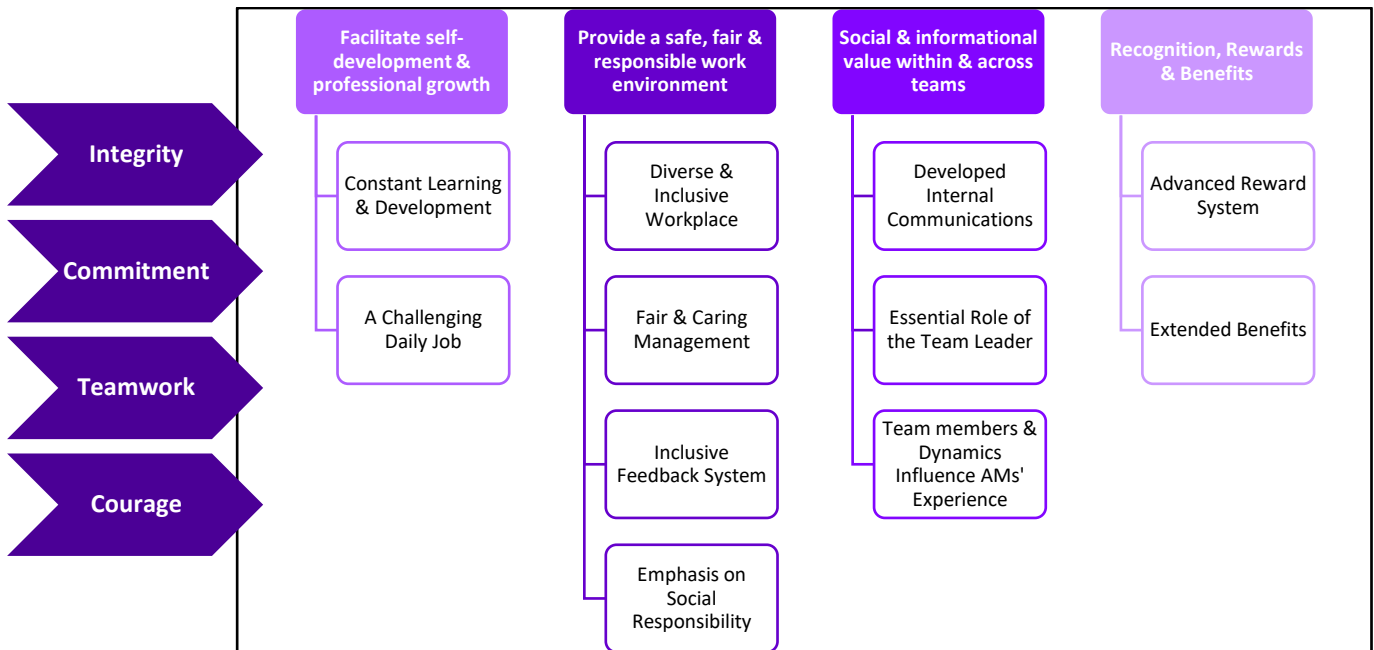
<sup>16</sup> With HRM and Brand leaders.

values are at the core of the internal branding done with all employees, including AMs, in that they are communicated to them from the recruitment onwards and continuously throughout their career. They thereby embody what is a priority to the organization, which is repeatedly conveyed to employees and contributes to the building of trust between them and the employer. Hence, I posited that the amalgamation of these official organizational values to the EVP dimensions systematically identified from the interviews on the employer side (see Figure 9) could result in the crystallization of Hilti's intended internal brand. The latter is magnified in Figure 10 (below), which demonstrates the transcendence of the EVP dimensions by the four organizational values. Hilti's intended internal brand with AMs is developed and evolves around four essential EVP dimensions, all permeated by the company's core values, to create trust between employees and their employer. In other words, the official organizational values are infused with millennial AMs through the EVP offered to them. The intended internal brand then functions as a means to draw together employees around a commonly shared purpose (Hankinson, 2004, p. 87).

For instance, Constant Learning & Development contributes to the facilitation of self-development & professional growth while harnessing the four official organizational values<sup>17</sup>. The internal brand functions in such way that millennial AMs should be committed to their Constant Learning & Development, show integrity in the way they learn, be brave to tackle all the learning even though this requires them to step out of their comfort zone right into the unknown, and all this should be done as part of a team (and the organization), learning from and helping each other. Though Constant Learning & Development can further on lead to rewards such as bonuses, a pay raise and even a promotion in the long haul, the direct value is the facilitation of self-development & personal growth, which subsequently can unlock other values related to better performance, such as Rewards & Benefits.

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<sup>17</sup> Hilti's four official organizational values are Commitment, Courage, Integrity and Teamwork.



**Figure 10. Hilti’s internal brand intended for AMs.**

### **4.1.3. Fair employer practices centered on diversity and inclusion**

As stated by the interviewees, the company HRM priorities revolve around diversity and inclusion (see Diverse & Inclusive Workplace category in Appendix 5). All interviewees indeed agreed on the same level of importance granted by the employer to addressing employee needs and demands, regardless of age, gender or ethnicity. In this regard, Hilti presents fair and non-discriminatory employer practices (see Diverse & Inclusive Workplace category). This sub-section attends to explore the impact of the HRM priorities on Hilti’s EVP and employer branding<sup>18</sup> intended for AMs (ref. RQ1C).

The implications of these priorities are noticeable from the absence of age differentiation in the employee value proposition to AMs. Hilti doesn’t seem to differentiate its value proposition to millennial Account Managers (AMs) and to other age groups, according to the HRM and Brand leaders interviewed. The Fair & Caring Management employer attribute category (Appendix 5) indeed outlines that there is no difference made between millennials and other age segments in the recruitment stage of AMs, nor in employer branding, though there exist some specificities throughout the employee life cycle and across scales. In actuality, one informant specified that external employer branding is more intended for young potential new employees because millennials seem to present some essential features that match the job characteristics – such as the entrepreneurial and innovative

<sup>18</sup> Employer branding is here used because the findings cover both internal employer branding with current AMs and external employer branding with potential new AMs.

mindset supplemented with a hunger for career development opportunities – whereas internal employer branding focuses more on satisfying more experienced employees, who would, as a matter of fact, be older. For instance, internally, there are some options for more experienced AMs or people who have a lot of solution-selling experience as they can participate in the Expert AM Program. There is also an additional parental leave for grandparents.

Another interviewee said that the employer doesn't distinguish millennial AMs from older AMs on a corporate level. Yet, on a team level, managers may adapt to individual preferences. For instance, using WhatsApp with millennials and phone calls with their elder.

However, whilst diversity and inclusion are Hilti's HRM priorities (see Diverse & Inclusive Workplace category), the AM position actually lacks female workers. In this regard, recruiting more females to fill in the AM position has become a priority.

*“In Finland, it's diversity because we are lacking female Account Managers, and that's one bigger topic we're trying to concentrate on. But not only the gender, but also the age for Account Managers, and the ethnic background. Many of our Account Managers are male and they are millennials. So, we definitely would want to see some more female Account Managers as well.” (L2)*

*“It's more attractive to males but we are trying to change that. [...] Because it's a construction industry, it's generally perceived as a male field.” (L3)*

Moreover, the construction industry and field sales may not appeal to male AMs either, although the position itself is deemed attractive to millennials by and large.

Furthermore, when the employer holds strong on to two HRM priorities that are diversity and inclusion (see Diverse & Inclusive Workplace category), the four strong organizational values of Integrity, Teamwork, Commitment and Courage render employees similar in the eyes of the employer (see “4 Strong Values Determine Employee Cultural Fit” dimension in Appendix 5). They are shared by all employees, sought after already during the recruitment process, and nurtured throughout the employee life-long cycle. In this sense, people are hired for cultural fit, so well that it can positively influence their level of satisfaction in their job. Internal branding is developed and sustained around the four core values of the organization.

*“So, I think that the values, these four values, are present in everything we do. And everything we communicate is based on these values, and they are very well known by our employees worldwide. [...] And these are the values we want our employees to live by every day in their work.” (L1)*

#### **4.1.4. Considerate construction and delivery of the EVP**

According to past literature, the EVP is affected “by the organization's values, society, initiative, environment, talent, and reward programs”, which presumes that employees should be involved in the design and framing of the EVP throughout their employment. (Pawar & Charak, 2015, p. 1197.) This paves the way towards RQ1D to reveal whether millennials’ expectations, needs, preferences and demands considered in the construction of the EVP at Hilti, and mostly revelatory of Hilti’s feedback system and some manners in which it is exploited by HRM leaders.

Though Hilti doesn’t directly ask millennial AMs for their expectations, needs, preferences and demands in the construction and delivery of the EVP first-hand, there exists an inclusive and extensive feedback system which allows AMs to participate in the shaping of the EVP (see Inclusive Feedback System category, Appendix 5). Millennial AMs have room to share about their opinions, experiences, needs and relative demands, from the two employee opinion surveys conducted yearly, passing through the 2019 company-wide project that required all employees to give anonymous feedback about any of their colleagues, to the Q&As sessions with the CEO held online about the company situation and its lead into the future, and from the feedback system about training, the one about the team, its climate and teamwork, and the one about Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) to the feedback form on the new intranet. All participants in the research asserted that all employee feedback is always at least taken into consideration. There is a lean development approach because all feedbacks are reviewed by the Leadership Team, that checks them to possibly action on them whenever it is feasible. The feedback system has been leveraged in that it has led to innovations and adjustments of the EVP. For example, millennial AMs have formulated requests to improve internal communications. In 2019, they gave feedback about issues in finding the information they needed to perform their work (who to contact, respective responsibilities, etc.). So, the organization’s Leadership Team has worked on this feedback to develop a table that works as a tool for people to know where to find specific information across the organization. Hence, when feedback underlines things that can be improved, action is then taken by the incumbent Leadership Team on a global scale and/or the Finnish HQ on a national scale, with potential follow-up by the team leaders on a local scale. The insertion of field trainers<sup>19</sup> got initiated from AMs’ post-training feedback, for instance. It appears relatively important to make room for feedback and address raised issues for employees to

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<sup>19</sup> Field trainers have been responsible for the initial and ongoing training of AMs at Hilti since January 2020. There were only two of them at the time when the research was conducted, meaning that not many AMs had benefitted from their help but mostly were trained by their respective team leader (i.e., Regional Manager, RM).



feel like they are heard and valued, so that they can contribute to improving the current activities, as confirmed by an informer.

*“The HR strategy is a pretty big part of the company strategy. So, as we often say that people are the most important resource in the company, so you can actually see it in the strategy. There are certain aims or goals that are stated in the strategy and those are related to retention rate, diversity and inclusion, and also, effective recruitment.” (L2)*

Millennial AMs’ demands and preferences about CSR are considered as well. As expressed in the quote above, people are perceived as the most salient resource of the company, which explains the interviewees’ impression of a stronger emphasis given to the social pillar of CSR (see Emphasis on Social Responsibility in Finland category, Appendix 5). Yet, AMs’ 2019 employee satisfaction survey revealed a lack of communication about environmental responsibility and the Leadership Team is currently working onto finding solutions to the lack of communication about the organization’s environmental responsibility. An informant (L2) questioned this feedback and claimed that Hilti’s high level of communication on the social pillar, the importance of environmental responsibility in the public discussion, and the inherent negative impact of the construction industry on the environment, altogether might affect millennial AMs’ view.

From all the participants’ viewpoint, CSR helps both in attracting and retaining millennial AMs, although most communication is not produced in Finland.

*“So, yeah, I mean it does play a part, but in Finland we don't do so much.” (L3)*

The consideration of AMs’ feedback, their expectations, needs, preferences and demands can be observed from millennial AMs’ exit interviews when leaving the company. The HRM leader in charge of these exit interviews asks about the reasons for AMs’ resignation. According to these exit interviews, two major factors lead to resignation: either people haven’t reached the promotion expected rapidly enough, or they simply don’t feel no passion for the construction industry and want to go elsewhere, where they could be more passionate about their job. Though the organization promises a wide variety of career development opportunities, HRM people recognized in millennial AMs what they alternatively characterized as “unrealistic career development expectations” and “impatience”. Both HRM leaders also highlighted that millennial AMs’ motivation and retention could be increased if they reached a faster career advancement and were paid more. On an average, it takes about two-three years to be promoted from an AM tenure to another role, a time lapse which has increased according to HRM interviewees, though both stressed the resort to internal employees for filling managerial positions in Finland. One informer added that the rapidity of advancement also depends on the availability of positions, which wasn’t that high in 2019. This could lead to some

millennial AMs' disillusion when coupled with a monthly basic salary that is lower than other employers in the construction industry (see Advanced Reward System & Benefits category in Appendix 5). On the other hand, HRM people believe the lack of satisfaction with the basic salary is somehow offset by the extensive list of other benefits and perks that come along with the AM tenure (see Advanced Reward System & Benefits category). One informant also indicated that millennial AMs would appreciate being granted more freedom in their job.

*“So, we didn't hire anyone outside when we hired to manager positions, but we also didn't have that many positions last year. What could I say? Maybe ten, or something (got promoted from AM to another tenure).” (L3)*

*“In my own opinion, and also coming up in the exit interviews, is that many would want to have even more freedom to do their job the way they want to. So, often it is felt from these different reporting tools, for example, that they're not that motivated.” (L2)*

Besides, HRM leaders contemplate AMs' preference for the social aspects of the job and they ascertained team spirit and team support as the biggest fun factor for millennial AMs in the daily. Millennial AMs' need for social connection seems to be fed satisfactorily since those who quit give positive feedback about social relationships. The latter occur locally, essentially through the team leader-AM relationship, the relationships between team members (AM to AM) and relationships developed with customers. All informers argued that team leaders, also known as Regional Managers (RMs), are the ones responsible for keeping a high level of motivation within their team. Team leaders deliver locally on the employer brand, decisions and initiatives, and develop strong relationships with AMs within their team, thus greatly influencing AMs' employee experience in the daily (see Essential Role of the Team Leader category, Appendix 5). They ensure motivation and commitment levels remain high both on a team level and on an individual level. Although the social bond established, nurtured and sustained between AMs is crucial to their engagement and commitment, it has been noted that occurrences and interactions on a team level are mostly out of the scope of the employer because dealt with locally by AMs and their respective RM.

## **4.2. Millennials' experience at Hilti**

Not only does the intended internal brand help instil a common purpose among employees, but it most importantly facilitates the analysis of the employee experience by imparting a common basis of reference for evaluation of millennial AMs' experience at Hilti (ref. RQ2). As seen in the prior section, Hilti's intended internal brand encloses their EVP permeated by their official organizational values. The employee experience is made with reference to the intended internal brand and fosters the emergence of the internal brand, that is the one experienced by employees and not any more what

is envisaged by the employer. This section focuses on millennial AMs' experience of Hilti's intended internal brand (ref. RQ2). First, millennial AMs' experience of the intended internal brand is enlightened, especially with regards to the official organizational values (ref. RQ2A). Then, RQ2B sheds lights on the value they perceive from the EVP framed with the employer. Lastly, millennial AM's willingness to continue working at Hilti is tied to their experience of the EVP (RQ2C).

First and foremost, it is essential to recall that AMs work remotely, each one of them partaking in one of the sales teams sparse across Finland. They are Hilti's salespersons with their B2B customers and the research participants either contract in the construction building or in the electricity industry. The remoteness of the position contributes to the definition, development and deployment of the EVP with them by the employer, in a continuous effort to construct and sustain their intended internal brand. In this section, quotes of millennial AMs are also identified according to a numerical order: AM1, AM2, AM3, AM4, AM5 and AM6.

#### **4.2.1. Millennial AMs' experience of Hilti's organizational values**

RQ2A centres on millennial AM's experience of Hilti's organizational values. In response, millennial AMs perceive Hilti's internal brand very positively and emphasize its caring nature built around strong values. During the interviews, the internal brand was defined as the image interviewees have of their employer. All of the interviewees said that Hilti's possesses a "really positive" employer image, 5 out of 6 qualified it as one of a caring employer, and two even stated it has been the best employer they have had. Accordingly, the company culture has been felt strongly as "supportive" (by 4 out of 6 AMs), "open" (by 2 out of 6 AMs), "honest" (AM6) and "very light compared to other workplaces" (AM2). One also mentioned that "diversity is seen as an asset" (AM3). This people orientation was named by an AM. Thus, the interviewees unanimously feel valued as individuals, and one of them declared that "COVID-19 really showed that Hilti cares about their employees" (AM4). Similarly, all informers indicated that they feel supported and appreciated for their work, three related this feeling to teamwork, and another added that more support is needed at times, specifying a "lack of engineers" (AM1).

*"I've done many things and worked for many companies and, hands-down, Hilti has been the best in that they take really good care of the workers, the employees." (AM6)*

*"They're very people-oriented. [...] Yeah, that's the main thing." (AM6)*

*"A simple answer would be that Hilti cares about the employees. I think that's the key." (AM5)*

*"I think it's really people-related. They are investing in people and people are part of the strategy, I think." (AM3)*

The entirety of interviewees asserted that their personal values align with Hilti's organizational values. Additionally, 4 out of 6 interviewees cited these values as one of the reasons either for their employer choice or for them liking working at Hilti. Diversity and inclusion were also broached by an AM (see quote underneath). Hilti values are communicated often and consistently over time, regardless of demographic differences among employees, through a mix of channels across the organization. They pervade from the job interview onwards to the onboarding – where they are learnt and discussed in the “Hilti Way”<sup>20</sup> – from their display on the intranet to trainings, and from team meetings to quarterly meetings or big area meetings later on – which spur discussion and interrogations such as “Has Hilti been enforcing those values?” or “Have we been enforcing those values in our daily work?” (AM6). Half of the participants clarified that the values delivery may be adjusted but the bottom line remains identical (AM2, AM3 and AM6). AM3 highlighted that organizational values are “looked a bit differently than in the 80s”, with young people having a different worldview today about values, it may be that they appeal more to younger people.

*“We invest heavily in creating an inclusive environment and put in place people development and reward systems, which are transparent, traceable and non-discriminatory, to make Hilti a great place to work for everyone.” (AM3)*

Teamwork, Integrity, Commitment and Courage can be observed from AMs' relationship both to their team leader and to their team, with only little differences in rating by AMs within and across teams. All participants informed on an average having a good relationship to their respective Regional Manager (RM) with high levels of mutual honesty and trust, of feeling respected, feeling enabled by their team leader to have their needs and demands met, and become and perform better. AMs feel inspired by their team leader to give their 110%, make efforts, improve and be proud of the work done. They feel protected by their team leader and believe (s)he instils a strong team spirit. In a similar fashion, AMs feel respected and agree on the presence of mutual trust within their team. They feel a sense of belonging and have a good team spirit, including mutual support, mutual care, cooperation, having each other's back, sharing moments together whenever possible, etc. Eventually, organizational values are reflected in that all but one interviewee admitted their belief in their possible career advancement at Hilti, with newest in tenure (two AMs hired at the beginning of 2020) showing stronger confidence in it than more experienced AMs. There seems to be a disillusion on the subject of career advancement, which got emphasized by AM1, who isn't sure about his chances due to difficulties faced in sales at some point and the long time needed to be promoted to an RM role. However, 4 out of 6 informers justified their belief by stating their abilities and strengths.

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<sup>20</sup> Hilti way is a program centred around Hilti values during employee onboarding, where they can learn and discuss the values.

In this way, AMs perceive Hilti as a fair, responsible and inclusive employer who cares about them and shows it via the structure established since the beginning of the employee life cycle. Not only do their personal values align with Hilti's values, but they are equally well-educated and trained on these values that are at core of everything being done within the organization and discussed repeatedly both on a team level, across teams and on a corporate level. These values permeate all the systems, relationships and work environment established by and through Hilti (see Figure 10, preceding).

#### **4.2.2. Millennial AMs' experience and perceived value of the EVP**

The perception of the value that the identified EVP actually creates for millennial AMs in their daily work (ref. RQ2B) was retrieved from their interrogation on what they like the most and the least about their position, and these issues were then linked back to the EVP. Among the five most appreciated elements were cited orderly:

- (1) Responsibilities, conveyed by all interviewees predominantly in the top 3 features of the job that are liked the most. Such responsibilities were associated with customer-related matters (such as meetings, helping customers, successes, relationships) by all AMs, and related to the fun aspect of the AM role (AM2), good performance (AM6), flexibility and time management (AM4, AM6), as well as pride and motivation (AM2).
- (2) Internal relationships, also evoked by five AMs in the top 3 most liked features of the AM job. They were tied to the fun aspect of the job (AM2, AM6), strong team spirit and successes (AM3).
- (3) Constant learning and development prevailed among the fourth (AM3, AM4, AM5, AM6) and fifth (AM1) ranks of the top 5 most liked features of the AM job. One informer tied this learning and development to a "need" (AM4) and another said reported feeling "supported and encouraged" in that area (AM6).
- (4) Flexibility and limited stress matters, mentioned by five AMs and ranked on top of the five most liked features of the job by two of them (AM1, AM4) and at the bottom of the ranking by two others (AM5, AM6). This flexibility was connected to working hours (AM1, AM6), responsibilities (AM4), freedom (AM5, AM6). Limited stress was broached by two AM (AM2 and AM6).
- (5) Recognition, rewards and benefits appeared only thrice across the top five most liked features of the AM job and were only indicated by two informers (AM2 and AM6), who respectively talked about the company car and monetary compensation (AM2), and benefiting from a possible promotion (AM6).

The company culture that revolves around caring people was also ranked first once (AM5).

Alternatively, the least appreciated or most difficult elements of the AM position had to do with:

- (1) Work-related stress, cited amid the first (AM3) and second (AM2, AM4) most difficult/least liked features of the job with three interviewees. Stress is “sometimes” felt due to the “hectic work environment” which can lead to difficulties in finding enough time to handle all the tasks.
- (2) “Situations when we fail to deliver our promise to customers”, touched by two informers in relation product availability/logistics challenges (AM1) and the “feeling that process prevails over customer satisfaction” (AM2).
- (3) Customer-related issues, delineated by three AMs and had to do with: not feeling valued by customers (AM4), closing deals with current price levels (AM1), and difficulty in managing the customer portfolio in the most efficient way (AM2).
- (4) Management issues, ranked respectively first and second most difficult/least liked features of the job by two informers and introduced as “micromanagement” (AM1) and “feeling like a toddler because the management addresses us in a condescending way” (AM6).
- (5) Inter-departmental communication issues, ranked respectively first and second most difficult/least liked features of the job by two informers, too. It may take “time to get your ideas into actions because of the internal bureaucracy” (AM6) and “communication between departments can be difficult in a large organization” (AM3).
- (6) Recognition, rewards and benefits issues that two AMs dislike and find really difficult. The bonus system creates conflict situations on how to mark the sale (AM5), uneven salary across regions were noticed (AM6), and advancement opportunities promised “way too soon” can create “a false sense of the experience needed to actually advance” (AM6).
- (7) Market opportunities prioritization, ranked third (AM4) and fourth (AM2) least liked/most difficult feature of the role by two interviewees. One recognized feeling challenged when it comes to having “all relevant projects on the same radar” (AM2).
- (8) Information systems issues, ranked third (AM3) and fourth (AM1) least liked/most difficult feature of the role by two interviewees as well. In particular, double reporting and momentary information overload were expressed.
- (9) Lack of help only appeared once among the responses and was ranked third least liked/most difficult feature of the job.

With consideration to Hilti’s EVP dimensions intended for AMs (see Figure 9 and Figure 10), both the positive and negative points broached by participants were sorted under the corresponding

employer attributes in Table 6 (succeeding). According to the customer value dynamics model (Khalifa, 2004), the most liked features were designated as “value magnifiers” whereas the least liked points were qualified as “value destroyers”. Note that the company culture doesn’t appear in the table because, just as the organizational values, it somehow overarches all the dimensions.

**Table 6. Millennial AMs’ experience of the EVP dimensions**

<b>EVP dimensions</b>	<b>Facilitate self-development &amp; professional growth</b>	<b>Provide a safe, fair &amp; responsible work environment</b>	<b>Social &amp; informational value within &amp; across teams</b>	<b>Recognition, Rewards &amp; Benefits</b>
<b>Value magnifiers appear after the related employer attributes</b>	A challenging daily job: Responsibilities, Flexibility and limited stress	Fair & Caring Management: Caring employer	Essential Role of the Team Leader: Internal relationships	Advanced Reward System & Benefits: Recognition, rewards and benefits
	Constant Learning & Development: Constant Learning & Development		Team members & Dynamics influence AMs’ Experience: Internal relationships	
<b>Value destroyers appear after the related employer attributes</b>	A challenging daily job: Work-related stress, “Situations when we fail to deliver our promise to customers”, Customer-related issues, Market opportunities prioritization	Fair & Caring Management: Micromanagement, Feeling of infantilisation	Developed internal communications: Inter-departmental communication issues, Information systems issues	Advanced Reward System & Benefits: Recognition, rewards and benefits

According to the EVP formerly identified with the employer, the “Facilitate self-development & professional growth” dimension was the most cited by millennials when asked about their perceived value of the EVP. Investment in employee training and development prevails. In fact, AMs believe receiving sufficient and relevant training for them to perform their job well. Hilti offers them comprehensive (AM5, AM6) and “high level training” (AM2, AM3) tools and means, ranging from “good sales training” and “good basic training” (AM1) to field training (AM4, AM5), all the way to the online training portal, especially useful for self-development during the Covid crisis. 4 out of 6 interviewees declared that they learn the most when on the field with more experienced colleagues, including their respective team leaders, who know “how to coach [them] personally” (AM6). *De facto*, team leaders (i.e., RMs) successfully assess AMs’ strengths and development needs, according

to the sample interviewed. This encompasses the development of a strong relationship over time, one that gives AMs the possibility to share personal knowledge and receive some from others, as well as constructive feedback (principally from their RM). However, there exists a need for a “better understanding of construction”<sup>21</sup> (AM1, AM4) coupled with a more “hands-on training” (AM6), specifically “for more challenging products” (AM2) and for installation training (AM1). Apparently, more practical training to acquire “technical knowledge” (AM3) is needed where AMs don’t have a background that matches their current vocational field and activities (construction notably). It seems that AMs’ opinion is also valued to find innovative and creative solutions to help improve their team performance. All AMs reported being encouraged to think creatively to achieve innovation and some acclaimed it as a practice unique to Hilti (AM4). Overall, AMs feel empowered by all the training and more confident in their position. Under the “Challenging daily job” employer attribute, the unanimous description of the position responsibilities and its flexibility was most accurately designated by the word “entrepreneur” inside of Hilti, used by two of the interviewees (AM1, AM4) in the definition of their job. The latter involves varied activities such as time and spatial planning<sup>22</sup> to take care of a portfolio of customers within one’s own geographical area, problem solving, customer visits on work sites and in offices, product demonstrations and pitching with the goal to maintain and develop 15-30 key accounts through customer relationships. Whence the work-related stress, associated to customer-related issues and market opportunities prioritization, all expressed as value destroyers.

The second most cited EVP dimension in terms of perceived value was determined in “Social & informational value within & across teams”. The significant role of the team leader and team interactions and dynamics in millennial AMs’ experience were delineated. The salient role of Regional Managers (RMs) in the development of AMs can be noted from the second’s perception of being effectively coached, their feeling of involvement in the team decision-making, and their belief that RMs action on their suggestions for improvement of activities. According to the sample of millennial AMs, RMs are competent in their position, they are seen as very helpful and dedicated coaches who answer AMs’ questions and they continuously tailor their coaching to each team member’s profile and preferred ways of learning (AM1, AM2, AM3, AM5, AM6). All informers feel greatly involved in their respective team decision-making, regardless of their level of experience,

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<sup>21</sup> Reference to the quote « how do construction sites work (phases, what to do and when, etc)?” (AM1).

<sup>22</sup> AMs plan their weekdays by themselves so that they can meet their customers during their working hours (7am-3pm), typically from early morning until beginning-mid-afternoon. Ideally, they should meet six customers a day. There are no clear definite working hours set though the employer expects from them to be working about 37.5h/week as mentioned in the law. So, AMs can work whenever and from wherever, as long as they meet their goals/ targets.



thereby accentuating the inclusiveness of RMs. By and large, RMs ask AMs' opinion on what can affect them, for instance for the organization of team meetings (AM2, AM5). Similarly, AMs relationships to their teammates import to their work experience, which they influence to a certain extent. All interviewees said being satisfied by their relationships to their teammates. High levels of honesty, trust, respect, sense of belonging and team spirit were reported by AMs. Team spirit was introduced to them as effusing from mutual support, mutual care, cooperation, having each other's back, sharing moments together whenever possible, etc. These relationships are constructed and maintained notably through the use of tools and events that allow for interactions within teams, predominantly via phone calls and text messages via phone or WhatsApp, face-to-face (mostly disrupted due to COVID-19) and online meetings by means of the Microsoft software Teams or Skype, and via email. They help AMs in overcoming the distance between them and build the social connection needed for teamwork and personal commitment to the team. When phone communications are more informal and offer more instant responsiveness to all AMs (e.g., for technical questions to AM3), emails are perceived more formal and relied upon for "information to save and come back to later" (AM2). Official and formal team meetings are held weekly via Microsoft Team or Skype video call (AM1, AM2, AM4, AM5). More informal team meetups like lunches/barbecues or weekend games, are organized by AMs for them to bond on a more casual level, which also contributes to strengthening their bond on the job. Interestingly, most of the communications between AMs and their respective team leader are not dependent on the employer, but occur via phone calls, texts and WhatsApp in the daily. The WhatsApp team group is used on a daily basis or almost by all informers and is intended for direct help (AM1, AM2) or "urgent/important matters that regard every AM" (AM2), even though the subjects of conversation can sometimes be non-work related (AM2, AM3, AM5, AM6). Whilst all the interviewees share the feeling of having sufficient interactions with their team members, four declared missing face-to-face interactions (AM1, AM2, AM3, AM6) since all communications had been transferred online from March through June 2020 because of the Covid crisis. On the "developed internal communications" employer attribute, the need for less reporting systems was expressed (AM1). The expression of this need was made with the management, which spurred the decision to shift to a unique Customer Relationship Management (CRM) system in August 2020, thus merging all reporting systems in one (AM1). Besides, whenever requested, support is provided (AM6).

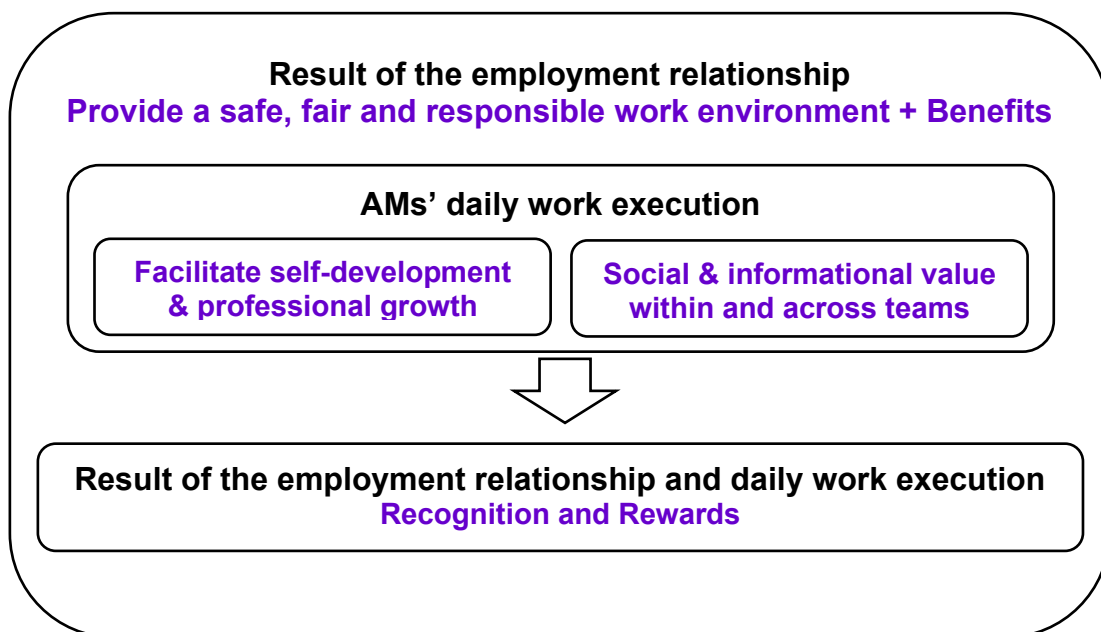
The "Recognition, Rewards & Benefits" dimension overall appeared third when broaching the perceived value with AMs, who spoke about the comprehensive recognition, rewards and benefits but had mixed feelings about the pay scheme. AMs unanimously recognized that there are numerous

satisfactory benefits (quarterly bonuses based on personal and team performance, health insurance, accident insurance, company car, laptop, phone and clothing, yearly pay raises based on personal and team performance, annual leisure and cultural voucher) added to the basic salary, which they however deem being low in comparison to that of the competition. One even said that Hilti is an “exemplar employer for benefits” (AM1). Whereas one said he likes “transparency about salaries and bonuses” (AM3), another claimed that there has been a loophole in the information around the yearly pay raise as hitting personal targets hasn’t led to such yearly raise, thereby breaching the initial promise, though this informer also acknowledged having received the missing information behind no raise afterwards, this was a somewhat bothering experience (AM6). One said that he prefers the sales-related bonus model over a fixed compensation model (AM2). Interestingly, he also said that the monetary impact of the yearly raise is “so low nowadays that it doesn’t really motivate people”. And two agreed (unknowingly) on that they would like to benefit from a 10-15% pay raise in monthly salary (AM5, AM6). Millennial AMs believe that their contributions and accomplishments are recognized locally by their respective team leaders (or RMs) but are not certain of their recognition by the company, although they all feel valued as persons at Hilti. Besides, although AMs gauge all the tools provided by Hilti to execute on their job effectively satisfactory, the need for a better work tablet was expressed (AM1).

The image of a caring employer with AMs could be correlated to the perceived value of “Providing a safe, fair & responsible work environment” dimension (see Figures 8, 9 and 10). More specifically, the feedback system in place is recognized and appreciated by millennial AMs, who all affirm that they are asked feedback on their work and Hilti’s initiatives through a cross-organizational feedback system that allows for mutual feedback (AM1) and make them “feel heard” by the management (AM1, AM2, AM3, AM5, AM6), even though one stressed that multiple AMs may have to convey the same message repeatedly to get it through (AM6). RMs give team feedback or one-on-one, which fosters a climate of trust and openness with AMs (AM3). In fact, AMs feel involved in the organizational decisions that can or will affect them in terms of “job framing and formation” (AM1), that is “what I work on and how I do the work” (AM3). Oftentimes, polls are rolled for AMs to choose among options (AM4). One added wanting to be involved in “how we do daily or how we operate daily, or what are the daily targets” (AM5) while another specified that feedback should be well thought-out to be considered by the management (AM6). Still, a lot of changes have been made according to AMs’ feedback (AM1), whereof stories have been heard by the newest employees (AM3, AM4).

### **Conclusion on Hilti's EVP influence on millennial AMs' experience**

Ultimately, both positive and negative points of millennial AMs' experience of the EVP accentuate the significant importance of two aggregate EVP dimensions: the "facilitation of self-development and professional growth" and the "social and informational value within and across teams". Since these two dimensions are tied to the daily exercise of the AM job, they suggest that the daily experience fundamentally influences employee experience of AMs at Hilti. Yet, the interviewees cited aspects of their daily work because the safe, fair, and responsible working environment created by Hilti allows them to fully focus on their job and have little to no concerns about the "provide a safe, fair and responsible work environment" dimension. Still, the "Recognition, Rewards & Benefits" dimension doesn't reflect best the work input of millennial AMs in that their basic salary doesn't satisfy them completely, in spite of all the other benefits granted to them. Consequently, employer attributes relative to these four EVP dimensions are seemingly key to the construction and deployment of the EVP with millennial AMs, whose experience influence their satisfaction, behaviours, practices, engagement, commitment, and their will to continue working at Hilti. The Figure 11 (hereafter) represents the organization of the EVP dimensions as experienced by the informants. Providing a safe, fair, and responsible work environment sets the positive foundation of the employment relationship, which comes with benefits necessary for the facilitation of self-development and professional growth as well as social and informational value within and across teams in the daily of the job. This daily execution then results in recognition and rewards.



**Figure 11. Hilti's EVP dimensions experienced by millennial AMs.**

### 4.2.3. Effects of millennials' experience on their continuance at Hilti

The investigation of the effects of millennial AMs' experience of the EVP on their will to continue working at Hilti (ref. RQ2C) showed that AMs' continuance with Hilti is relative. When asked about whether they see themselves continuing in their tenure, interviewees showed mixed feelings, torn between the satisfactory workplace environment, benefits and relationships and their thirst for more career advancement. Though AM informants commonly rated rather high their position at Hilti, on an average estimating they like their job at 8.5/10, they unanimously consider the AM position as an entry-level job for them to develop further within Hilti. Two respondents have a clear idea of the positions they would like to be promoted in (AM5, AM6), and three shared having a predetermined estimation of the maximum time they could spend as an AM (AM1, AM5, AM6). To the informers, it seems that AM is not a long-term position for multiple reasons, such as a lack of challenges and complexity felt for highly educated people (AM1), a lack of enjoyment of the position (AM6), and a salary deemed uncompetitive for considering the background they have (AM1). On the other hand, one also said a raise could lead him to review his ambition for advancement (AM2). Globally, the interviewees are open to career opportunities and advancement at Hilti. They know they have to put in the work in their current position in the daily to reach these career ambitions. In this respect, millennial AMs embody the organizational values of Teamwork, Commitment, Integrity and Courage.

Related to the "Provide a safe, fair & responsible work environment" dimension (see Figures 8, 9 and 10), millennial AMs believe that their employment contract is fair and satisfactory because it offers the security of a permanent contract in a well-established company. Hilti's financial stability, the varied possibilities of advancement on a global scale, and many benefits and perks compensate for the salary considered a bit low. Whereas there exist many different opportunities for advancement, one interviewee stated that their amount is however limited (AM5).

Aspects that fit under the "Facilitate self-development and professional growth" dimension (see Figures 8, 9 and 10) consist of primary sources of commitment in the job, according to four informers (AM2, AM4, AM5, AM6). AM6 tied it to the "Recognition, Rewards & Benefits" dimension (see Figure 8, 9 and 10): "I strongly believe I have a chance to move up the ladder to a position I would enjoy more, thus relieving more stress and making me happier to go to work". The interviewees unanimously feel challenged by their job in that they "always have something to do" (AM2), they do a lot of problem-solving (AM1) for their customers, who they need to discover and understand<sup>23</sup>, and

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<sup>23</sup> What do customers do? How do they do it? How do they want to do it? How can AMs help?

“it’s not an easy task to get” the information necessary (AM5). Paradoxically, this need for constant development doesn’t prevent the difficulty to innovate because many basic tasks are “mechanical” (AM1). Overall, challenges help millennial AMs not to feel a lack of interest at work.

The “Social and informational value within & across teams” dimension (see Figures 8, 9 and 10) was substantially referred to by AMs, whose teammates import because they share supportive relationships that enable each and every one of them to go through the daily challenges and contribute to their feeling of belonging to a team. As one phrased it, “I feel that I need that in my job, so that I have the strength to do this job, to have a sense of belonging, so to say” (AM5). Not only do AMs share a bounty of information about business, but they can also build deeper relationships by talking about some more personal matters (AM5, AM6). This fosters empathy and the development of friendships. While they recognize the differences between people that result from their very diverse backgrounds and personalities, AMs “are similar in that [they] share the same values” (AM1).

Besides, customer relationships and sales consist of the major source of motivation for the sample interviewed (AM1, AM2, AM4, AM5) and a primary source of interest and excitement. They informed that the ability to help customers (AM2, AM4) and to make them feel they are important (AM5), the possibility to see that the solutions they are selling really help in keeping customers productive (AM4), and eventually the ability to verify customers’ happiness with Hilti’s products and services, all are motivational upsides of the AM job.

### **4.3. EAC approach to HRM for improvement of Hilti’s EVP**

According to the data collected with HRM-Brand leaders on one hand and millennial AMs on the other, Hilti’s people orientation, reflected in its EVP with AMs, appears to align with the “employees as customers” (EAC) view to HRM. The EAC approach advances employees as individuals more than mere human resources; they are human beings whose needs and demands should be addressed for the successful achievement of organizational goals (Rao, 2017). At Hilti, the sample interviewed unanimously feels valued at work in consequence of the EVP developed, deployed, maintained and revised across scales and functions. All the four EVP dimensions identified with both parties to the employment relationship contribute separately and reciprocally to the creation of the employee experience of millennial AMs and, thence, the creation of the internal brand.

With reference to the customer value-build-up model of value creation (Khalifa, 2004, see Figure 4), the employer-employee relationship is perceived more as a continuous interaction meant to last in the best conditions. In this regard, while most of the AM experience perceived with the sample is positive,

Hilti should consider addressing the elements compiled and highlighted in the Table 7 (underneath) to build greater value for their AMs. This provides some manners for Hilti to leverage the EAC approach to HRM and improve their EVP to meet millennials' expectations, needs and demands in Finland (ref. RQ3).

**Table 7. EAC approach applied with millennial AMs at Hilti**

<b>Current employer attributes</b>	<b>Key improvement points and needs</b>	<b>Suggestions to address these issues and needs</b>
<b>Daily job</b>	Work-related stress (responsibilities, hectic work, difficulty to handle all tasks in the daily)	More flexibility on how AMs conduct the job, recalling them they can pace their responsibilities over time and helping them in so doing (e.g., tips and core training). Incentivising the establishment of clear work/personal life boundaries appears crucial, too.
	Situations when AMs fail to deliver their promises to customers (product availability/logistics challenges, too many processes)	Reduction of customer-sales processes. Reliance on a transparent system of logistics which is accurate and ideally instantly updated on products availability/transport. Putting a logistic expert in contact with clients as soon as a deal is closed or even before, to reassure them and clearly make them comprehend the room of feasibility.
	Customer-related issues (closing deals with current price levels, difficulty in effectively managing the customer portfolio)	Finding a way to grant AMs more freedom/flexibility in how they negotiate and close deals with customers.
	Market opportunities prioritization for simultaneous projects management	Providing AMs with training on how they can prioritize market opportunities for simultaneous projects management (e.g., personal assessment and guidance once a month with their team leader, monthly tips sharing in teams, etc.).
<b>Training and Development</b>	Lack of understanding of the construction industry and insufficient practical training (especially for those who don't have a construction background)	Educate AMs more about the construction industry and provide them with more practical training.
<b>Management</b>	Micromanagement	Minimize micromanagement by team leaders. E.g., educate/train RMs on team leading practices that empower their AMs rather than constrict them.
	Management communication perceived as condescending	Adopt a communication language and tone which convey trust and respect of all, regardless of their profile.
	Interdepartmental communication issues	Accelerate information transfer across departments resorting to a unique communication channel made

<b>Communication and information within and across teams</b>	(inertia and long periods of time for a message to be transmitted across scales and functions)	available and accessible to all directly from the intranet. All feedback given via the form present on the intranet should be replied to within a maximum period of one week, or 10 days for those which require strategic decision-making for improvement of activities. A campaign could be designed to show the benefits of such rapid and effective feedback loop within the company.
	Double reporting into systems	Introduce and leverage a multi-purpose system which integrates the variety of data processes required in the daily.
	Momentary information overload	Offer AMs a digital environment wherein they can access all information relative to their job and its execution in different formats (written, images, videos, audio) and encourage them to keep a personal notebook (online or offline) compiling all the information they wish.
	Need for more face-to-face interactions with colleagues during the Covid crisis	This cannot be resolved due to Covid restrictions. Alternatively, online team building activities can address this need. E.g., videocalls, team chat rooms enabled before/after weekly team meetings, thematic chat rooms once a week (can be scheduled with a special theme a day, people joining depending on their need), multiplayer videogames organized by team members, introducing VR for meetings, etc.
<b>Recognition</b>	Conflictual situations for marking the sales	Putting emphasis on the team goals achievement that influence the sales bonuses and yearly pay raise for all members of the same team, thus developing team spirit.
<b>Rewards</b>	Advancement opportunities communicated too early and unclear communication about yearly pay raises	More transparent and accurate communication about advancement opportunities (variety, limited number, performance needed for a promotion) and yearly pay raises.
	Current basic salary, lower as compared to competing employers	Consider adopting a 5-10% pay raise on the basic salary and/or ways to boost AMs' earnings via the bonus system.
	Uneven salary across regions?	Clear pay scheme presentation to all AMs during a meeting intended for all AMs across Finland, shedding light on the security of the contract. Same presentation to newcomers during their onboarding.
<b>Benefits</b>	Need for better workplace ergonomics, notably for those spending a lot of time in their car	Include a neck pillow in the work car and a surface AMs could use as a mini desk to write on. Conduct a research with AMs to learn what could help them feel more comfortable during their workday. Encourage AMs to continue performing their work remotely (e.g., from home) after the Covid crisis, allow them to visit customer sites only if they deem it necessary based on their exchange with their client.
	Need for a renewal of work material whenever it is reported being a hindrance to AMs' work	Conduct a research with all AMs asking them about the state of their current work material and facilities and what they believe should be repaired/replaced.

Though Hilti's current HRM practices shed light on their care for their employees, the EAC paradigm can help them in constructing an EVP which would present an even better work experience to millennial AMs. The salience of the employment relationship emphasized with the customer value build-up model of value creation (Khalifa, 2004), the identification of elements affecting millennial AMs' experience both positively and negatively supported by the customer value dynamics model (Khalifa, 2004), and the isolation of sources of motivation, sources of commitment, sources of fun, sources of interest and excitement, and sources of pride, all participate in the craft of the millennial AM profile. They could be harnessed by Hilti to reflect on how to address millennial AMs' demands and needs captured through the present research, one that confers a deeper understanding of millennial AMs' viewpoints and experience of the current EVP. This could subsequently allow them to review and refine their offering accordingly, with subsequent betterment of their internal brand with AMs.

#### **4.4. EAC approach to HRM with millennial employees**

On the basis of the research findings with the case organization Hilti, organizations should, more generally, be able to address millennial employees' needs and demands that revolve around:

- 1) The facilitation of self-development and professional growth via constant learning and development:**
  - a) Need to be educated about their work industry and the organization's offering of products and services.
  - b) Need to receive practical training and coaching, both initially when beginning on a job and continuously throughout their career to update their skillset whenever deemed necessary (e.g., in the case of introduction of new systems, development of the offering, etc.).
  - c) Need to feel engaged in their work, to be able to apply on the job what has been learnt and learn from experience in the daily.
  - d) How to minimize work-related stress and keep it as low as possible while ensuring that millennials feel challenged, so that their interest will be sustained. Self-leadership and discipline are powerful levers that can benefit employee experience, eminently with the advent of remote work as the "new normal" in a post-Covid world.
  
- 2) The providing of a safe, fair and responsible work environment:**
  - a) Creation of a diverse and inclusive workplace, wherein people are hired for cultural fit, according to a set of organizational values shared by all employees.



- b) Have fair and somewhat caring management practices and behaviours that reflect a people-first mentality and the priority given to respecting, nurturing and empowering people.
- c) Need to establish an inclusive and regular feedback system, accessible to all employees, whose data can be reviewed and considered in a timely manner by a dedicated team/individual. Pulse surveys<sup>24</sup> can be preferred over annual satisfaction surveys.
- d) Need to have a well-designed and clearly communicated CSR (corporate social responsibility) plan that is deployed on both social and environmental fronts.

### **3) Social and informational value within and across teams:**

- a) Essential need to easily access internal communication channels or other communication channels (such as texting, video call apps) deemed appropriate in the daily, notably during the Covid crisis.
- b) Need to establish more transparency and accuracy and accelerate information (including feedback) transfer.
- c) Need to build and strengthen a trustworthy relationship to a leader/coach who knows the individual personally and, therefore, can guide, advise, help and encourage millennials effectively on a regular basis.
- d) Need for a sense of belonging, especially locally within one's own team, having teammates who hold on to the same work values, and with whom one can oftentimes communicate and genuinely share their experiences, thoughts, feelings, opinions on a variety of work-related matters. The sense of belonging can be achieved through teamwork and team spirit, which encompass one's understanding of the bigger picture and the role they play in it.

### **4) Recognition, rewards and benefits:**

- a) Need of recognition of one's behaviour, actions and performance both by the direct leader/coach, peers and the organization.
- b) Demand of rewards, such as advancement opportunities, bonuses, pay raises, or any other type of reward, deemed appropriate to compensate the work performed, and expected in accordance with the information received when joining the organization or later from supervisors. Alignment, transparency and accuracy are of utmost importance.

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<sup>24</sup> A pulse survey consists of a short survey sent to employees for them to fill on a regular basis (monthly, quarterly...). It can be responded rapidly by employees and covers subjects such as communication, relationships, leadership, work environment, etc.

- c) Need to be provided with all the material necessary to perform one's job successfully and benefit from working conditions that match one's expectations based on terms agreed upon with supervisors. For instance, being allowed to conduct work remotely and having access granted to all systems and communication channels that are essential to work during the Covid crisis.
- d) Demand and/or expectation of extra benefits such as health coverage, insurance, leisure budget, team lunches and team building activities, transport allowances.

# CHAPTER 5

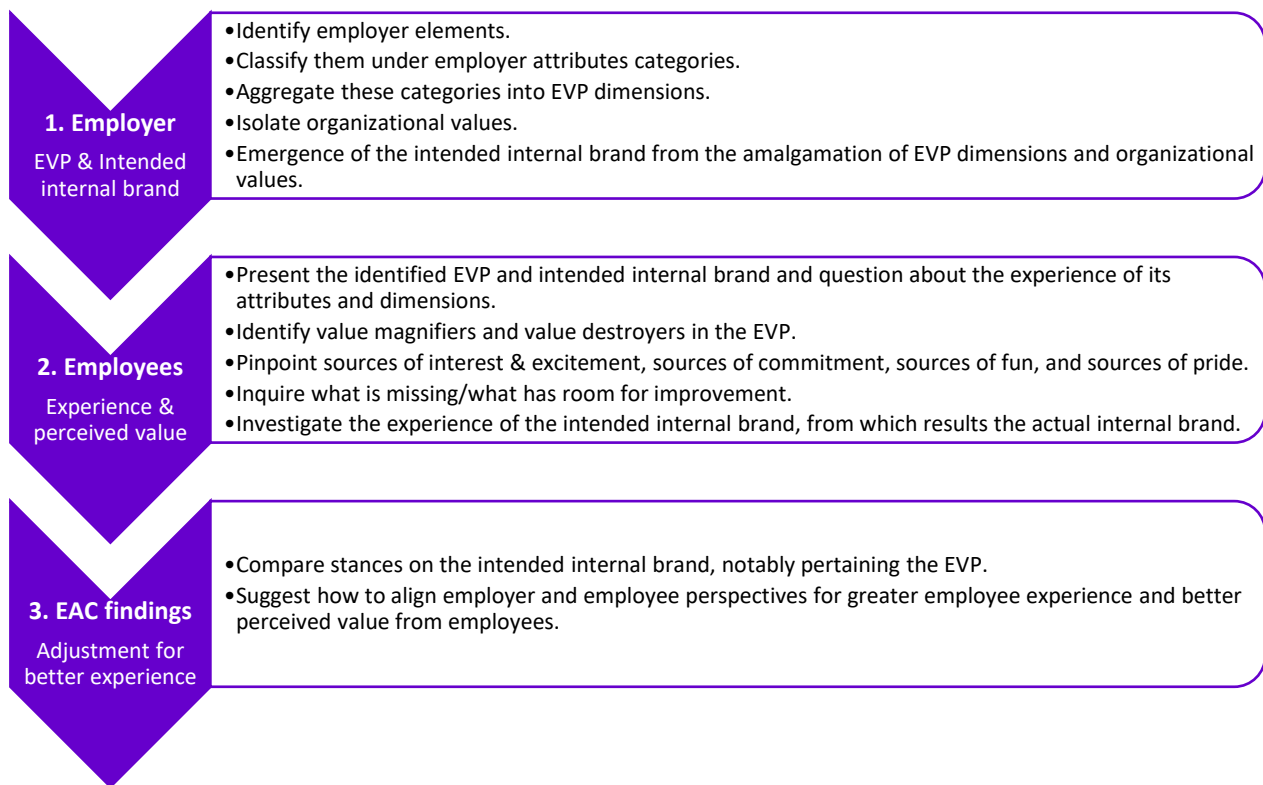
## Discussion and Conclusion

### 5.1. Research summary and outcomes

This research aimed at the exploration of how the EAC approach to HRM can help an organization to better its offering for millennial employees. For this purpose, employer and employee perspectives on the intended internal brand – constituted by the EVP permeated by the official organizational values – and the value it creates for employees were compared. More precisely, the EVP dimensions that emerged from the empirical study outline the value intended for employees by the employer. The EVP dimensions were aggregated from the employer attributes identified via the inductive coding of data obtained during online semi-structured interviews with the HRM and Brand leaders, who endorsed the employer stance. Further, the amalgamation of the EVP dimensions with the organizational values could crystallize the intended internal employer brand of the case company. The intended internal brand of the company was then put in perspective with the data collected with millennial AMs through online semi-structured interviews. Their opinions and perceived value of both the EVP were compared to recognize similarities, patterns, discrepancies necessary to seize the overall value and internal brand perceived by them as target population, and how they affect their will to continue working with their employer. Though the perceived value of the EVP is individualistic and relativistic, this research attempted to build a framework that could somehow capture an overarching perceived value for the sample of millennial AMs who participated in the research, assumed to reflect millennial AMs experience with Hilti in Finland. Eventually, the EAC view to HRM fostered suggestions on what the employer could improve for greater employee experience and how, based on the comparison of the findings with both parties to the employment contract. Particular attention should be given to: (1) the reduction of work-related stress, (2) further education about the construction industry and the delivery of more practical training, (3) the acceleration of information (including feedback) transfer and establishment of more transparency and accuracy, (4) the minimization of conflictual situations for marking the sales, (5) more transparent and accurate communication about advancement opportunities and yearly pay raises, (6) the consideration of the adoption of a more satisfactory pay scheme for AMs, (7) the quality of work material and conditions for AMs to execute on their job.

The ground-breaking instrumentalization of models of customer value creation in the field of HRM proved to be successful, in the sense that it allowed for the effective comprehension and interpretation of millennials' experience (or perceived value) of the intended internal brand identified with HRM and Brand leaders as well as team leaders. It facilitated the framing of the response to the research question 2. The means-end chain model adapted to employer brand choice initially motivated the distinction between employer attributes, that is the controllable elements of the EVP, and the employee perceived value, which is not directly controllable by the employer but can be aimed at via strategies of internal branding and their implementation. Such strategies require the collaboration between different organizational functions, prominently HRM and Marketing. Employee benefits present in this first model were excluded from the research because they were somewhat implicitly understood from the employer attributes and the research was oriented towards the study of the perceived value. The value build-up model served in the evaluation of the employer's approach to the relationship to AMs and helped in assessing where Hilti stands on the spectrum of the EAC philosophy. It appeared that employees are conceived as human beings, whose opinion, demands, and needs are sought after and considered in the construction and delivery of the EVP at Hilti, although management initiatives are often undertaken prior asking for employee feedback. Finally, the value dynamics model of value creation was utilized in the assessment of the perceived value by millennials. Only value magnifiers and value destroyers were appropriated to the research due to their respective correspondence to the most liked and the least liked/most difficult features of the AM job. In effect, explicitly expected characteristics corresponded to the elements used by the employer in their job ad and description of the AM position, as well as all the information conveyed by the employer once employees integrate the company; the implicitly expected and the unexpected could not be retrieved from the interviews conducted.

Figure 12 underneath condenses the research findings across the three stages of investigation of the EAC view to HRM. It frames the organizational experience co-creation by the employer and their employees.



**Figure 12. EAC framework for organizational employee experience co-creation.**

Empirical findings were shared with the HRM department of the firm on how their intended internal brand is experienced by their millennial AMs, as well as suggestions and recommendations on how to better such experience by means of the reviewal and adjustment of their EVP according to the EAC view to HRM. To make sense of millennials' experiential feedback, my collaboration with HRM department led to the writing of a dedicated report. The latter gathers the main findings and recommendations on how to address current and future AM' needs, expectations and demands in accordance with the revised internal branding strategy inspired by the EAC philosophy and the application of the customer models of value creation. Further, I hope that my involvement with the employer will encourage them to ascertain their EAC approach to employees. This entails that they will subsequently take the decisions and measures necessary for their workforce to feel more engaged by their experience of the workplace, seeing their needs met, thereby improving employee commitment, organisational culture, environment and performance, all important to employee loyalty and the internal brand.

## **5.2. Contribution to research**

This study contributes to research on EVP, internal branding and the employee experience by integrating the means-end chain model adapted to employer brand choice (Ronda et al., 2018) with customer models of value creation (Khalifa, 2004) to understand how the EAC view can be adopted

in the realm of HRM and pave the way towards employee experience co-creation by the employer and their employees. This integrated theoretical framework brought in new information as regards to:

- The theory on the EVP and its construction, internal branding, and the EAC paradigm. The abductive research method was conducive to such theoretical extension as it consisted of the association of existing literature and concepts to the empirical data through the exploration of the employers' offering alone, of their employees' experiences alone, and of the employer-employee relationship. Though the resort to the means-end chain model adapted to employer brand choice, the four types of employer attributes as well as the seven employer branding value propositions (Ronda et al., 2018) inspired the framing of interview questions with the employer, the data analysis was performed inductively and furthered the concept of EVP in correlation to the intended internal brand. In fact, the framework for thematic coding of the employer's interview data (see Figure 6) elaborates a roadmap that (1) starts from the elements of the EVP, (2) classifies them into employer attributes, (3) then aggregates them under EVP dimensions, (4) which together with the official organizational values, (5) enable the capture of the organization's intended internal brand. Consequently, the research initiated two major theoretical advancements: 1) the crystallization of the EVP through the methodical identification of employer attributes and their classification into EVP dimensions, 2) the definition and construction of the internal brand, and more precisely the distinction of the internal brand intended by the employer, and the actual internal brand, as experienced by the workforce.
- The transfer and suitability of two models of customer value creation, that are the value build-up model of value creation and the customer value dynamics model (Khalifa, 2004), to evaluate employee experience. The ground-breaking application of customer value creation models in analysing and interpreting how value can be created for and with current employees through internal branding, in what manner and to what extent it impacts their experience with the organization in today's rapidly changing environment, consists of a bold and deepening consideration of the EAC view in HRM.
- the co-creation of employee experience at an organizational level, condensed into a framework.

Another significant contribution resides in the findings on the millennial age segment in the workplace. Whilst previous research on millennials has focused on the study of their values, expectations, attributes and behaviours, and related influence in the workplace and on organizational behaviour, this research is among the first to explore millennial employee experience *per se* by

considering them as internal customers, whose needs and demands must be addressed effectively. The data gathered with millennials and their employer conforms to previous literature findings on millennials. The latter indeed seek “interesting, meaningful work, a collegial work environment and a socially responsible culture”; and working conditions (such as supervision, work hours, flexibility) and contractual aspects (such as job security, pay scheme and training) import more over time (Kuron et al., 2015, p. 1002). Millennials’ hunger for rapid advancement, their need for continuous constructive feedback, their need for strong relationships, their expectation for management transparency and their appeal for teamwork, their ease with ICT, and their contribution in the redefinition of the EVP observed converged with existing research (e.g., Myers & Sadaghiani, 2010). Their preference for socially responsible employers whose organizational values align with personal values (Alonso-Almeida & Llach, 2019, p. 239) was reflected too. If the freedom millennials have in the daily of their job at Hilti is one of the elements they reported to be a value magnifier, it may not result in the satisfactory work-life balance job crafting has been posited to spur (Mihelič & Aleksić, 2017) since millennials may actually feel more stressed by all the responsibilities they possess.

### **5.3. Managerial implications**

Some practical tools stemmed from this research, such as Figure 12 – which provides a framework for organizational employee experience co-creation, according to the EAC paradigm – and general recommendations on how EVPs can address millennial employees’ needs and demands (see after Table 7, pp. 80–82).

Employers can ensure that millennials will fit in their organizations and feel satisfied from the benefits of their experience with them by considering millennials as internal customers. The uniqueness of this segment of the workforce merits to be correctly understood and addressed through internal branding – recalled as the “systematically planned management of behaviour, communication, and symbolism utilised by an organisation to attain a favourable and positive reputation with target audiences for an organisation” (Matanda & Ndubisi, 2013, p. 1033). Only then could they initiate and facilitate behavioural changes that are consistent with the intended brand identity and foster person-organization fit of millennials through an enhanced compatibility of organisation-employee values and a greater satisfaction of millennials’ needs.

Such statement is most likely also valid for employees in general. All should be considered as internal customers throughout their employee life cycle for them to thrive in the organization, whose success depends on its workforce.

## 5.4. Research limitations and future research

There are a number of limitations as the research builds on the data collected with the study case organization, whose HRM practices, processes, management and operations are peculiar to them, their employees and their industry.

Although the aim is to advance the adoption of the EAC view as an innovative means that can be utilized to construct and enhance the EVP together with millennials through internal branding to meet their expectations, needs and demands, one must acknowledge that the case under study may not be representative of the overall employer offering and population of millennials in Finland precisely because it comes as a particular investigation, whose modalities are tailored to the case at hand. Therefore, the internal customer orientation advanced was tailored to the organization and individuals studied. In other terms, some further investigation would be needed to assess whether the model could suit some other employers and millennials in Finland, depending on their respective HRM strategy and value proposition and individuals' experience of it.

The reconstruction of the intended internal brand at the case company was based on interviews, data collected with the employer on employee experience, data retrieved from their website. The limited number of informants connotes that the research design did not necessarily reveal everything about the internal dynamics in the organization studied, but rather represents the informants' view. This implies that some elements might not appear as accurate and salient as they could with another researcher. Furthermore, the evaluation of the company's alignment with the EAC philosophy stems from my own understanding of the approach based on the concept delineated in previous literature, as well as on real life empirical cases. Besides, room exists for more research with employers who may not yet have HRM strategies that converge with the EAC view.

As employee experience is based on their statements and behaviours, themselves being submitted to the participants' level of honesty, extent of sharing, and limited by the questions framed, the research spurred a great interpretive challenge. Nevertheless, my interaction with the HRM and Brand leaders of the firm could allow for the formulation of the most relevant questions to be answered, so as to find the best ways to improve their EVP by meeting their employees' needs, expectations and demands through internal branding at the entry level. In addition, my study focused on current millennial employees, implying that the findings might not be the same with older employees.

The thematic coding of the employer's data in the construction of the intended internal brand could be utilized in the investigation of other organizations' offering to assess its generalizability and



suitability across sectors of employment. With the beneficial and growing tendency to perceive employees as internal customers whose needs and demands should be addressed successfully, the instrumentalization of customer value creation models in the realm of HRM could be furthered to establish theoretical structures suitable in the internal value creation process with employees throughout the employee life cycle. The linkages between EVP and employee behaviours, employee performance and employee loyalty could all be explored. Likewise, such research could be replicated and deepened with focus on the perceived value of a specific dimension of the EVP, such as the use of ICTs, a training program, the compensation scheme, the relationship to supervisors, etc. Another research focus could be on the organizational values and how they contribute to shaping the employee experience.

Additionally, it would be interesting to assess whether the EAC framework for organizational employee experience co-creation could be utilized as a foundation for research with other employers. Likewise, for the four EVP dimensions and the intended internal brand crystallized from these dimensions and official organizational values of the empirical case.

When this research has focused on the exploration of millennials' experience in the workplace and adaptation to their profile as existing employees, a next step in research would lie in the study of their integration to the existing older workforce. On top of the need to address intergenerational dynamics at work, similar research to this one could be endeavoured with older age segments with the goal to address their needs and demands more effectively.

Eventually, it would be fascinating to see future research on employee experience of the EVP studied through the lens of models of customer value co-creation since both the employer and employees contribute to the creation of the internal brand in thriving innovative organizations.

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# APPENDICES

## Appendix 1. Table 2 – Empirical data.

This table encapsulates the empirical data employed in the research.

**Table 2. Empirical data.**

<b>Phase 1</b>	<b>Informants</b>	Brand & Communication Specialist Talent Acquisition Specialist HR Business Partner
	<b>Other material</b>	GEOS 2019 survey results GPTW 2019 survey results
<b>Phase 2</b>	<b>Informants</b>	6 millennial Account Managers 3 Regional Managers
	<b>Other material</b>	Responses from HRM and Brand leaders interviewed in phase 1
<b>Phase 3</b>	<b>Material</b>	All data gathered in phases 1 and 2

## Appendix 2 – Millennial AMs Interview questionnaire

### BACKGROUND INFORMATION

- 1) Age, gender and location.
- 2) For how long have you worked at Hilti? How long in your current position?
- 3) What is your background (study/work)?

### ORGANIZATIONAL ATTRIBUTES AND INTERNAL BRANDING

- 4) What are the values of Hilti?
- 5) Do they align with yours?
- 6) How are Hilti's values communicated to you? Does it differ from how they are communicated to your older colleagues (over 40) who are also Account Managers?
- 7) Is there anything missing from Hilti's internal communication? *Think about management decisions, their explanation, think Redi.*
- 8) What is the company culture like at Hilti?
- 9) What are 3 to 5 elements of this culture that positively impact your experience at Hilti?
- 10) A) What do you find has the best impact on your experience as an Account Manager? B) On you as a person?
- 11) A) What do you find negatively impacts your experience as an Account Manager? B) On you as a person?
- 12) Are you asked feedback on your work and on Hilti's initiatives?
  - If yes, how do you feel about giving your feedback? How does it affect you?
  - If no, would you like the company to ask feedback on your work? On their initiatives?
- 13) Does the management act on your feedback and suggestions for improvement of activities?
- 14) Do you feel involved in the organizational decisions that can or will affect you?

- 15) What is the image you have of Hilti as an employer?
- 16) Does internal branding affect the way you perceive Hilti?
  - A) Do you believe Hilti has a strong and relevant employer brand?
  - B) What contributes in the creation of Hilti’s internal brand to you?

**JOB ATTRIBUTES**

- 17) What are your responsibilities in this position?
- 18) What is your favourite part of the job as Account Manager (up to 5 elements)? *Think about the following questions (from A to N) and, once all of them answered in written herein, identify in green and rank the most positive elements in the table “What I like the most about my job”:*
  - A. How do you experience the position of Account Manager in terms of flexibility and working hours?
  - B. What motivates you in your job?
  - C. What keeps you interested and excited about the job?
  - D. Do you feel supported and appreciated for your work (team leader, teammates, management, other business units)?
  - E. Are your contributions and accomplishments recognized by your team leader? By the organization (management)?
  - F. Are you proud of your work? What feeds your pride in your job?
  - G. Do you feel valued as a person?
  - H. How much feedback do you receive about customer satisfaction?
  - I. Do you receive sufficient and relevant training for you to perform your job well? *Elaborate.*
  - J. Do you believe that you could advance in your career at Hilti? Why?
  - K. What makes you feel committed to your job?
  - L. Do the tools (training, vehicle, materials, etc.) provided by Hilti help you effectively in executing on your role?
  - M. Are you encouraged to find innovative and creative solutions to help improve your team performance?
  - N. What is fun in your job?

<b>What I like the most about my job</b>
1.
2.
3.
4.
5.

- 19) What do you like the least (up to 5 elements)? What’s the most difficult for you in holding your position of Account Manager? *You can look at the questions above (from A to N) to help you think about your answer.*

<b>What I like the least/what is the most difficult about my job</b>
1.
2.
3.
4.
5.

- 20) Do you feel challenged by your job? *Elaborate.*
- 21) Does the training make you feel empowered, more confident in your position?
  - If yes, what is the most valuable training (except the basic training) you have benefited from at Hilti?
  - If no, what is missing for you to be able to achieve better and feel more confident at work?
- 22) Would you change (add/remove, accentuate/attenuate) something to the current training program? If yes, what?



- 23) What could improve your working conditions and performance?
- 24) What are your salary and benefits (including bonuses)? Do you believe it is fair for compensating all your work?
- If yes, why?
  - If no, I heard that there is a yearly raise possible depending on your performance. What could you do to improve your results?
- 25) Overall, how do you feel about your employment contract (length, compensation, perks, possibilities of advancement)?
- 26) Overall, do you like your job? *Please rate it from 1 (lowest level) to 10 (highest level) out of 10.*
- 27) Do you see yourself continuing as Account Manager at Hilti?

## WORKPLACE ATTRIBUTES

### Team leader

- 28) What is your relationship to your team leader like? Describe it. *Please check with an "X" the column in the table below according to the presence or absence of relationship aspects/nature. If present, refer the degree of such presence by rating it from 1 (lowest level) to 10 (highest level) out of 10. Ex: Significant level of trust → Trust: "X" put in the Yes (present) column and followed by "9/10".*

Relationship aspects/nature	Yes (present)	No (absent)
Good (satisfactory)		
Your team leader is honest and so are you		
You feel inspired by your team leader to give your 110%, make efforts, improve, be proud of the work done		
You feel trusted by your team leader and trust him/her back		
Your team leader protects you and instils a strong team spirit (fair decision-maker, understanding, inclusive, and make people feel part of the team)		
Your team leader enables you to have your needs and demands met, and become and perform better		
You feel respected		

- 29) Overall, are you satisfied by this relationship?
- 30) Does your team leader successfully assess your strengths and development needs?
- 31) Does your team leader coach you according to your demands and needs?
- 32) Do you feel involved in the decision-making process in your team?
- 33) Does your team leader act on your suggestions for improvement of activities?

### Team members

- 34) A) How do you remain in touch with the rest of your team? Does Hilti provide anything for it?
- B) How often do you use the WhatsApp group and for what?
- 35) Do you feel that you have enough interactions with the rest of your team?

36) Are you satisfied by your interactions with them?

- If yes, why?
- If no, why not? What is missing for you to feel happier as a member of your team?

37) Do you feel connected to your colleagues (empathy, complicity, ease around each other)?

38) What type of relationships do you have with your teammates? *Please check with an "X" the column in the table below according to the presence or absence of relationship aspects/nature. If present, refer the degree of such presence by rating it from 1 (lowest level) to 10 (highest level) out of 10. Ex: Significant level of trust → Trust: "X" put in the Yes (present) column and followed by "9/10".*

<b>Relationship aspects/nature</b>	<b>Yes (present)</b>	<b>No (absent)</b>
Good (satisfactory)		
Honesty		
Trust		
Team spirit (mutual support, mutual care, cooperation, having each other's back, sharing moments together whenever possible, etc.)		
Sense of belonging (they feel part of the team)		
Respect		

#### **CSR ATTRIBUTES**

39) What is Hilti most important CSR (corporate social responsibility) pillar, social or environmental?

40) What CSR pillar is the most important to you, social or environmental?

## **Appendix 3. HR leaders Interview questionnaire.**

#### **BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

1. Title, age, gender
2. For how long have you worked at Hilti? How long in your current position?
3. What are your responsibilities in this position?

#### **GENERAL QUESTIONS ON THE EMPLOYER AND ITS STRATEGY**

4. In your own words, how would you describe Hilti's HR strategy for the last year? What are the goals for the upcoming year?
5. What is Hilti's current HR priority with Account Managers on the agenda?
6. I heard that you conduct 2 employee opinion surveys a year. How do you assess and measure Account Manager employee experience? Anything (document, data, etc.) I could access?
7. Hilti was respectively ranked 20<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> among the best workplaces in Finland in 2019 and 2020.
  - A) Who among Hilti's employees participated in the data collection?
  - B) What is the participation rate of Account Managers?
  - C) What are Hilti's strengths to achieve this title of Best Workplace?
8. Are there differences in the way you address employee needs and demands depending on their age or gender?

9. A) What in Hilti's offering do you think could be improved to increase the motivation of millennial Account Managers?  
B) What could be improved to increase their retention?
10. Do millennials present any feature(s) that is (are) of importance or interest to Hilti that other age segments don't have?
11. Do millennials present any feature(s) that is (are) negative for Hilti as compared to older age groups?
12. How would you describe the employer-employee relationship with millennial Account Managers?
13. What could be bettered in this employer-employee relationship?

## QUESTIONS RELATED TO THE ACCOUNT MANAGER POSITION

14. Do you believe that Hilti offers all the elements listed in the Account Manager job ad (copy in front of you as a reminder)?
15. A) What type of employment contract do Account Managers have (permanent/temporary, full-time/part-time)?  
B) Do you believe it is secure for millennials?
16. What is the salary of Account Managers? How is it calculated?
17. What other perks and benefits do they get?
18. A) What are their working hours?  
B) How much flexibility do they have in their job?
19. How much travel do they go through in the daily?
20. A) What is the international exposure they can get in the daily of their job?  
B) How do you construct this international exposure?
21. What tasks do Account Managers perform in the daily?
22. How do you ensure that millennial Account Managers have some fun in their work (mechanisms, tools, people, frequency, etc.)?
23. How do you ensure that millennial Account Managers are interested, challenged and excited about their work (mechanisms, tools, people, frequency, etc.)?
24. A) What knowledge and skills do Account Managers need to execute on their job?  
B) Does the Account Manager position actually invite them to apply their knowledge and skills?
25. What can contribute in them finding meaningfulness in their job?
26. How do you provide them with growth and advancement opportunities?
27. The "commitment to [Account Managers]' career development" seems genuine when looking at:
  - all the training they receive over time (initial 4-month training, including 10 days with a field trainer; few days followed by the Regional Manager; "new innovations training" every 6 months; small training sessions every now and then),
  - the tools (internal e-training tool Fuse, and external Harvard Manage Mentor) and international mentoring program they have access to.
  - A) Does all this training actually lead to better results from Account Managers?
  - B) How many of them obtain promotions (ratio of career advancement)? How much time does it take on average?
  - C) Do you ask them for feedback on this training programs and tools?
    - If yes,
      - a) what training program or tool is the most appreciated by millennial Account Managers? Why?
      - b) Which training program or tool is the least appreciated by millennial Account Managers? Why?
      - c) Do you consider feedbacks and address things that can be improved?
    - If no, how do you continually ensure the timeliness and effectiveness of these training programs and tools?
      - d) Have they formulated requests to better their e-training experience? Elaborate a bit.

28. What is the millennial Account Managers utilization rate of e-training platforms?
29. A) How are they rewarded for their work? Describe the reward system.  
B) Does this reward system seem appropriate to you?
30. What are the clear management guidelines for Regional Team Managers? Can you provide me with some detailed information?
31. Do you know how they deliver on their responsibilities with Account Managers?
32. What can help in instilling a sense of belonging, direction and purpose with millennial Account Managers?
33. Can you tell me about the organization of Account Managers teams across Finland: at the national scale? Regional scale? Local scale?
34. A) How do you ensure that Account Managers stay in touch with the rest of their regional team?  
B) Local team?  
C) How often do they meet?
35. In what sense would you say that Account Managers perform teamwork?
36. A) What type of relationships do they have in the regional teams?  
B) How do they sustain these relationships?
37. Do you believe the Account Manager position is attractive to millennials? Why (not)?
38. What is (are) the Account Manager position characteristic(s) that you believe are the most difficult for employees? To millennials?
39. What is (are) the Account Manager position characteristic(s) that you believe are the most satisfying/compelling to employees? To millennials?
40. Do you think that millennials are “the right fit” for the Account Manager position?

#### **QUESTIONS ABOUT THE INTERNAL COMMUNICATION AND BRANDING**

41. What are the communication tools you use to stay in touch with Account Managers? Do you use them effectively and timely?
42. What are the brand image and values you strive to convey internally with Hilti’s employees?
43. Do you feel like you use this brand image and values in your construction and delivery of the offering to Account Managers?
44. Does it seem like millennials align with this brand image and values?
45. How is internal branding developed and sustained at Hilti? Do you believe it reaches Account Managers?
46. Does internal branding differ depending on the age segments of your workforce: do you brand yourself differently with millennials than with other age segments (over 40)?
47. Does CSR help in attracting millennial Account Managers? Does it help in retaining them?
  - If yes, how?
  - If no, why not? What do you think is (are) the biggest retention factor(s)?
48. What is the most important pillar of your CSR (social or environmental)? How do you communicate it to millennial Account Managers (tools, people, and frequency)?
49. What is the CSR pillar that seems the most important to millennial Account Managers? Why?
50. Do millennial Account Managers influence your CSR decisions and actions?

## **Appendix 4. Brand & Internal Communications Specialist**

### **Interview questionnaire**

#### **BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

- 1) Title, Age, gender.
- 2) For how long have you worked in your current position at Hilti?

- 3) What are your responsibilities in this position?

### **GENERAL QUESTIONS ON THE EMPLOYER AND ITS STRATEGY**

- 4) A) In your own words, how would you describe Hilti's HR strategy for the last year?  
B) What are the goals for the upcoming year? What were they before the current COVID-19 crisis?
- 5) A) What is Hilti's current HR priority on the agenda?  
B) What was it before the current COVID-19 related situation?
- 6) What is/are the internal communication priorities with Account Managers?
- 7) A) What internal communication channels does Hilti use with Account Managers?  
B) Are they used effectively and timely: by the employer? By Account Managers? By their supervisors?

### **QUESTIONS ABOUT THE INTERNAL COMMUNICATION AND BRANDING**

- 8) How do Account Managers use each of these internal communication channels in the daily of their work? Please describe the mechanism through which Account Managers use internal communication channels to communicate in the daily of their job.
- 9) Is there any element in internal communications with millennial Account Managers that differs from internal communications with older Account Managers?
- 10) A) What do you think is the most challenging/difficult in internal communications: with Account Managers? With millennial Account Managers in particular?
- 11) Are millennial Account Managers actively involved in internal communications?
- 12) Have they formulated any requests to improve internal communications: in-between Account Managers? with their trainers and supervisors? With Hilti as an employer?
- 13) Are their demands/opinions/suggestions/inputs considered and addressed by Hilti?
- If yes, how? Is it effective?
  - If no, why not? What could make their demands/opinions/suggestions/inputs be addressed by Hilti?
- 14) What are the brand image and values you strive to convey internally with Hilti's Account Managers?
- 15) A) How is internal branding developed and sustained through internal communications at Hilti?  
B) Do you believe it reaches Account Managers? Are they receptive?
- 16) Does it seem that millennial Account Managers align with these brand image and values? In what way(s)?
- 17) Do you believe that internal communications affect millennial Account Managers in their behaviours and performance?
- If yes, how?
  - If no, how could internal communications be orchestrated to positively affect millennial Account Managers in their behaviours and performance?
- 18) Does CSR help in retaining millennial Account Managers?
- If yes, how? Is it effective?
  - If no, what could help/be adopted for engaging them more and better in their work?
- 19) A) What is the most important pillar of Hilti's CSR: social or environmental?  
B) How do you communicate it to millennial Account Managers (tools, people, frequency)?
- 20) What is the CSR pillar that seems the most important to millennial Account Managers? Why?
- 21) Do millennial Account Managers influence Hilti's CSR decisions and actions?
- 22) Can you please (separately) identify the elements of Hilti's internal communication and branding that can be classified under the following categories with both Account Managers on one hand, and on the other, with millennial Account Managers specifically:

- Social value:
- Interest value:
- Application value:
- Development value:
- Economic value:
- Management value:
- Work/life balance value:

If you feel like some categories are non-existent, please specify it. If some elements can fit under multiple categories, please cite them in all these categories. Below is the “Seven employer branding value propositions” model that can help you in understanding how to classify features of Hilti’s internal communications and branding with millennial Account Managers:

SOCIAL VALUE	INTEREST VALUE	APPLICATION VALUE	DEVELOPMENT VALUE	ECONOMIC VALUE	MANAGEMENT VALUE	WORK/LIFE BALANCE
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Is this a fun place to work with talented people and great organizational culture?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Is this an interesting place to work, with challenging but achievable goals?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Is the work meaningful and does it invite the application of knowledge and skills?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Are there opportunities for employees to grow and advance professionally?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Is work rewarded appropriately through salaries, benefits, and perks?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Are managers good, honest leaders who inspire, trust, protect, enable and respect employees?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Are work arrangements flexible enough to achieve success on and off the job?</li> </ul>

## Appendix 5. Table 5 – Employer attributes data structure.

This table displays the employer data, sorted into (1) employer attributes, (2) then classified under employer attributes categories, (3) themselves aggregated into EVP dimensions.

**Table 5. Employer attributes data structure**

1st Order – Employer attributes	2 <sup>nd</sup> Order – Employer attributes categories definition	Aggregate – Employee value proposition dimensions
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Heavy communication of and on the organization’s four values (Teamwork, Integrity, Commitment and Courage) within and outside the organization and the employer wants their employees to live by them in their work.</li> <li>• Internal branding is developed and sustained around the four core values of the organization.</li> <li>• Organizational values are shared among all employees and sought after already during the recruitment process.</li> <li>• Integrity unfolds from the daily decisions made in a context of AMs having a wide scope of freedom.</li> <li>• Courage unfolds from AMs’ goodwill and perseverance in facing challenges by getting out of their comfort zone.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Employer Values &amp; Cultural Fit</b></p> <p>Four strong values (Integrity, Teamwork, Commitment, Courage) are sought after from the recruitment phase and nurtured throughout the employee life-long cycle. AMs are hired for cultural fit, which can positively influence</p>	<p><b>4 strong values determine employee cultural fit</b></p>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Teamwork unfolds from AMs collaboration with their team members and across teams.</li> <li>• Commitment unfolds from the will and dedication of AMs to execute on their job at their best.</li> </ul>	<p>their level of satisfaction in their job.</p>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Regional Managers trained to handle diversity &amp; inclusion on a team level</li> <li>• Finnish is the working language</li> <li>• Experienced employees from abroad can relocate to Finland</li> <li>• Inclusion of AMs in the decision-making process pertaining topics relative to their job or the organization through a well-established feedback system (2 employee opinion surveys run yearly)</li> <li>• All official trainings and workshops are held in English for all employees around the world.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Diverse &amp; Inclusive Workplace</b> Employees evolve in an inclusive and multicultural environment with colleagues from various backgrounds, which enriches them and benefits in terms of innovation.</p>	<p><b>Provide a safe, fair and responsible working environment</b></p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Absence of age segmentation to fill in the AM position.</li> <li>• No difference is made in employer branding across age segments, though there exist some specificities throughout the employee life-long cycle.</li> <li>• Good level of importance granted by the employer to addressing employee needs and demands, regardless of age, gender or ethnicity.</li> <li>• Company commitment to AMs' personal development and employee experience.</li> <li>• During the COVID-19 crisis, Hilti's CEO has made sure to outline employees' importance for the company and how much they need to take care of themselves (health and well-being).</li> </ul>	<p><b>Fair &amp; Caring Management</b> Fair employer practices that effuse care for their people.</p>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• GEOS survey with an internal purpose (internal employer branding), run once a year for employees to evaluate nine different dimensions in Finland: Engagement, Hilti, Team leaders, Development opportunities, Worthwhile work, Team, Leadership Team, Reward &amp; Recognition, and Customer.</li> <li>• GPTW survey with an external purpose (external employer branding), run once a year for employees to evaluate: Credibility (Two-way communication, Competence, Integrity), Respect (Support, Cooperation, Caring), Justice (Equality, Equity), Pride (My work, Teamwork, Organisational image), Team spirit (Familiarity, Kindness, Communality), Effectiveness of leadership, Community innovation, and Business growth.</li> <li>• Feedback form on Redi</li> </ul>	<p><b>Inclusive Feedback System</b> AMs' participation in the shaping of the employee value proposition. Innovations and adjustments were made thanks to the</p>	

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Q&amp;As sessions with the CEO held online about the company situation and its lead into the future.</li> <li>• Feedback system about training is in place. The initiative to introduce two field trainers for AMs results from the feedback they gave.</li> <li>• Feedback system about the team, its climate and teamwork.</li> <li>• In 2019, a company-wide project required all employees to give anonymous feedback about any of their colleagues.</li> <li>• Feedback system on CSR. In 2019, AMs underscored the lack of internal communication on environmental aspects in the employee satisfaction survey.</li> </ul>	<p>feedback received from millennial AMs.</p>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Hilti endeavours to participate in and drive the sustainable productivity development of the construction sector are not only good for business but also for the planet.</li> <li>• CSR is done on a global scale mostly, through the Hilti Foundation that is dedicated to CSR.</li> <li>• CSR is not done actively in Finland. Yet, in Finland, if people know the company, they probably are aware of the significance of CSR.</li> <li>• CSR is part of internal employer branding strategic activities. In fact, 2% of employee salaries are retained for the Hilti Foundation to sustain social responsibility activities and charity work.</li> <li>• Employees can endeavour a development program that allows them to build and establish their own social entrepreneurship project together with other colleagues, which fosters teamwork learning.</li> <li>• Hilti Finland mainly focuses on the social pillar of CSR.</li> <li>• Hilti's social orientation is reflected in the internal communications to AMs, who under-scored the lack of communication on environmental aspects in the employee satisfaction survey 2019.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Emphasis on Social Responsibility in Finland</b></p> <p>Hilti CSR in Finland prioritizes employees and the company has the vision to develop sustainably the construction industry through the mission that consists of the development of innovative and eco-friendly services and tools.</p>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Strongly developed internal communications on a team level: WhatsApp, meetings, regular calls, emails, teamwork.</li> <li>• Internal communications channels: Microsoft Suite, new intranet Redi to replace Yammer, wherein there are still some discussions going on.</li> <li>• Internal communications channels are used effectively and timely according to the employer side.</li> <li>• There exists some inertia between the field and the global HQ (regarding the feedback system, CSR matters, training programs, products/services development,</li> </ul>	<p><b>Developed Internal Communications</b></p> <p>Developed internal communications</p>	<p><b>Social and informational value</b></p>



<p>etc.), where the Leadership Team is responsible for the feedback system.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• There exists also some inertia between the Finnish HQ and the global HQ: collaboration between the Leadership Team of the global HQ and the local Finnish HQ in the decision of how to improve sales teams' goal setting.</li> <li>• Hilti's reaction and communication to employees during the COVID-19 crisis has been exemplar.</li> </ul>	<p>system across scales. AMs' participation in the construction of their work experience.</p>	<p><b>within &amp; across teams</b></p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Clear and good management structure constructed by HR and Team Leaders.</li> <li>• The HR Team actively follows Team Leaders to ensure they are having development discussions and creating development plans for their team members.</li> <li>• Team Managers are well-trained for managing their respective teams.</li> <li>• Team leaders have personal targets split between quantitative targets (sales-driven for their territory and team) and qualitative targets based on retention rates and feedback from AMs on their development. 2020 corresponds to the first year during which targets are not only sales-related but also qualitative.</li> <li>• Team Leaders deliver on their responsibilities with AMs through their daily interactions, and by spending at least a day with each team member per month, coaching AMs, receiving customers together, asking and answering questions to provide the best guidance possible.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Essential Role of the Team Leader</b> The team leader delivers locally on the employer brand, decisions and initiatives, and develop strong relationships with AMs within his team. Greatly influences AMs' employee experience in the daily. Ensures motivation and commitment levels remain high both within their team and on an individual level.</p>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• AMs perform teamwork in that they are constantly in touch with their team members, they usually meet daily (e.g. sharing lunches), and they can cooperate whenever they are working on different projects with the same customer to build the most fruitful exchange and obtain the best results.</li> <li>• Team meetings (entirely transferred online during the COVID-19 crisis) held at the beginning of the week, monthly and ...</li> <li>• Relationships between team members are constructed through their daily exchanges and teamwork.</li> <li>• Hilti's Culture and Sports Committee plans and coordinates various events and activities, such as fishing, theatre, games (volley-ball, ice-hockey, etc.), allowing AMs to socialize in an entertaining manner. There is a big budget allocated for that.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Team Members &amp; Team Dynamics Influence AMs' Employee Experience</b> Team members and their dynamics greatly influence AMs both in the daily of their employee experience and in the long run, by affecting their engagement levels as well as their will to pursue in their tenure. The social bond established, nurtured and sustained between AMs is crucial to their engagement and commitment. Happenings on a team level are mostly out of</p>	

	<p>the scope of the employer because dealt with locally by AMs and their respective RM.</p>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Initial four-weeks training, including 10 days with a field trainer to learn about the construction industry and Hilti's offering as many don't have no construction background.</li> <li>• Career-long trainings (few days followed by the Regional Manager, "new innovations training" every 6 months, small training sessions every now and then).</li> <li>• Excellent selling skills and knowledge about Hilti's offering to deal with B2B customers are sought after by the employer.</li> <li>• Online training tools: internal e-training tool Fuse, and external Harward Manage Mentor).</li> <li>• Two Field Trainers travel across Finland to help and coach AMs since January 2020.</li> <li>• International mentoring pro-gram.</li> <li>• Daily webinars held between 14-15 due to the COVID-19 crisis.</li> <li>• Slower career advancement, before within a year, now within about two years as an AM.</li> <li>• There could be more advancement opportunities in the Finland's capital area than up North, just as there are way more opportunities abroad.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Continuous Learning &amp; Development</b>  Extensive and thorough development and training programs made available and accessible to AMs, both for their career development on their current job and possible future roles (ref. internal recruitment system based on referrals), and for their personal development through trainings and the daily work-life.</p>	<p><b>Facilitate self-development &amp; professional growth</b></p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Permanent employment contract for a full-time position.</li> <li>• Branded car and clothing.</li> <li>• Laptop.</li> <li>• Phone or coverage of the AMs' phone subscription payment.</li> <li>• When onboarding, AMs receive a customer portfolio of existing customers to develop further.</li> <li>• Meeting customers during their working hours, typically 7-15, either it be in an office or on work sites.</li> <li>• AMs perform products and services demonstrations, that demand good knowledge about the company's offering with the goal to sell them to customers.</li> <li>• Problem-solving with a long-term orientation, to spot new contract opportunities with these current customers. This requires some knowledge about the construction industry.</li> <li>• Travel for customer meetings (disrupted during the COVID-19 crisis, with mostly online meetings or phone calls).</li> <li>• AMs plan their weekdays by themselves. Ideally, they should meet six customers a day. There are no clear</li> </ul>	<p><b>A Challenging Daily Job</b>  A secure contract that involves a challenging daily comprised of a variety of tasks and responsibilities that require AMs to master planning, social skills, problem-solving and products/services knowledge for demonstrations, with the goal to perform at their best and potentially meet their set targets.</p>	

<p>definite working hours set though the employer expects from them to be working about 37.5h/week as mentioned in the law. So, AMs can work whenever and from wherever, as long as they meet their goals/targets.</p>		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Performance-based bonuses paid quarterly. Bonuses are calculated based on individual sales performance, but also team performance, whether they reach the targets. This year (2020), the focus is on selling a specific software solution. The more this solution is sold, the more bonus is paid.</li> <li>• Yearly pay raises according to both personal and team performance.</li> <li>• Access to quality healthcare services.</li> <li>• Health and accidental death insurances.</li> <li>• 400€ yearly benefit for lunches, leisure and transports.</li> <li>• Car benefits (AMs can use the car even when not working).</li> <li>• Punctual sales competitions with gifts for the winners.</li> <li>• Most valuable peer competition run yearly and that rewards Hilti's employees who have been helping others best according to peer feedback. 25 winners then get rewarded.</li> <li>• Promotions.</li> <li>• Basic AM monthly salary of 2,900€, that is a bit lower than other employers in the construction industry.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Advanced Reward System &amp; Benefits</b> Advanced reward system that offers an abundance of extended benefits in both functional and economic terms.</p>	<p><b>Recognition, rewards and benefits</b></p>

## Appendix 6 – Table 3 – Downstream classification of interview data with AMs

Table 3 represents how the interview questions with millennial AMs have been instrumentalized to respond to RQ2A, RQ2B and RQ2C.

**Table 3. Downstream classification of interview data with AMs**

<p><b>Research sub-questions</b></p>	<p>(2) a. How do millennial AMs experience Hilti's internal brand?</p>
	<p>(2) b. How and to what extent does the EVP influence millennial AMs' experience at Hilti?</p>

	(2) c. How and to what extent does millennial AMs' experience of the EVP affect/influence their will to continue working at Hilti?	
<b>Data cluster</b>	<b>Interview questions</b>	<b>Reference to research sub-question</b>
<b>Profiles</b>	Names, Team belonging, Age, Gender, Background, Tenure (duration of employment), Prior position at Hilti?	
<b>Values</b>	Organizational values,	(2)a.
	Their alignment with personal values,	
	Their communication to AMs (frequency, source, age differences?)	
<b>Culture</b>	"What is the company culture like at Hilti?"	(2)a.
	"3 to 5 elements that positively impact your experience at Hilti?"	
<b>Communication</b>	"Is there anything that is missing from Hilti's internal communication when thinking about the explanation of decisions made by the management?"	(2)a.
	"What is the image you have of Hilti as an employer?"	
<b>Job</b>	"How do you like your job?"	(2)c.
	"What do you find negatively impacts your experience as an Account Manager?"	(2)b.
	"AM responsibilities"	(2)b.
	"What are your salary and benefits (including bonuses)? Do you believe it is fair for compensating all your work?"	(2)b.
	"Could you benefit from the yearly raise depending on your performance? What could you do to improve your results?"	(2)b.
<b>Feedback</b>	"Are you asked feedback on your work and on Hilti's initiatives?"	(2)c.
	"Does the management act on your feedback and suggestions for improvement of activities?"	(2)c.
	"Do you feel involved in the organizational decisions that can or will affect you?"	(2)c.

	“How much feedback do you receive about customer satisfaction?”	(2)c.
<b>Elements that positively impact AMs’ and their experience</b>	“What do you like the most about your job?”	(2)c.
	Sources of motivation in the job	
	Sources of interest and excitement in the job	
	Sources of fun in the job	
	Sources of commitment in the job	
<b>Elements that negatively impact AMs’ and their experience</b>	“What do you like the least/What is the most difficult about your job?”	(2)c.
<b>Team leader</b>	Table to rate the relationship to your team leader out of 10	(2)a.
	“Overall, are you satisfied by the relationship that you have with your team leader?”	(2)c.
	“Does your team leader successfully assess your strengths and development needs?”	(2)b.
	“Does your team leader coach you according to your demands and needs?”	(2)b.
	“Do you feel involved in the decision-making in your team?”	(2)b.
	“Does your team leader act on your suggestions for improvement of activities?”	(2)b.
<b>Training &amp; Development</b>	“Do you receive sufficient and relevant training for you to perform your job well?”	(2)b.
	“Do you believe that you could advance in your career at Hilti? Why?”	(2)a.
	“Do the tools (training, vehicle, materials, etc.) provided by Hilti help you effectively in executing on your role?”	(2)b.
	“Are you encouraged to find innovative and creative solutions to help improve your team performance?”	(2)b.
	“Do you feel challenged by your job?”	(2)a.
	“Do you feel like the training has helped you in actually learning some more about mechanics?”	(2)b.
	“What would you change (add/remove, accentuate/attenuate) from the current training program?”	(2)b.

<b>Team</b>	Table to rate relationship to teammates out of 10	(2)a.
	“How do you remain in touch with the rest of your team? Does Hilti provide anything for it?”	(2)b.
	“Use of the WhatsApp team group (frequency and reasons)”	(2)b.
	“Do you feel that you have enough interactions with the rest of your team?”	(2)b.
	“Are you satisfied by your interactions with your teammates?”	(2)c.
	“Do you feel connected to your colleagues (empathy, complicity, ease around each other)?”	(2)c.
<b>Feelings</b>	Work flexibility and working hours	(2)b.
	“Do you feel supported and appreciated for your work (team leader, teammates, management, other business units)?”	(2)a.
	“Are you proud of your work? What feeds your pride in your job?”	(2)c.
	“Do you feel valued as a person?”	(2)a.
	“What could improve your working conditions and performance?”	(2)b.
	“How do you feel about your employment contract (length, compensation, perks, possibilities of advancement)?”	(2)c.
	“Are your contributions and accomplishments recognized by your team leader? By the organization (management)?”	(2)c.
<b>Continuance</b>	“Do you see yourself continuing as Account Manager at Hilti?”	(2)c.
<b>CSR</b>	“What is Hilti most important CSR (corporate social responsibility) pillar, social or environmental?”	(2)a.
	“What CSR pillar is the most important to you, social or environmental?”	