

**Employer Attractiveness and Employee Commitment: The Case of a
Large Multinational Software Company in Ireland**

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This research project is submitted in partial fulfilment of the

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Signed Statement

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List of Abbreviations

MS – Masters Students

US – Undergraduate Students

Executive Summary

This research succeeds in two aspects. Firstly, it gauges the attractiveness of a multinational software company in Ireland (Company X) from the perspective of Masters and undergraduate software engineering students at an associated third level institute (College Y). Secondly, it gauges the commitment type held by existing employees within this company who have graduated from the same third level institute, based on their psychological contract fulfilment.

Five recognised dimensions of employer attractiveness, consisting of numerous organisational factors, were adopted in order to identify the factors of most importance to College Y students when evaluating a prospective employer. These five dimensions of employer attractiveness were again used in relation to Company X, as comparative parameters to evaluate how well the students believed Company X succeeded in providing such factors. As empirical research emphasises, employer attractiveness is a result of a process known as ‘employer branding’. Therefore, Company X’s employer branding effectiveness was also evaluated in this context. Findings revealed that considerable importance was placed on all organisational factors under the five dimensions, especially development factors, by College Y students. However, some negative beliefs around Company X existed regarding its provision of certain organisational factors, as well as the effectiveness of its employer branding processes and practices to attract College Y students.

Additionally, a number of existing employees’ perspectives were included in terms of their commitment towards Company X, based on the extent to which their implicit expectations had been met post-employment. These implicit expectations, developed prior to and during employment, are otherwise known as the ‘psychological contract’. Based on whether or not their psychological contracts had been fulfilled, and additional reasons given for their

commitment, these employees' commitment types (affective, continuance, normative) were identified. Both the primary and secondary findings revealed that a presence or absence of affective commitment (wanting to stay with an organisation) is strongly influenced by the extent to which a psychological contract is fulfilled. Furthermore, unfulfillment of a psychological contract during employment results in a lack of affective commitment.

Research on both the prospective and existing employees' perspectives in this context has not been previously carried out and posits a 360-degree view of one multinational company in the Irish software industry. This serves as a basis for filling future gaps in the Irish research field, particularly by focusing on a larger and different sample.

The method of analysis adopted was a sequential mixed methods approach to include distribution of online surveys to 111 College Y students of which a 49.5% response rate was achieved. This gauged the attractiveness of Company X as a potential employer as well as its employer branding effectiveness. Following this, five semi-structured interviews were carried out with Company X employees who had also studied in College Y, which succeeded in gauging their commitment type.

The recommendation put forward by the current research is for future researchers to adopt a similar strategy for evaluating the attractiveness of an organisation and the commitment to it by a specific sample group. However, focusing on a different and larger set of students within a different industry in Ireland would posit greater results. The need for such research is supported by the limitations posed by the small sample size and scope of the current research and the lack of similar research carried out in Ireland, where there are multiple third level colleges.

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

The overall research project is described in this chapter. It outlines the rationale for undertaking the research followed by the research aims, objectives and background. A project outline is also included which gives an introductory account of what each chapter entails and the structure the overall research takes.

1.2 Research Rationale

As part of a Masters in Business Studies programme, the author was given the opportunity to undertake a research project on a topic of choice. As an investigation into the jobs market for future career prospects was already underway, a certain interest grew around the area of employer attractiveness and what attracts job seekers to an organisation. It seemed appropriate therefore that the chosen topic should be in this field. On further research into the field, it was discovered that employer attractiveness is a result of a process known as “employer branding” and that the “psychological contract” develops through this process. Therefore, it seemed essential that these aspects were also included in the research to give a 360-degree view of employer attractiveness. While acknowledging that similar fields have been studied by many scholars and academics, the author has strived to make this research unique in order to maintain not just her own, but the reader’s interest.

Studies such as Biswas & Saur (2013) looked at what attracted employees in the Indian manufacturing industry to an organisation. Arachchige & Robertson (2013) studied employer attractiveness from the perspective of final year Business Studies students and MBA’s in Sri Lanka. Although these studies among others are recognised in their field, the author agrees

with Vroom (1966) who argues that each company possesses its own unique attractiveness and thus each new study pertaining to employer attractiveness provides unique findings and a new body of research.

The concept of psychological contract fulfilment has evolved in recent years. Researchers such as Maia & Bastos (2015) state that before even taking up employment in an organisation, the psychological contract begins to form through prospective employees' expectations of that organisation. This highlights an importance of fulfilling such expectations to influence employee commitment. However, while there is a vast amount of literature on employee commitment in the broader sense, research is lacking on the effects psychological contract fulfilment has on the employee commitment types developed by Allen & Meyer (1996).

A certain gap needed filling for the reasons above but most importantly, the author felt there was a need for a specific focus and element of uniqueness in comparison to previous research. Combining all areas mentioned above into a research project has not previously been carried out, nor has something similar been carried out in Ireland.

1.3 Research Aim and Question

The aim of this research is to explore the attractiveness towards and commitment within a multinational software company in Ireland which has strong connections with a third level institute in the same region. This attractiveness is explored both from the perspective of software students within the third level institute, and the commitment is explored through employees within the company who have graduated from the same third level institute. As the selected company wished to remain anonymous, it will henceforth be referred to as Company X. The third level institute will be referred to as College Y.

Two questions needed satisfying in order to gauge the attractiveness from the student and employee perspective:

- To what extent do prospective employees from College Y perceive Company X to be an attractive employer?
- To what extent are existing employees at Company X committed to the organisation regarding their expectations being met?

Students' perception of the company as an employer will gauge the external attractiveness, while existing employees' commitment in terms of their psychological contract fulfilment will gauge the internal attractiveness.

1.3.1 Research Objectives

To answer the research questions posed, a set of objectives are defined and stated below.

- To determine the importance that Masters and undergraduate software engineering students at College Y place on certain organisational factors under the five dimensions of employer attractiveness
- To discover the extent to which Masters and undergraduate software engineering students from College Y agree that Company X provides the organisational factors of most importance
- To examine Company X's employer branding effectiveness from the perspective of Masters and undergraduate software engineering students at College Y
- To explore the psychological contract fulfilment and resulting commitment types pertaining to existing employees at Company X who graduated from College Y.

1.4 Research Background

1.4.1 Company X and College Y

Company X is a multi-national software company in Ireland co-located and closely associated to College Y, a third level institute. The institute provides a range of software engineering qualifications and there is an inevitable intake of graduates from the institute to Company X. College Y and Company X also run a joint Software Engineering Masters programme which has been in operation for several years. Students on this programme undergo normal college study but also internment-like work placement at Company X through a two-year contract on successful completion.

Therefore, students at College Y, depending on whether they are undertaking the Masters programme or an undergraduate degree, have different exposure to Company X. Any distinct similarities or differences between both sets of students in terms of what they deem attractive in a prospective employer and the extent to which they believe Company X to meet their expectations of an employer, are equally important in this research.

A separate but related outcome of this research will be to ascertain ways in which Company X could improve its attractiveness both to students at College Y and to employees at Company X who graduated from said college.

1.4.2 Employer Attractiveness

There has been an increased amount of research into organisational attractiveness in the past two decades (Barber, 1998) but more so in recent years. A lack of available highly skilled and talented employees has led to an increase in the need for companies to attract these types of employees to gain a competitive edge (Ready, Hill & Conger, 2008, pp. 62-70). Researchers

have therefore become concerned about employer attractiveness and how organisations can become more attractive both to prospective and existing employees (Wilden, Gudergan & Lings, 2010, pp. 79-84). Egan, Yang & Bartlett, (2004, p. 296) place importance on attracting I.T employees as they are in high demand, however there is little research into their attractiveness towards prospective employers.

According to Berthon, Elving & Hah (2005, pp. 51-172) there are five dimensions of employer attractiveness: Interest Value, Social Value, Economic Value, Development Value, and Application Value. All job seekers assess some aspects of these dimensions when determining what attracts them most to an organisation. However, each job seeker is unique (Wallace et al, 2014) as is each organisation's attractiveness Vroom (1966). This justifies why this research focuses on two specific sets of students pertaining to one single multinational company in Ireland. The research identifies distinct factors that characterise Company X's attractiveness. Any stand-out findings, positive or negative, of Company X could potentially be considered as part of Company X's employer branding process for the future.

1.4.3 Employer Branding

The rationale behind including aspects of employer branding in this research is justified by the extent to which research highlights that employer attractiveness is a result of employer branding. It not only ties in the promotion of functional and economic benefits to prospective employees, but also the psychological benefits (Ambler & Barrow, 1996, pp. 85-206). Therefore, it is where employer attractiveness as well as the psychological contract are developed. The importance of companies such as Company X succeeding in its employer branding processes and practices is highlighted by Barrow (1996), who argued that it aids in both effective recruitment and retention of employees.

1.4.4 Psychological Contract Fulfilment and Employee Commitment

All employees have informal expectations of and beliefs about their employer and their employment. Many of these expectations and beliefs have been nurtured by the employer prior to the employment commencing and are further consolidated during the employment. These expectations and beliefs have been referred to in the literature as the “psychological contract”.

To get a complete image of Company X as an attractive employer, it is plausible to examine the psychological contract in relation to employees at Company X who have graduated from College Y. This examination will also look at such employees in terms of how the fulfilments of their psychological contract impacts on their commitment to Company X. This would serve as useful research data for Company X and would enable it to choose the appropriate employer branding techniques during recruitment practices.

1.5 Research Structure

The structure of this dissertation corresponds with the guidelines given by the Institute.

Chapter 1- Introduction

In this chapter, the aim and objectives of the research are defined, the rationale for undertaking the research is discussed, and a background to the research is set. The structure that the research takes is also outlined, along with the methods in which the necessary data has been gathered in order to meet the aim and objectives of the research.

Chapter 2 – Literature Review

The focus of this chapter is to provide an insightful, yet concise view of the research field through extensive studying and sifting through previous literature and findings. Previous literature is in relation to employer attractiveness, employer branding, the psychological

contract, and employee commitment. This provides a thorough and informative background, while highlighting the need for further research.

Chapter 3 – Research Methodology

This chapter is primarily focused on how the author has conducted and carried out the primary research in order to fulfil the research aim and objectives. Research philosophy, methods, and strategies that were necessary for the research are examined in terms of suitability and limitations, by justifying and critiquing the processes. Alternative methods are also discussed to cover all areas of consideration. Ethical considerations are an important part of this chapter in ensuring confidentiality and anonymity of participants and Company X.

Chapter 4 – Results

The findings obtained through the methods discussed in Chapter Three are presented in Chapter Four. Results from the online surveys and semi-structured interviews that address the research aim and objectives are displayed. Survey results are analysed and displayed through graphs and figures for further insight, followed by presentation and analyses of findings from the interviews.

Chapter 5 – Discussion of Results

The purpose of this chapter is to provide the reader with a concise discussion, combining results presented in Chapter Four with the obtained literature in Chapter Two to identify correlations or discrepancies between the two. Interpretation of results is therefore present.

Chapter 6 – Conclusion and Recommendations

The sixth and final chapter presents the conclusions reached by the author upon undertaking the current research and the limitations which occurred. Recommendations for Company X and future research are also stated.

1.6 Method of Gathering Information

To conduct the secondary research, various sources were used which include articles, studies, reports, conference proceedings, and books. Access to this material was gained through online databases such as Google Scholar, Copac, Emerald and the Institute's Library database.

Information for the primary research, however, was gathered through a mixed methods approach by distributing online surveys to a student population, and carrying out semi-structured interviews with Company X employees.

1.7 Conclusion

The aims and objectives have been defined and the research rationale and background discussed. The reader now has an insight into the direction the research has taken and how it has been conducted. The following chapter deals with a review of existing literature relevant to the research areas discussed in this chapter.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to identify, evaluate and engage with the existing bodies of research in the chosen research fields. The areas reviewed are highly related to the research aim and objectives defined in Chapter One. Overall, the review establishes a distinct need for the current research.

To aid in the fulfilment of objectives one and two, a critical review of literature on employer attractiveness was essential to identify aspects of attraction to prospective employees in past research. A review of employer branding research will help the reader understand ways in which companies can be effective at attracting prospective employees, and thus aids in the fulfilment of objective three. Finally, research around the area of the psychological contract and employee commitment is required to satisfy objective four.

2.2 Employer Attractiveness

Berthon et al. (2005, p. 151) define employer attractiveness as the “*envisioned benefits that a potential employee sees in working for a specific organisation*” while Saraswathy et al (2013) describe it as the extent to which a potential applicant is interested in taking up employment in a specific organisation. Similarly, Highhouse et al. (2003, pp. 986-1001) define it as an individual’s “*affective and attitudinal thoughts about particular companies as potential places to work for*” and explains that organisations will want to build a prestige image of the organisation so that it inspires people to work there.

Early research identifies Vroom (1966, pp. 212-225) as one of the first to bring the attraction of organisations to the attention of professionals and scholars. He used a single item measure

in order to gauge how attractive organisations were to graduate students, only to realise that each organisation had a specific and unique attractiveness and that each organisation possessing the same attractiveness would limit research. This has served as grounds for research to follow. Therefore, further research is continuously carried out on the factors that contribute to the perception of an organisations attractiveness. Subsequently, Fulmer, Gerhart & Scott (2003, p. 987) emphasise the importance of understanding which organisational factors determine and contribute to attractiveness and how these can be impacted by aspects such as employer branding.

2.2.1 The Five dimensions of Employer Attractiveness

Berthon, Ewing & Hah (2005, pp. 151-172) developed the concept in which five dimensions were perceived as the organisational values that attract prospective employees. These values are Social Value, Interest Value, Economic Value, Development Value, and Application Value. Values, as defined by Rokeach (1973, p. 5) are “*enduring beliefs that a specific mode of conduct or end-state of existence is personally or socially preferable to an opposite or converse mode of conduct or end state of existence.*” As Thornbury (2003, pp. 68-79) suggests, values determine how an individual behaves and acts. Employees are more inclined to be attracted to an organisation when there is an alignment between their values and the values of the organisation (Judge & Cable, 1997).

Interest Value

Interest value concerns the stimulating work environment that an organisation is perceived to have, as well as employment policies and procedures that encourage innovativeness. An organisation that demonstrates a strong interest will be positively perceived in terms of effectively utilising employees’ talent for the good of both the organisation and its employees and thereby creating a reputable, successful organisation (Berthon et al, 2005).

Social Value

Organisations with high social value encourage teamwork, respect, and provide a positive working environment. This attracts prospective employees because of the friendly and enjoyable interpersonal environment and atmosphere that such an organisation is perceived to have (Berthon et al, 2005). Collins & Stevens (2002, pp. 1121-1133) emphasise the importance of organisations displaying these attributes of a friendly working environment.

Economic Value

A primary consideration in measuring a company's attractiveness is its economic value. This relates to an organisations' attractive salaries, job security, future advancement prospects, and remuneration (Berthon et al, 2005).

Development Value

Prospective employees are attracted to organisations that invest in developing their employees' skills through further training and education, enabling them to progress in their field of expertise and enhance their future employment opportunities. An organisation with development value recognises employees and their achievements (Berthon, Ewing & Hah, 2005).

Application Value

What prospective employees see in this value is an organisation that encourages employees to teach, train, coach, and mentor others by applying their existing knowledge and skills learned from previous roles or college degrees to their current role (Berthon et al, 2005). Such organisations have a humanitarian ethos and practice social responsibly, meaning prospective employees would feel proud to work there and existing employees would be more likely to commit to the organisation for a longer period (Turban & Greening, 1997, pp. 658-683).

Berthon, Ewing & Hah's (2005) study involved developing a 25-item employer attractiveness scale (the EmpAt scale), consisting of organisational factors relating to the above five dimensions. Using a deductive and inductive approach and six focus groups consisting of 683 students, both undergraduate and graduates from an Australian University, they could prove a positive correlation between the five dimensions and employer attractiveness. Results also illustrated that there was a strong relationship between the 25 items and the five dimensions. They believed the students' perspectives were most useful in the study of employer attractiveness as many of the students were less than 6 months from entering the job market. Those entering the job market have been a focus of many studies since, which the author finds promising for future graduates and job seekers.

Another study by Arachchige & Robertson (2013) based in Sri Lanka, addressed employer attractiveness from the perspective of final year Business Studies students and MBA's from various disciplines. This study also used the Berthon, Ewing & Hah (2005) five employer attractiveness dimensions and EmpAt scale. Results illustrated that the most preferred organisational factors for final year students were career enhancing experience, future opportunities, and job security. For MBA students it was gaining experience, appreciation from management, and job security. A fun and exciting environment was more important to MBA's than final year students, who preferred the idea of applying their University knowledge in their new job role and further career development opportunities. Correspondingly, Elving et al (2013, pp. 355-373) discovered that career prospects and development opportunities were aspects of attractiveness for job seekers in the Netherlands.

Sivertzen et al. (2013, pp. 473-483), who also adopted the Berthon et al (2005) approach, discovered that innovation, creativity and excitement were amongst the most attractive attributes to students from higher education institutes in Norway. Good management and leadership as well as compensation were of least importance. This is inconclusive with Roy

(2008, pp. 110-130), a study based in India, and the Australian study by Berthon et al. (2005), who discovered that good management and leadership were amongst the most important factors to participants.

Findings from a study by Biswas & Saur (2013, pp. 93-102) based on the Indian manufacturing industry revealed that social value was one of the most prominent values in attracting employees to an organisation followed by interest value. The factors that stood out as important were good relationships with colleagues (85%) and with a boss (82%). Next in line was having a fun working environment. Economic value was also important to colleagues, especially receiving an attractive compensation package. The least important value was application value as only 33% saw applying what was learned in college as important in attracting them to an organisation and 56% wanted to teach others what they knew. Additionally, Honeycut & Rosen (1997, pp. 271-290) approached 263 MBA students and alumni who were required to analyse the attractiveness of a job role in a fictitious company. Flexible career paths and work life balance were the most attractive aspects especially to those with families which were not factors of high importance in Biswas & Saur (2013). Thus far, the reader can see that not all organisational factors bare equal importance to individuals.

Furthermore, Srivastava & Bhatnagar (2012) carried out a study on final year postgraduate management students, workers in management, and HR executives that were currently or previously involved in recruitment. These were in different areas across India and ranged in age from 24-45. Participants were required to pick from a list of 32 organisations and pick the one they were most familiar with and attracted to. The strongest aspects of attractiveness were in relation to career growth, then performance based pay, followed by learning opportunities. Perceived culture was also an important determinant of employer attractiveness as it represented how committed the organisation was to employees' well-being, the degree of autonomy given to employees, and the working atmosphere. By focusing on a range of

different disciplines and organisations across India, this study had an extremely large scope and therefore results were less specified to one organisation, over-varied, and likely held inaccuracies.

2.2.2 Employer Reputation

Knowing what others know and believe about an organisation is key to attractiveness as it determines how people will react to that organisation, and so Brown et al (2006) developed four key questions which aid in determining the attractiveness of an organisation through the mental associations that people hold about its reputation (See table 2.1).

Table 2.1 Employer Reputation

		What the questions represent
Q1	Who are we as an organisation?	Corporate Identity & personality
Q2	What does the organisation want others to think about the organisation?	Mental associations the organisation wants prospective employees and stakeholders to hold
Q3	What does the organisation believe others think about the organisation?	Mental associations the organisation believes prospective employees and stakeholders hold
Q4	What do stakeholders really think of the organisation?	Mental associations others outside the organisation truly hold

Adapted from Brown et al (2006)

Questions one to three revolve around what the organisation wants people to believe, or what the organisation believes people think about it. However, as this holds little truth regarding the attractiveness and reputation of the organisation, Brown places greater importance on question four as it represents the organisations reality. It also holds the most valuable answers and meaning to this review and the current research as a whole. The mental association's that

prospective employee's hold with regards to an organisation determine that organisation's attractiveness. This mental association or organisational association, as defined by Dacin & Brown (1997, p. 69) is "*a label for all information about a company that a person holds*". This strongly links both reputation and organisational attractiveness to one another.

Furthermore, Brown et al, 2006, pp. 100-105) acknowledged that all mental/organisational associations prospective employees hold can be influenced by a variety of different sources such as the Internet, word of mouth and media which the company may not always have control over. Empirical evidence has shown that the more positive the reputation an organisation has as a result of these mental associations, the more attracted job seekers are to that company (Cable & Turban, 2003, p. 2244).

2.3 Influencers of Employer of Choice

College students, especially in their job searching, are heavily influenced by the perception that friends, family and classmates have of a company (Kilduff, 1990, p. 271). Allen, Mahto & Otando (2007, p. 1698) say that these sources of evaluation are trusted almost as much as personal experience with a company, but the effectiveness of these sources will differ in terms of quality, quantity and realism of the information provided. Conclusively, Schwab et al., (1987, pp. 129-166) consider the fact that many job seekers will seek information about job vacancies from others as well as from official sources. Given this to be true, Schwab also states that it is highly likely that job seekers will therefore seek the opinions of their friends and families regarding the prospective employer, in line with the theory of Kilduff (1990). However, in some situations, the recruiter itself may have the strongest influence on prospective employees in terms of how their behaviour and characteristics are perceived (Dougherty & Turban, 1992, p. 739).

Regardless of who influences prospective employees' attraction to an organisation, the images and beliefs that job seekers have of a company that determine this attractiveness, are otherwise known as employer knowledge (Cable & Turban, 2001, pp. 127-128). Without this basic image or awareness, a potential employee will have no knowledge of a company and therefore will not be inspired to work there. It is this knowledge coming from various sources that strongly influences the attractiveness of an employer (Barber, 1998, p. 101-102).

Gomes & Neves (2011, p. 685) explain that understanding what leads to intention to apply to an organisation is key to effective recruitment. This highlights the importance of the primary research as it partly aims to identify the organisational aspects which attract prospective employees to a particular organisation. However, to truly discover an employer brand that is attractive to potential employees, a process known as employer branding must be reviewed (Ritson, 2002, p. 24).

2.4 Employer Branding

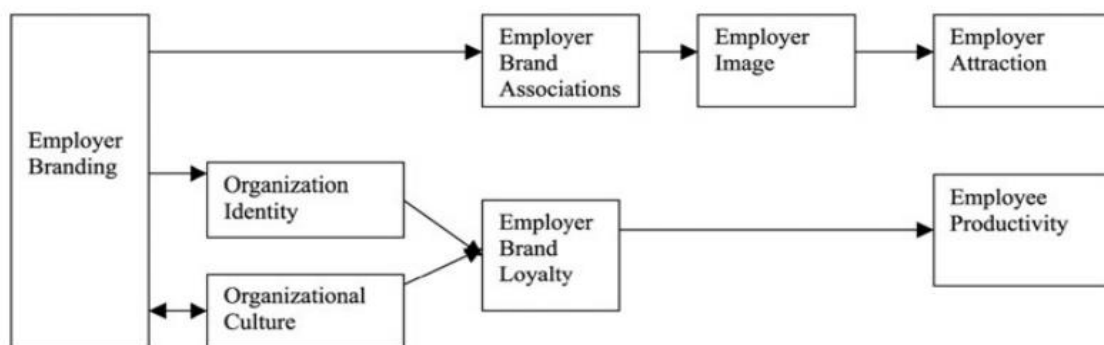
When organisations effectively promote their practices both internally and externally through their employer branding process, it is likely that those organisations will manage a more positive reputation, which will attract prospective employees (Berkson, Harris & Ferris, 1999, pp. 83-98). The more people that agree on an organisation's image, the more renowned that organisations reputation becomes (Cable & Turban, 2001, p. 130).

Branding, as defined by Kotler & Lee (2008, p. 215) is "*the process of developing an intended brand identity*". Although most commonly used to differentiate products and services, the branding process can also apply to organisations, a concept referred to as 'employer branding', and a term derived from Ambler & Barrow (1996, p. 187). They define employer branding as "*the package of functional, economic, and psychological benefits provided by employment and identified with the employing company*". Similarly, it can be defined as "*the sum of a*

company's efforts to communicate to existing and prospective staff that it is a desirable place to work" (Lloyd, 2002; Berthon et al., 2005). It is a concept that has only recently come to the forefront of the literature as an approach to attract and retain talent (Sokro, 2012, p. 164). It essentially creates the brand image and reputation which determines the attractiveness of an organisation (Cleary, 1981).

Celani and Singh (2011, p. 224) state that employer branding and employer attractiveness are related as organisational attractiveness is a result of employer branding. Figure 2.1 highlights this. However, employer branding and employer attractiveness can also be distinguished. While employer attractiveness attempts to determine what elements make an employer attractive, employer branding aims to focus on promoting these elements (Broek, 2015, p. 2).

Figure 2.1 The Outcome of Employer Branding



(Backhaus and Tikoo 2004, p. 505)

Martin & Beaumont (2004, p. 15) describe the employer brand as a “company’s image as seen through the eyes of its associates and potential hires”. It can be argued that it adds to effective recruitment, retention and employee satisfaction when done correctly (Barrow, 1996, pp. 185-206). Whether it is internal or external employer branding, it must also emphasise the differentiation of the company from its competitors (Backhaus & Tickoo, 2004; p. 502). A

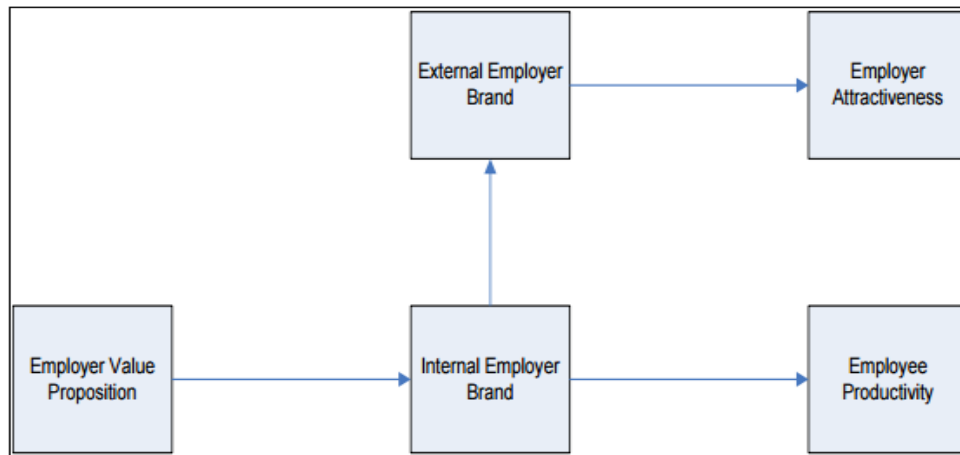
company that follows the employer branding process outlined below may find themselves more attractive than their competitors.

2.4.1 Employer Branding Process

Step 1: Mosley (2007, p. 131) states that this step should involve communicating to prospective employees what they can expect in terms of tangible/intangible benefits. It will also communicate what organisations want from prospective employees. Berthon et al. (2005, p. 156) state that the organisation's brand equity will be stronger depending on how these prospective employees perceive the value proposition. This step is very important as prospective employees are the ones who determine the attractiveness and development of the organisation's value proposition. It should communicate what would make working with a prospective employer a valuable experience (Backhaus & Tikko, 2004, p. 502).

Step 2: This stage is where the organisation markets its value proposition to the target market through various sources such as the internet, career guidance counsellors, recruitment consultants, and so on. This again is widely focused on external marketing and should enhance the brand image (Sullivan, 1999, pp. 457-475). When a firm successfully reaches a high level of recognition through its brand in the external market, then it is easier to attract talented employees (Bouchikhi & Kimberly, 2008, p. 137). See figure 2.2.

Figure 2.2 Outcome of External Branding



(Arachige & Robinson, 2013, p. 36)

Step 3: The third and final step focuses on the internal marketing aspects and carries the weight of the psychological contract, aiming to deliver on expectations formed through it (Frook, 2001, pp. 1-2). This step involves promoting and developing a working culture that shows commitment to both employee values and organisational goals (Backhaus & Tikko, 2005, p. 503).

2.4.2 Employer Branding Practices

Besides following through with the three steps of employer branding, organisations also adopt the following practices to influence prospective employees' appeal.

Practice 1: Low-involvement recruitment practices.

This involves the distribution and promotion of posters, banners, sponsorship activities and other activities which will create an initial awareness and positivity about the brand and create positive signals in relation to the organisation (Collins & Hann, 2004, p. 691). These positive associations are formed by job seekers with little effort as there is only enough information provided through these activities to create initial awareness. However, this awareness should then motivate job seekers to seek further information. This practice is more likely to influence those who have little prior knowledge of the organisation (Cable & Turban, 2001).

Practice 2: High-Involvement recruitment practices

This practice provides much more detail to job seekers to influence their behaviour (Collins & Han, 2004; p. 693). The information provided is in terms of growth opportunities, salary, and company culture. It is communicated through recruitment brochures, websites, company executives, university alumni, career events, campus events, and so on. The information provided is much more in-depth than that given through low-involvement recruitment practices as it is targeting those who are more motivated to seek out the information about the employer and those who have prior knowledge of and beliefs about the organisation (MacInnis & Jaworski, 1989, pp. 1-23).

While many perceptions are formed through company websites or advertisements, they are still often formed through word of mouth (Elving et al, 2012, pp. 355-373). It is therefore the author's belief that more effective employer branding would also influence positive word of mouth information.

The importance of employer branding is essential to this research, because the positive knowledge and awareness job seekers have will have an impact on applications as well as intention to work for and commit to a company (Collins & Stevens, 2002, p. 24). When the attention of qualified and talented candidates is drawn to a company, it adds value to the company by giving them competitive advantage. However, it also provides a positive message to employees that their psychological contract will be fulfilled (Cable & Turban, 2003, p. 733).

2.5 The Psychological Contract

There are two perspectives to identify when analysing employer attractiveness and awareness. The first is the external perspective, which looks at the perceptions that the outside world has of the employer, i.e. external employer attractiveness which has been reviewed above. Then there is the internal perspective, which looks at the perceptions that existing employees have of the employer, in this case in terms of psychological contract fulfilment. Broek (2015) states that it is highly important to align external employer attractiveness with the internal situation of the company by following through with the psychological contract that is implied prior to employment. What is attractive to prospective employees is greatly dependent on whether existing employees are satisfied from within and have the intention to stay with that company (Ricardo, 2012, pp. 50-54).

Rousseau (1989, p. 123) defined the psychological contract as *“an individual’s beliefs regarding the terms and conditions of a reciprocal exchange agreement between that focal person and another party”*. Similarly, Morrison & Robinson (1997, p. 229) described it as what employees believe the reciprocal obligations of employer and employee should be, although these obligations are perceived promises and may not be recognised by the employer. Foster et al (2010, pp. 410-409) derived a concept that the employer brand holds with it a psychological contract between the company and its existing and prospective employees. Prospective employees compare the perceived values implied or stated by the employer brand, with their actual needs. If they see themselves fit to work alongside what the employer brand promises but the employer fails to deliver what was promised, this will result in negative perceptions of the brand and a reduction in employee satisfaction or commitment (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004). Current employees have a real experience of promises made and kept by the company (Edwards, 2010, p. 15). Employees’ attitudes greatly affect an organisations image as well as the level of satisfaction in working there. Therefore, the organisation must have a

match between what employees' values and what the employer brand delivers on (Kaur & Syal, 2017, p. 132).

The psychological contract begins when the company advertises, communicates, or promotes any sort of attractive career paths or career development initiatives offered by the company. This is likely to take place during Step 1 of the employer branding process. This contract is essentially an unwritten promise which, if not kept or delivered on to a certain extent, can result in disgruntled and resentful employees at a later stage, or during Step 3 of the employer branding process (Davis, 2015, pp. 29). Therefore, psychological contract fulfilment is an effective foundation for becoming both an attractive employer from within and an employer that employees want to stay with. According to (Kyndt et al, 2009, p. 195), this is especially difficult to achieve in the contemporary economy, where organisations must adapt to and anticipate rapid changes. However, attracting and retaining the right employees is essential, especially I.T-related employees who are increasingly in demand (Egan, Yang & Bartlett, 2004, p. 296).

2.5.1 Psychological Contract Breach

Rosseau (1995) explained that a breach of the psychological contract can lead to employees feeling that the employer has not delivered on its promises satisfactorily. The expectations that employees have of an employer are the basis of the psychological contract and if these are not followed through on, it is a breach which holds with it negative consequences such as employees holding back their own promise, which was to contribute to the company's performance (Restubog et al, 2006, p. 299). Companies will want to avoid the cost of employees holding back or wanting to leave along with their valuable tacit knowledge and

skills. If employees perceive the contract to be breached, it can have individual consequences such as stress or anger (Johnson & O'Leary, 2003) or organisational consequences such as reduced performance, reduced commitment, increased turnover, and unpromising behaviours (Tomprou et al., 2015).

2.6 Employee Commitment

There is an internal marketing concept that the personnel within an organisation are the first market of that organisation (George & Gronroos, 1989). If jobs are considered as internal products, then employees can be perceived as internal customers according to this marketing perspective. Therefore, these products need to appeal to the customers, attract them and satisfy their expectations in order to motivate them to commit to such products (Berry & Parasuraman, 2004, p. 151). This highlights the importance of psychological contract fulfilment for employee commitment. Although employees leave for a variety of reasons, influencing their commitment is a strategic process that shouldn't be avoided (Davies, 2001).

According to McDonald & Makin (2000, p. 86) there is an existential link between the psychological contract and employee commitment. The nature of organisational commitment stemmed from Allen & Meyer (1996) who suggested there were three types of commitment: affective commitment, continuance commitment, and normative commitment.

Affective Commitment

Affective commitment is the degree to which employees perceive themselves as being emotionally attached to the organisation they work in (Allen & Meyer, 1996, pp. 252-276). McDonald & Makin (2000, p. 86) also state that it relates to the individual identifying themselves with the organisation. They also mention that it is associated with the psychological contract, as affective commitment is a result of the employees needs and expectations about an

employer being matched with their experience in that organisation. They are therefore committing to the organisation because they truly want to work there. Employees must have a strong connection and commitment to the organisation and feel a sense of belonging there in order to want to work hard on behalf of the organisation (Curtis & Wright, 2001, p. 60).

Continuance Commitment

Employees who hold high levels of continuance commitment are those who stay due to the perceived costs of leaving or a lack of alternatives. However, low levels would not influence their intention to leave unless they did not hold affective commitment too (Meyer et al, 2002, p. 39). This type of commitment usually evolves when the employee's investments would be lost if they left (Becker, 1960, pp. 32-42).

Normative Commitment

Normative commitment evolves because of a perceived obligation the employee holds to stay with the organisation (Meyer et al., 2002, p. 21). Correspondingly, McDonald & Makin (2000, p. 86) explain that normative commitment is influenced by societal norms which state that one ought to commit to such an organisation. It essentially relates to the implicit reciprocal obligations amongst employer and employee, namely a repayment for one another's efforts and exceeding of expectations.

Chew (2011, pp. 19-36) carried out a study showing the importance of influencing core employees' commitment to an organisation. This involved looking at areas such as reward and recognition, compensation and benefits, culture, leadership styles, communication, consultation and the working environment which all affected employee commitment. Participants consisted of experienced practitioners and academics between the ages of 30-70 whom mostly had PhD's or MBA's. Results showed the top factors influencing commitment were effective selection, career development, reward and recognition, training, and career

development. The study also showed that employees of different ages and backgrounds differ and that younger people prefer the option to grow within the company, and appreciate challenges, training, and skills building. For older employees, job security and enrichment is more important.

A paper by Chew & Chan (2008, pp. 503-522) focused on full time employees in nine Australian organisations from various industries such as education, healthcare and manufacturing showed similar results. Remuneration, recognition, person-organisation fit, and training and development were recognised as influencing employee intention to stay whereas career development and challenging assignments were not as heavy influencers (p. 514). Additionally, results from a study carried out by (Saraswathy et al., 2013) and based on the Indian IT industry showed that employees valued development factors, economic factors and global opportunities the most. Although Chew & Chan (2008) included existing employees in their research, these were from different sectors across Australian organisations. Barber (1998, p. 137) emphasised the importance of adding to past research by studying one particular organisation rather than multiple ones. Additionally, not including prospective employees' perspectives on employer attraction may limit the research.

The reader should know by now that each individual is likely to value different aspects. However, no matter what, if they hold back on their side of the implicit obligations it can have negative impacts on the organisation. If their affective commitment decreases, their satisfaction likely decreases which can result in a transactional attitude. This suggests that they only give what they get as they no longer have that personal attachment or loyalty towards the organisation that once motivated them to go above and beyond their call of duty (McDonald & Makin, 2000, p. 85).

A breach in the psychological contract regarding employees' expectations, beliefs and values can result in reduced levels of trust and employees putting their own interests first (Robinson, 1996). Not only does this result in a decrease of affective commitment, but also an increase in continuance commitment, suggesting that employees are only staying due to a lack of alternative employment elsewhere, or normative commitment because they feel obligated to stay (Cassar & Briner, 2011, p. 284). Although the psychological contract varies from person to person and group to group, individuals can experience aspects of all three types of commitment at various levels (Mc Donald & Larkin, 1999, p. 85). However, affective commitment is the one that posits the most positive satisfaction and long-term commitment, and is therefore something organisations clearly must encourage.

It is often the efforts put into practices such as selection, training, and compensation that determine how many employees are attracted to an organisation, both before employment and while employed (Barber, 1998, p. 1). Existing and prospective employees will put their best efforts into working for an organisation if they are provided with certain factors that are suitable for their future growth and development. These practices are what attract job seekers and influence employee commitment. Focusing on the right aspects will build the attractiveness and create the employer knowledge needed (Collins, 2006, p. 23). Despite the psychological contract being informal, unwritten and ever-changing, it is an essential aspect in determining employee's intention to stay with an organisation (Mc Donald & Makin, 2000, p. 84).

2.7 Conclusion

While the studies reviewed have been wide ranging and insightful, no empirical research or studies were found from the Irish context which leaves a gap in the reader's knowledge. Srivastava & Bhatnagar (2012, pp. 6-17) studied employer attractiveness in India from the perspective of workers in management, HR executives and postgraduate management students. Arachchige & Robertson (2013) studied MBA and final year business students from various

disciplines in Sri Lanka, and Biswas & Saur (2013) focused on the manufacturing industry in India. Additionally, there has been no research on employer attractiveness which combines the existing employees' commitment in terms of a fulfilled psychological contract to achieve a 360-degree view of where an employer stands. Nor has there been research which includes the effectiveness of a company's employer branding process in attracting prospective employees.

As Vroom (1966) discovered, each organisation has a specific and unique attractiveness and Wallace et al (2014, p. 26) state that not all prospective and existing employees value the same attributes in an organisation. Therefore, any study that is carried out on the area of employer attractiveness will provide new evidence and a new body of research.

The current research focuses on a different context relating to the attractiveness towards and commitment within a multinational software company in Ireland from prospective and existing employees having studied software engineering in a third level institute nearby. Such research is necessary and unique in terms of filling a research gap.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

This chapter outlines the methodology underpinning the research and the justification behind it. The main aim of the research was to explore the attractiveness of Company X for prospective employees from College Y, and to identify employees' commitment type towards Company X in terms of a fulfilled psychological contract. This required an exhaustive consideration of appropriate strategies in undertaking the research. Nevertheless, an overview of the research philosophy, strategy, methods used, participant information, limitations, and ethical considerations is provided as further insight and validation of the methodology adopted.

3.2 Research Purpose

Kothari (2004, pp. 1-2) describes research as an art of scientific investigation and a search for knowledge. Its purpose, he maintains, is to discover the answers to questions through the application of scientific procedures. Consequently, research aims to find the hidden truth which has not yet been found, all of which validates Sharp's (2012, p. 7) description of the purpose of research which is to add to one's own body of knowledge and to that of others.

In compliance with Kothari (2004) and Sharp (2012), the purpose of this research is to investigate employer attractiveness from the perspective of software engineering students within a selected third level institute in the same region. It also explores psychological contract fulfilment and resulting commitment types from the perspective of some existing employees within Company X. Such research has not previously been carried out in Ireland to the best of the author's knowledge, and so adds to a body of knowledge as stated by Sharp (2012).

This research should therefore be of value to Company X and students within College Y, as both parties have obvious stakeholder interest in positive employer attractiveness within Company X. It could potentially aid in Company X improving or enhancing their employer

brand to improve their attractiveness, along with highlighting the importance of psychological contract fulfilment in influencing employees' affective commitment.

3.3 Research Philosophy

There are two main forms of research philosophy; positivism and interpretivism. (Saunders, 2016, pp. 135-137) explains that positivism results in unambiguous and accurate knowledge and it can involve using existing theory to develop an idea. It requires larger sample sizes, is often deductive in nature and primarily uses quantitative analysis. Denscombe (2014, p. 2) describe it as focusing on facts, figures and statistics and encourages the researcher to sustain a detached and objective approach. Existing theory on the topic of employer attractiveness and the psychological contract was needed as a basis for this research and the quantitative analysis was the primary source of data collection through which facts and figures could be developed.

The purpose of interpretivist research as described by Saunders (2016, p. 140) is to create a new body of research, one that holds deeper understanding and interprets different contexts by looking at different groups and the perspectives of others. This research is highly reliant on the perspective of software engineering students from College Y and existing employees from Company X, which involves a new context, group, and perspective. Interpretivism also aims to make sense of what participants communicate, primarily through qualitative methods of analysis, using smaller samples and text and images rather than facts and figures. The employee interview process carried out corresponds with this approach in that it involves a smaller sample size and does not depend on the use of facts and figures.

3.4 Research Strategy

Both quantitative and qualitative research methods were adopted to fulfil the aim and objectives of this research. Quantitative research employs the deductive method as it tests theories, is more objective and uses larger sample sizes (Taylor & Trumbull, 2005, p. 235). As opposed to this, qualitative research is inductive in nature as it is unstructured, exploratory, provides insight and understanding and is tailored around smaller sample sizes (Malhotra & Birks, 2006). A combination of both research types appealed to the author for a more in-depth study of the prospective-existing employee perspective. Saunders et al., (2016) sees this combination as an acceptable and promising approach and one that has become more popular in recent years and known as the ‘mixed methods’ approach.

3.4.1 Mixed Methods Approach

This method was criticised by Smith & Heshusius (1986, p. 8) as it rejected the underlying assumptions of research which was that both strategies do not complement one another. However, the author held greater agreeance with a more recent view of Andrew & Halcomb (2009) who argue that the mixed methods approach adds a unique perspective to research that quantitative or qualitative on their own could not achieve sufficiently. Additionally, Bryman & Bell (2015, p. 643) claim that it has acquired great attention as a credible research method in the area of business studies.

For this reason, the opinion of Smith & Heshusius (1986) was disregarded, as the mixed methods approach would provide a deeper, more unique understanding of the perceptions that prospective and existing employees hold in relation to Company X.

3.4.2 Triangulation

The mixed methods approach can also be referred to as triangulation. Morse (1991, p. 121) sees the value in methodological triangulation as it provides a more advantageous approach to solving a research problem, especially when one method alone is not sufficient. Miles & Huberman (1994) also encouraged the use of triangulation, as it helps corroborate and validate information.

The sequence and priority of methods were considered when determining the suitability and structure of the mixed methods approach for the current research. Triangulation can be simultaneous or sequential according to Field & Morse (1985, p. 135). They describe simultaneous triangulation as involving the use of both quantitative and qualitative methods at once, whereas sequential triangulation implies that one can be carried out before or after the other. The latter was more appropriate in fulfilling the aim and objectives of this research as the online survey needed to be distributed at an earlier stage due to the larger sample and small window for completion of the survey. However, the semi-structured interviews could be carried out at a later stage due to the smaller employee sample. More time was also needed to organise the interviews, to find suitable participants and to gain the necessary permission from Company X.

3.5 Pilot Testing

Baker (1994, p. 182) describes pilot testing as the ‘trying out’ stage of the data gathering method. This can be time-consuming, frustrating, and can lead to unanticipated issues. However, it has merits in that it can identify problem areas early on, before investing more time and effort into the research (Mason & Zuercher, 1995, p. 11). Since an online survey was the primary source of data collection, it was important that this survey was strong and well-tested, as Krosnick (1991) states pilot testing can lead to more satisfactory responses.

Saunders (2016, p. 473) suggests getting experts to comment on the survey initially, and so opinions were obtained from two department heads and the research supervisor. In addition, feedback was obtained from two independent business professionals known to the author. Fink (2013) stated that for student questionnaires, a satisfactory number for completion of the pilot test is ten people and so a further five individuals from the author's class participated in the pilot test.

Pilot testing is also appropriate for interviewing, particularly when the researcher has a lack of confidence or is a novice with regards to the technique (Holloway, 1997, p. 121) which was the case with the author. Pilot testing the interviews certainly helped to strengthen the integrity and scope of the interview. It also allowed the author to practise techniques and build the necessary competence to conduct the interviews professionally.

All feedback from the pilot testing of the survey and the interview was taken on board. This was especially helpful with regards to the pitching of the open-ended questions in both methods as the feedback threw up a lot of comments regarding sensitivity and reluctance around these. To allow adequate time to factor in feedback, the pilot tests were completed two weeks in advance of the survey and a week in advance of the interviews.

3.6 Online Survey

According to Denscombe (2014, p. 7), the purpose of a survey, regardless of the medium through which it is conducted, is essentially to make contact with a target audience in order to obtain information from them. This information is then viewed comprehensively and in detail.

Online surveys have become increasingly popular since the era of the internet, advances in technology making them much quicker to complete than manual surveys (Evans & Mathur, 2005, p. 195). This was more enticing to the author due to the time constraint previously mentioned. Besides their speed and timeliness, the exporting of data serves as another

advantage (see table 3.1). According to Tingling et al (2003, pp. 226), respondents are also less likely to skip questions and jump ahead to a different page than with traditional paper methods.

Table 3.1 Advantages and Limitations of Online Surveys

Advantages	Limitations
Flexibility	Unclear instructions
Speed and Timeliness	Time constraint
Convenience	Impersonal
Ease of data entry and analysis	Access to sample group
Low cost	Privacy and security implications
Large sample	Low response rate
Can collect qualitative and quantitative data	Lack of depth
Attractive format	Restricted to online population
Better response to open ended questions	Requires motivation

Evans & Mathur (2005, p. 197); Bryman & Bell (2015, p. 668); Denscombe (2014, p. 29).

3.6.1 Survey Design

The survey consisted of four sections. Section 1 developed the participant profile regarding age, degree of study, and years of professional experience. This was useful for filtering purposes in the analysis of results.

Sections 2 and 3 had a similar format to each other and were designed to fulfil Objective 1 and 2 as defined in Chapter 1. A thematic approach around Berthon, Ewing & Hah’s (2005) dimensions of employer attractiveness and their 25 items of employer attractiveness was incorporated into these two sections. Respondents could complete these sections by choosing the degree to which they agreed with the certain factors from ‘strongly agree’ to ‘strongly

disagree’. While Section 2 would determine the importance placed by participants on factors under the five dimensions of employer attractiveness, Section 3 would determine the extent to which participants perceived that Company X could deliver on these factors. Thus, Section 2 served as a comparison parameter to explore the attractiveness of Company X. The author has not seen this design or approach carried out in previous literature. An open-ended question was included in Section 3 for a more elaborative insight into student’s perspectives of Company X as an attractive employer.

Section 4 was based on aspects of employer branding and included some check-box questions, some statements to be rated from ‘strongly agree’ to ‘strongly disagree’, and another open-ended question (see Appendix B).

Overall, the survey was designed in a way that encouraged the participant to complete it accurately and honestly.

3.6.2 Participants

A total of 111 online surveys were administered to students at College Y of whom 27 were Masters students (MS), and 84 were final year undergraduate students (US). Overall, a 49.5% response rate was achieved. Both sets of students were studying for qualifications consistent with the type of software engineering graduate that Company X employs.

3.6.3 Procedure

The surveys were administered to students by email towards the end of the final semester. Dommeyer et al (2004, pp. 11-15) suggests that the end of semester is a suitable time to distribute online surveys, allowing approximately two weeks for students to complete it and so a reminder email was sent after one week and a further two weeks were allowed for completion. Hogg (2003, pp. 81-83) discusses the importance of respondents being able to fill out the

survey at a time convenient to them rather than being inconvenienced when approached with a survey at an unsuitable time.

The email included a link to the survey, explained the survey's purpose and process, and assured the participants of anonymity and confidentiality. The identities of Company X, College Y and their location were included.

Survey tools that the author examined were Google Forms and Survey Monkey, and the former was selected due to low cost, preferable ease of use and exportability to MS Excel.

3.6.4 Limitations

Response Rate

Baruch (1999, pp. 421-438) outlined the main reasons for poor response rates to surveys to be: 1) selection of an incorrect target population, and 2) response reluctance. Incorrect target audience was not a factor and so response reluctance was likely the reason for not achieving a response rate exceeding 49.5%. This reluctance was likely due to students' exam fatigue and survey bombardment as many other survey requests upon the same population were issued around the same time. Nevertheless, the 49.5% response rate achieved was deemed satisfactory and allowed for assessment of results. According to Rogelberg & Stanton (2007, p. 196) it is unreasonable to expect a 100% response rate, however a response rate in the higher quartile will yield more credible findings which 49.5% did achieve.

3.7 Semi-structured Interviews

By using interview based data collection, it was possible to obtain valid and reliable data, thereby meeting the qualitative aspects of the research objectives. Bernard (2011) describes semi-structured interviews as open-ended, with the ability to cover a list of topics with a good degree of flexibility. The set of open-ended and probe-like questions used can be seen in Appendix F. The main advantages and disadvantages of interviews are outlined in Table 3.2.

Table 3.2 Advantages and Limitations of Interviews

Advantages	Limitations
Interviewer control	Time consuming
Flexibility	Cost
In depth and detailed information	Bias
Eliminates ambiguity	Smaller sample size

(Bryman & Bell, 2015)

With regards to the limitations, interviews conducted for this research were not overly time consuming, nor did they incur any cost, and the smaller sample size in fact suited the research so was not seen as a limitation.

3.7.1 Sampling

A total of five Company X employees were interviewed. Of the five, two had graduated from College Y through the Masters programme while the remaining three had graduated from College Y with an undergraduate software engineering degree. Participants were selected through a process of ‘snowball sampling’ which Bryman & Bell (2015, p. 192) describe as a form of convenience sampling and one often used within qualitative research. It involves the researcher making contact with those seen as relevant to the topic of research and through this, obtaining more contacts from word of mouth. One of the participants, along with a lecturer in

the college suggested potential interviewees and provided names and email addresses, resulting in a group of five.

Furthermore, interviewees were selected based on their length of service to Company X. De Vos et al (2003) suggest that it takes up to three years for an employee to feel integrated in their current organisation. Therefore, employees who were fully integrated in to the company, but could still reflect back prior to employment while giving an insightful understanding of their current situation in Company X, were selected.

3.7.2 Procedure

Once the potential interviewees had been selected, they were contacted by the author and interviews were arranged at Company X through the company's HR unit. Saunders (2014, p 391) stresses the importance of communicating to the participant the general theme and key questions that will be involved. Similarly, Edwards & Holland (2013, pp. 29-30) emphasise the importance of the interviewee understanding the context and content of the interview. This was achieved through email prior to the interviews (see Appendix D) and again in person at the start of each interview. Semi-structured interview questions do not necessarily have to flow in the same order from interview to interview but they will possess similar wording and provide the interviewee with more freedom in responding (Bryman & Bell, 2015, p. 467).

At the start of the interviews, a form was signed so that the interviewer and interviewee had an aligned understanding of confidentiality. Consent was also sought to record each interview so that all data gathered could be captured for accurate analysis at a later point (see Appendix E). Rapley (2004, p. 15–33) noted that if trust is established a recording should not be a concern. The author also saw great importance in building this trust through an honest, transparent communication and discussion at all times. All interviewees agreed to be recorded, with each interview lasting approximately five to ten minutes.

3.7.3 Limitations

Permission

Limitations regarding the interviews were scarce. However, one slight limitation was Company X's concerns about the interviews, placing a condition that they see the questions beforehand. Although this was perfectly understandable, it delayed the interview scheduling pending approval of the posed questions.

3.8 Alternative Method of Data Collection

Structured Interview

Structured interviews are used in situations where the interviewer wishes to adhere to a defined schedule and context, especially when time is a restricting factor. Each interviewee would be asked identical questions to reduce error and there is little room for open ended questions (Bryman & Bell, 2015, p. 202). These were strongly considered due to authors inexperience with conducting interviews. However, they are generally related to quantitative research and quantitative results were adequately obtained from the online survey. Therefore, the author felt that structured interviews would not add any additional value to the research whereas the mixed methods approach would.

3.9 Research Limitations

Bias

Saunders (2016, p. 397) discusses interviewer and interviewee bias and explains how interviewer bias can occur through the interviewer's tone, body language or comments expressed which can alter how interviewees respond to questions asked. It can also occur when the interviewer interprets responses according to their own beliefs which can reduce the validity

of responses. Careful planning, consideration and the interview pilot test helped the author avoid such bias.

Interviewee bias can occur due to the his/her perception of the interview or the interviewer. As the interviewer's aim is to receive explanations and insights from the interviewee, he/she will need to be aware that interviewees can be sensitive to open ended questions and thus may hold back on certain aspects which could have been vitally important for the research (Saunders, 2016, p. 397). Conducting semi-structured interviews meant that interviewee had an element of control over how he/she responded to questions. The author used probing techniques and paraphrased responses from time to time which created healthy empathy and trust with the interviewee to avoid interviewee bias. The author also ensured an objective stance was maintained throughout.

3.10 Ethical Considerations

Ethics in research is a common concern when choosing a strategy to obtain findings (Denscombe, 2014, p. 5). An interesting quote from Saunders et al (2009, p. 184) states that *"the ends served by your research can never justify the use of research which is unethical"* which was adhered to throughout the whole process of obtaining findings for this research.

Cooper & Schindler (1998) outline the goal of research ethics as ensuring that no participants are affected or suffer any unnecessary consequences from participating in the research. Careful attention and consideration was paid to participants in the process. They were encouraged rather than coerced, to complete the survey and interviews. Carefully abiding by confidentiality and anonymity factors mitigated any risk of confidentiality breaches.

Confidentiality and anonymity with Company X and its employees were the most important ethical considerations to be aware of. Bryman & Bell (2015, p 129) state that care must be taken to ensure that both individuals and organisations are not mentioned unless permission is

given to identify them. For this reason, the identities of Company X, College X and their location were hidden throughout the whole research project. Additionally, interviewees' names were also disguised.

3.11 Conclusion

This chapter justified the use of certain strategies, methods, and techniques in conducting the current research and fulfilling the research aim and objectives. Only when the author had confidence in the methods adopted could satisfactory results be obtained. This therefore sets the scene for the next chapter which will present the results and findings collected.

CHAPTER 4: RESULTS

4.1 Introduction

The research methods and strategies discussed in Chapter Three were used to gather information and translate it into more relevant and valuable information in this chapter, according to the research aim and objectives.

Results from objective one identified the level of importance MS and US from College Y placed on certain organisational factors under the dimensions of employer attractiveness. Objective two however, discovered the extent to which these sets of students believe Company X to provide such organisational factors. Objective three holds great importance as it examined Company X's effectiveness at attracting the MS and US by exploring their employer branding processes. Finally, objective four examined the extent to which existing employees who had studied in College Y, believed their psychological contract was fulfilled and the type of commitment they held as a result.

4.2 Quantitative Research

An online survey was used to gather results for objectives 1, 2 and 3. Section Two and Three of the survey relate to objectives 1 and 2 while section 4 relates to objective 3. Out of 111 students to whom the online survey was distributed, 55 responses were received: 21 MS and 34 US. This corresponds to a response rate of 49.5%. A higher response rate could not have been achieved unless the survey had been distributed at an earlier date which was not suitable. Although respondents were from different degree levels, all were in the field of software engineering. A full set of survey questions can be seen in Appendix A.

4.2.1 Participant Profile

Qualification being sought

Of the 55 respondents, 21 were studying for a Masters degree while 34 were undergraduates. The MS were undertaking a course designed for Company X, while the US were in their final year of a software engineering degree which had no association with Company X.

Respondents' age

For both sets of students, the overall age profile was 18-40+ with the most prominent range being 23-27 followed by 18-22. The prominence of the 23-27 age range was quite significant in the MS set of participants at 57%. This age range wasn't as dominant for US (47%) with the next most dominant age range of 18-22 being 38%. Those who were 40+ were the least represented in both cases, being 6% or lower of respondents. See Figure 4.1 and 4.2.

Figure 4.1 Age Profile of Masters Students

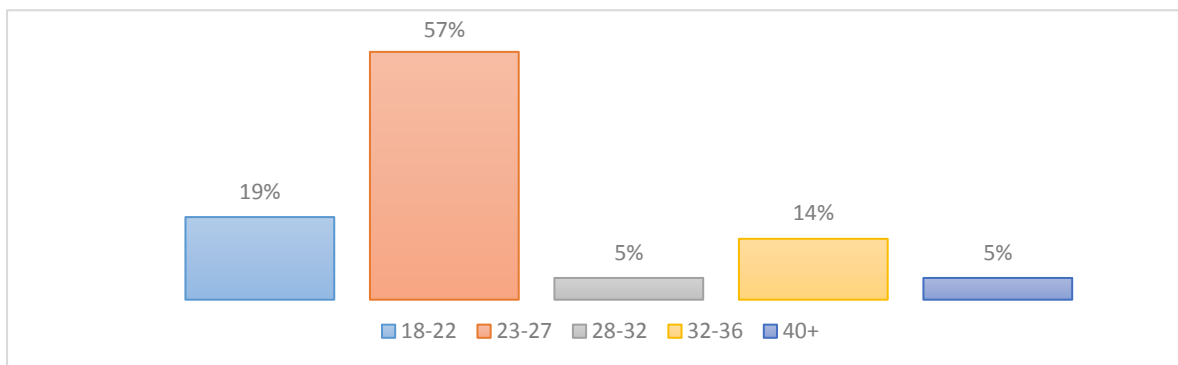
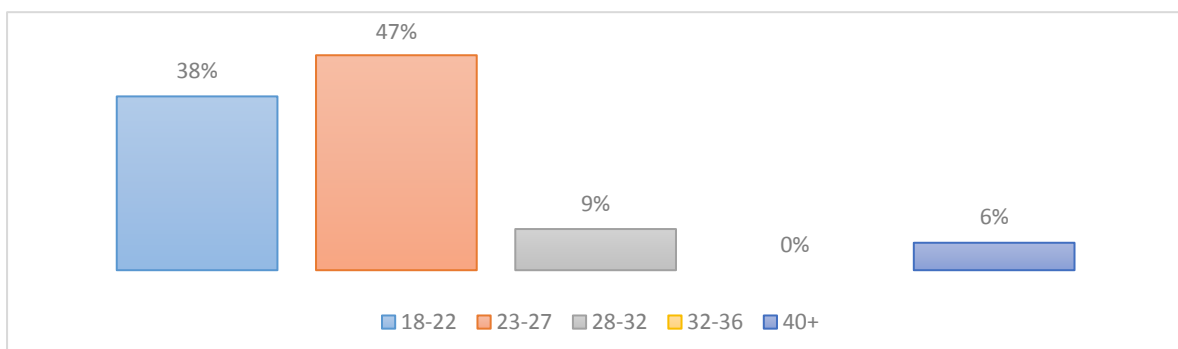


Figure 4.2 Age Profile of Undergraduate Students



Respondents experience in years of professional work

The majority of respondents (>70%) had no prior professional work experience. Only 24% of MS and 23% of US had 1-3 years' experience. Although 5% or less had 7+ years of experience, it was discovered that these respondents were aged 40+.

Figure 4.3 Work experience: Masters Students

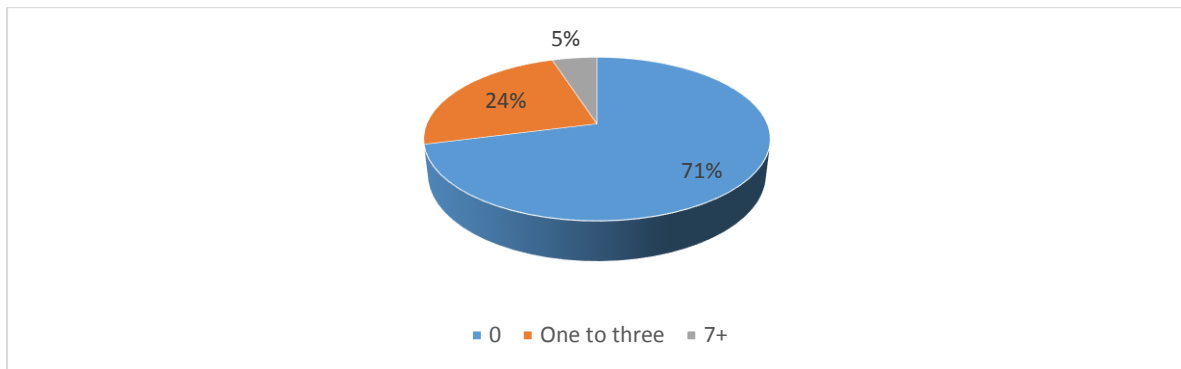
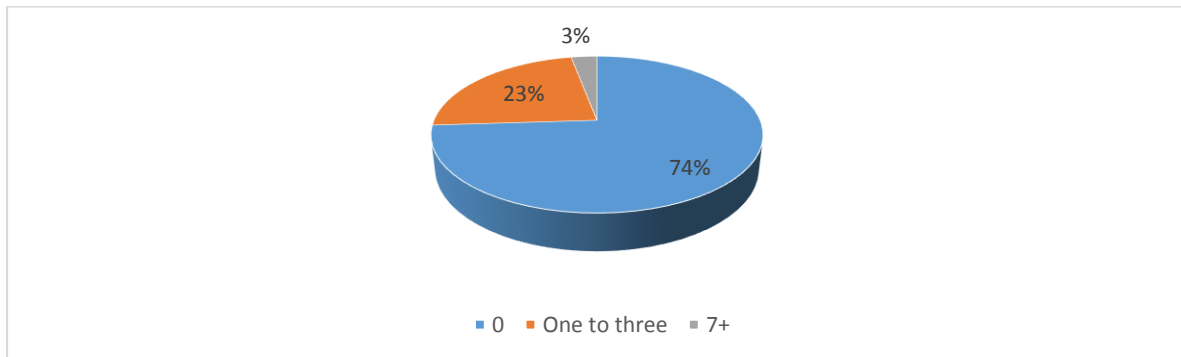


Figure 4.4 Work experience: Undergraduate Students



4.3 Objective 1: Employer Attraction

From the results obtained from the online survey, the importance that students placed on the five dimensions of employer attractiveness can be deducted. The students were required to select the level to which they agreed with certain factors against each dimension in attracting them to an organisation.

4.3.1 Interest Value

As illustrated in figures 4.5 and 4.6, *an organisation that values ones creativity and innovation* emerged as the most important factor under Interest Value for both sets of students. For MS a total of 95% agreed while 80% of US agreed. The second most important factor to MS was a *challenging environment and great leadership* which also accounted for 95% of MS agreeing. For US, *an organisation with strong company values and work practices* was second in importance. Of least importance to MS was an organisation with *strong company values and work practices*, while a *challenging environment with great leadership* was least important to US.

No participants disagreed with the importance of any of these factors. However, the higher number of US remaining neutral with regards to their importance highlights a higher importance of interest value to MS.

Figure 4.5 Interest Value: Masters Students

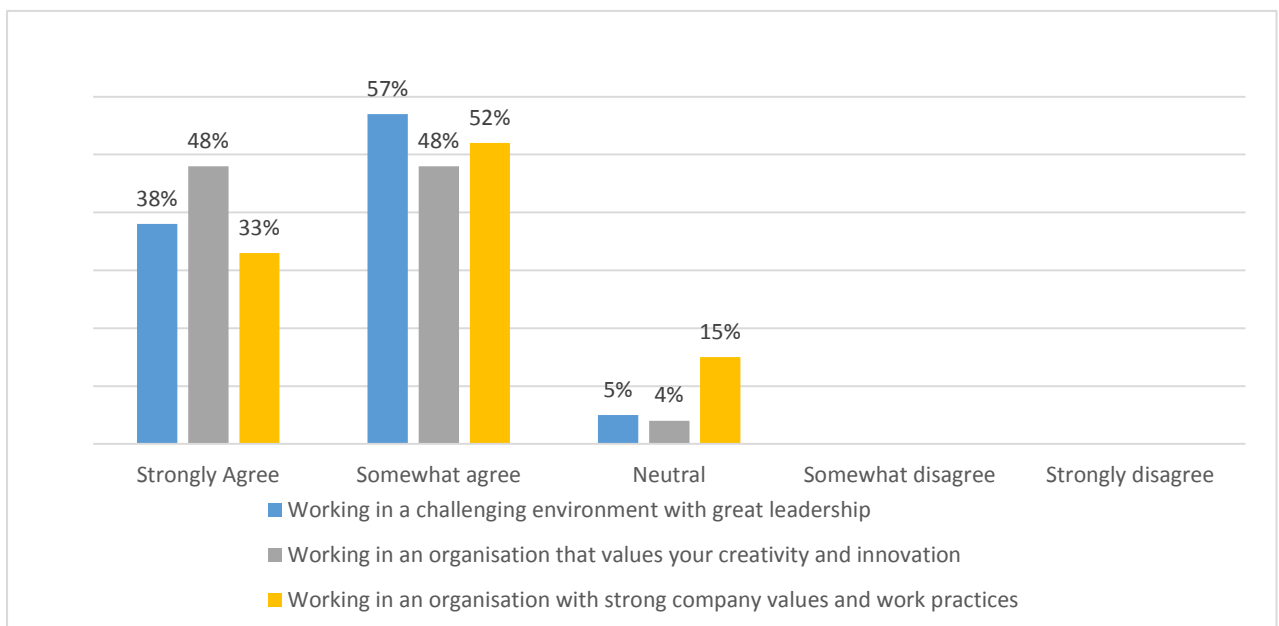


Figure 4.6 Interest Value: Undergraduate Students



4.3.2 Social Value

The factors used in the survey to determine the importance of Social Value to participants can be seen in figures 4.7 and 4.8. Apart from *a fun and exciting place to work*, the majority of MS and US strongly agree with the importance of all factors.

A high number of MS (71%) strongly agreed that both *good relationships with colleagues and management* and *positive work life balance* were of importance. Standing out for US, was a positive work life balance with 85% strongly agreeing that it is important.

Appreciation and recognition from management and superiors also held significant importance for both MS and US but to a lesser extent.

A fun and exciting place to work didn't seem to interest MS in terms of attracting them to an organisation as 33% remained neutral and 14% somewhat disagreed with its importance. This holds a similar stance for US with 32% remaining neutral and 3% somewhat disagreeing.

Overall, the first three factors were high influencers in attracting these students to an organisation, some more than others.

Figure 4.7 Social Value: Masters Students

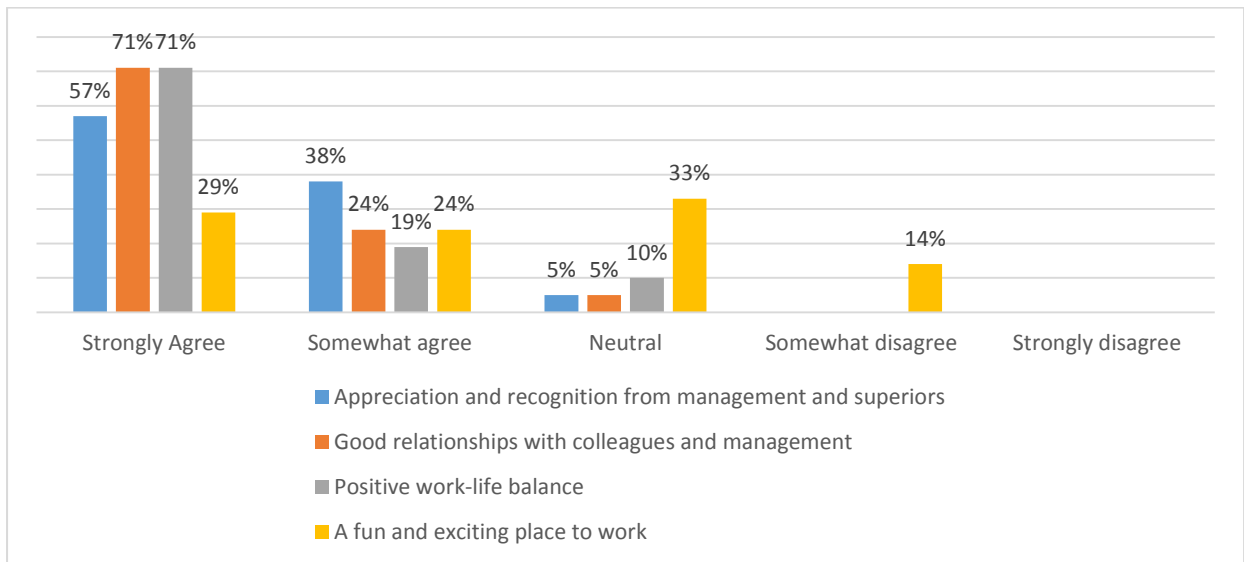
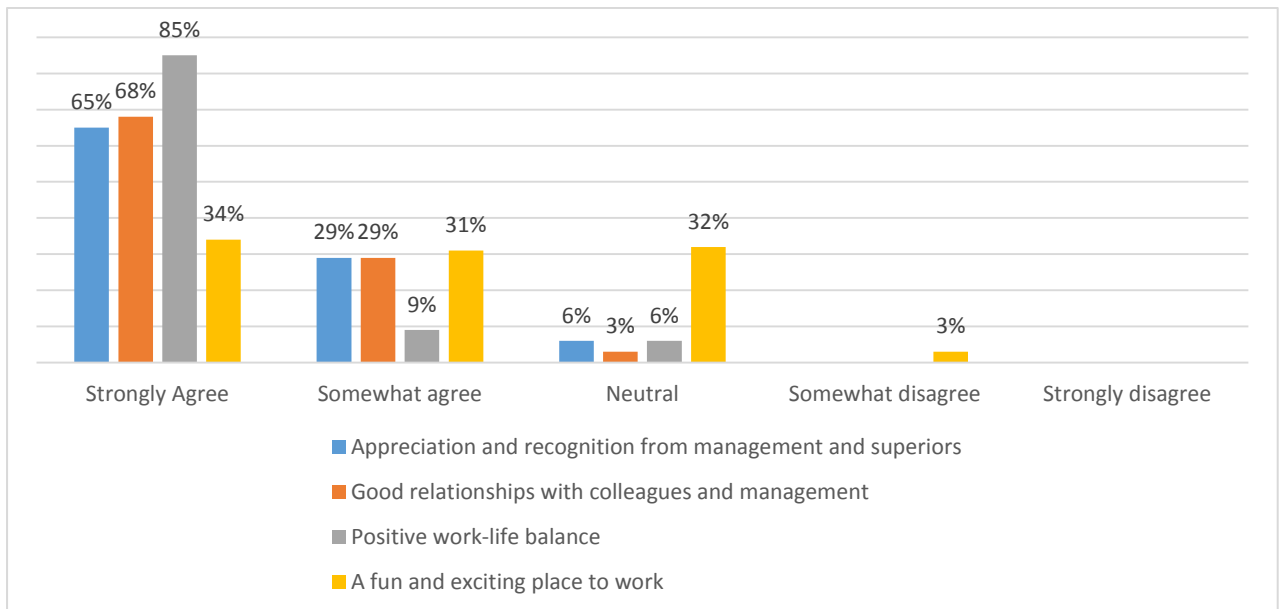


Figure 4.8 Social Value: Undergraduate Students



4.3.3 Economic Value

Under economic value, *job security* was the most important to MS in attracting them to an organisation. Next in importance to MS was *an attractive salary and benefits*. The least important of the three factors was *future advancement opportunities* being the least important of the three factors. Almost a quarter of MS participants remained neutral in terms of the latter, however, no MS disagreed to any extent regarding the importance of these three economic factors.

This sharply contrasted to responses from US. Here, *an attractive salary and benefits* was the most attractive factor with 100% of participants agreeing. Next were *future advancement opportunities* and *job security*. Only 6% of US remained neutral towards these factors. However, as with MS, no US disagreed with the importance of these factors.

Figure 4.9 Economic Value: Masters Students

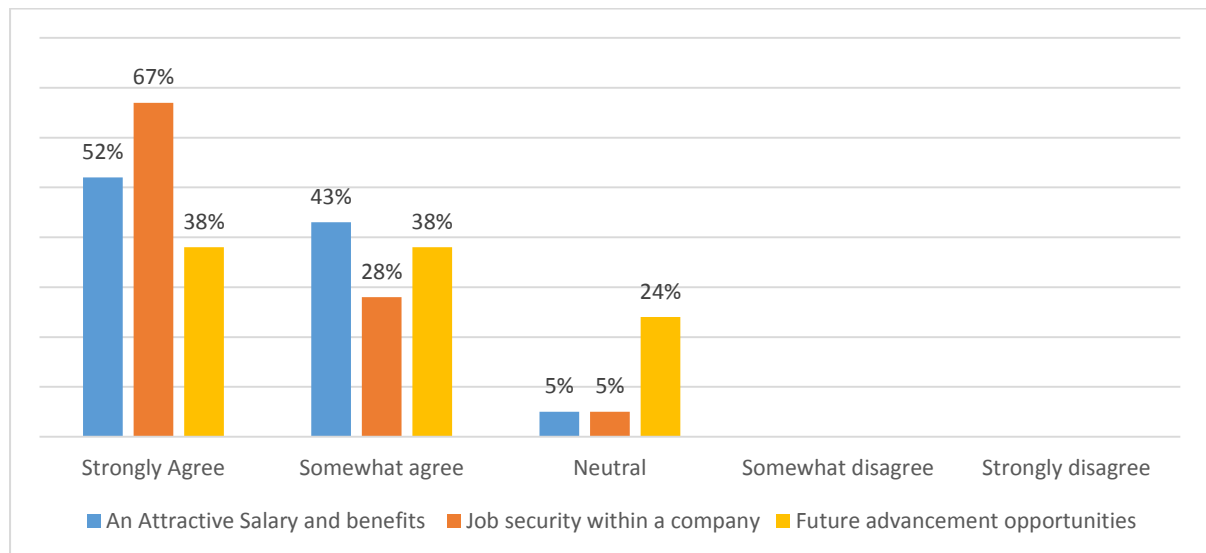
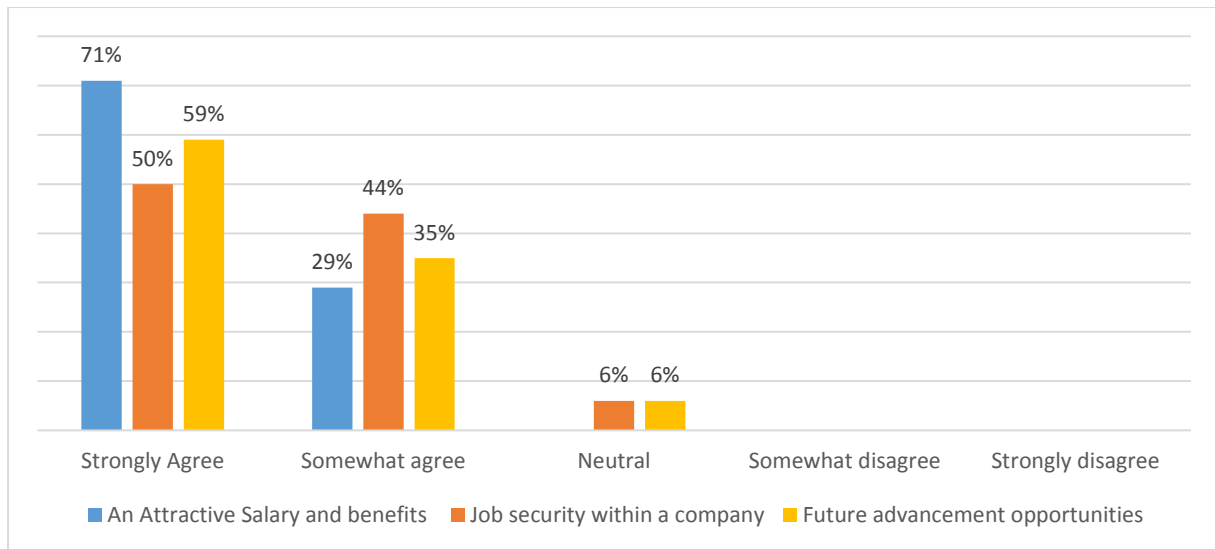


Figure 4.10 Economic Value: Undergraduate Students



4.3.4 Development Value

Figures 4.11 and 4.12 show that the overall results for Development Value were similar for both sets of students. No participants agreed that factors under Development Value were unimportant and only a small percentage were neutral. Therefore, a distinct finding was that Development Value was important to both sets of students.

However, a higher percentage of MS strongly agreed with the factors compared to US. For MS, *gaining experience that enhances your career* was the most important factor, while for US the most important factor was *future career advancement opportunities*. Although *training and development* was the least important factor to both sets of students, over 70% of MS and 62% of US strongly agreed with its importance, highlighting an apparent importance.

Figure 4.11 Development Value: Masters Students

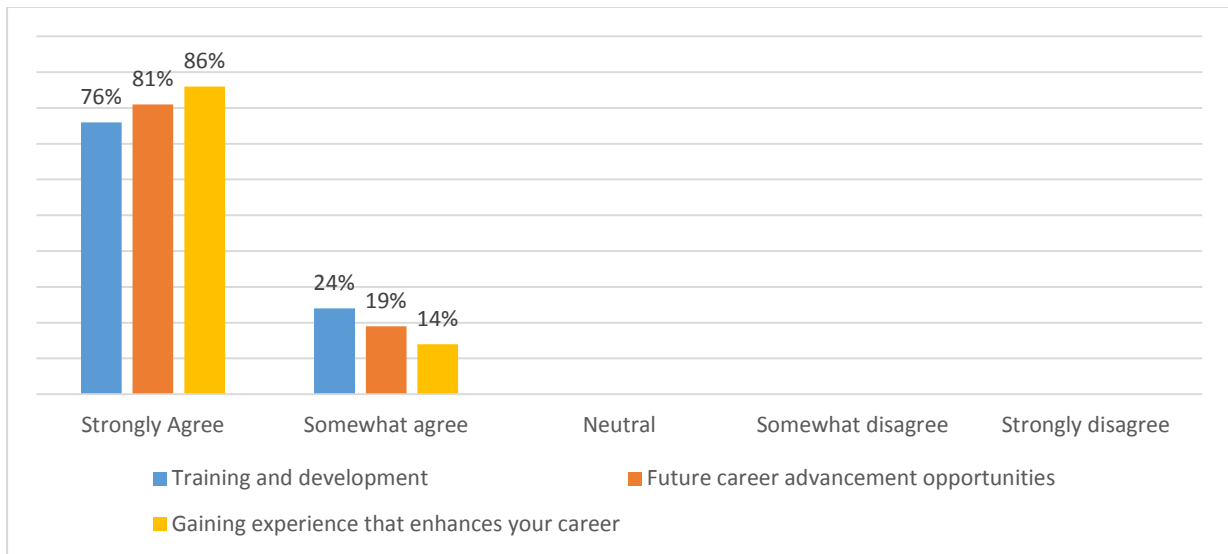
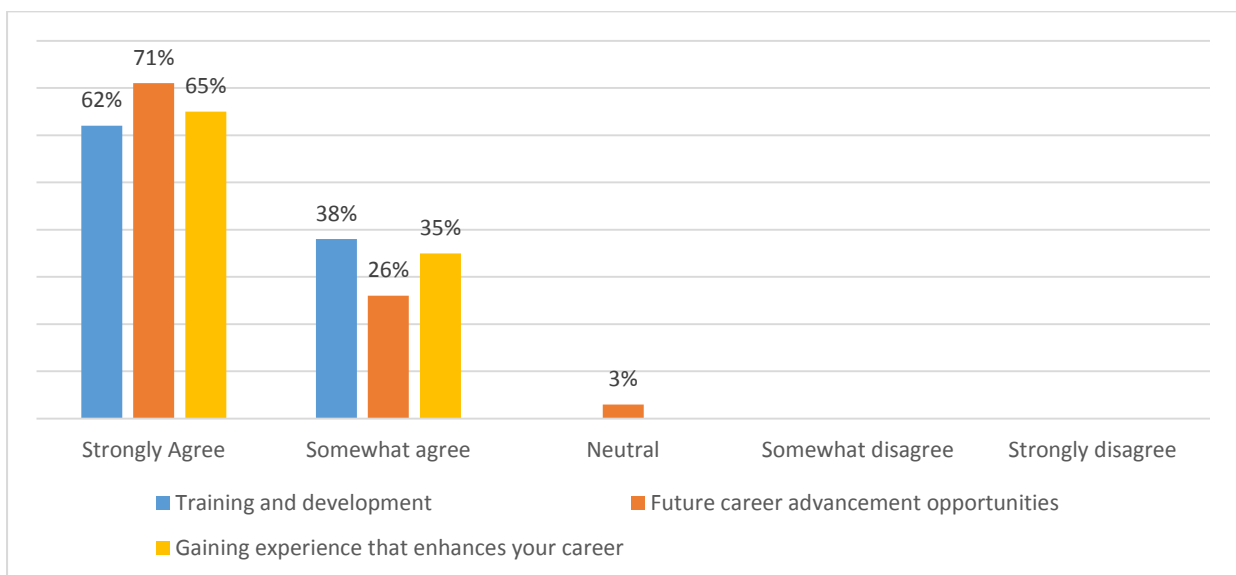


Figure 4.12 Development Value: Undergraduate Students



4.3.5 Application Value

Figure 4.13 illustrates that the *ability to apply knowledge and skills learned from degree to the role* was the most enticing aspect to MS. Holding a similar level of importance was *the opportunity to help others learn from you*. However, for this set of students, the *opportunity to lead a team to success* was significantly less important with 48% holding a neutral view.

Figure 4.14 highlights a rather flat range of percentages (38% to 50%) for US who strongly agree or somewhat agree with the three factors. No factor is significantly different from the others, however, no participants disagreed to any extent with their importance, and thus they were all of relative importance. On close inspection, the *ability to apply knowledge and skills from degree to the role* was revealed as most important, followed by the *opportunity to lead a team to success*.

Figure 4.13 Application Value: Masters Students

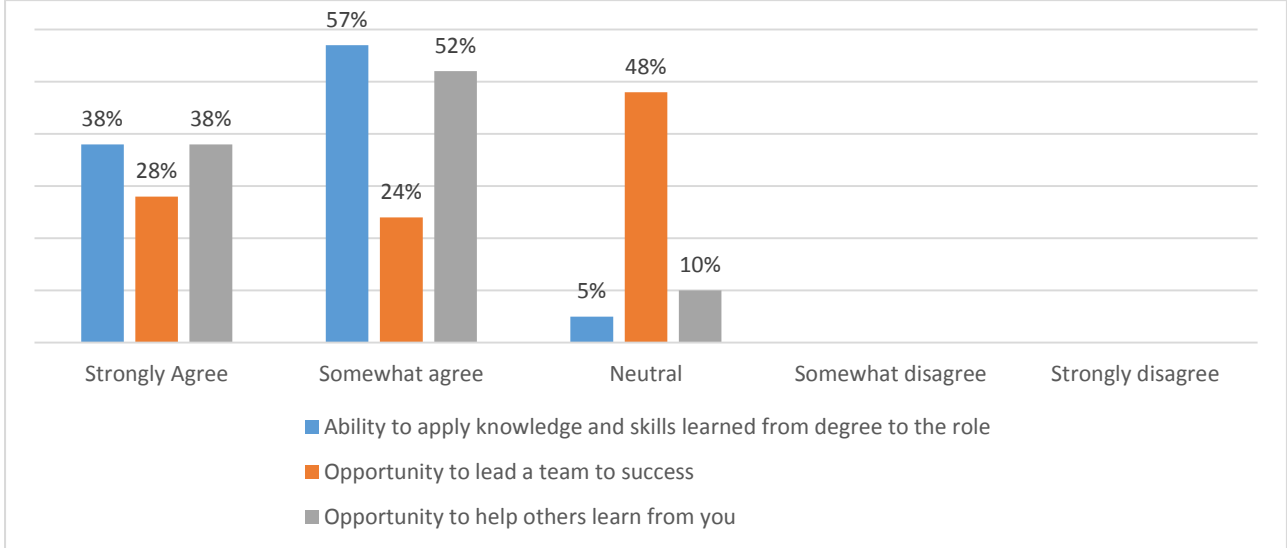
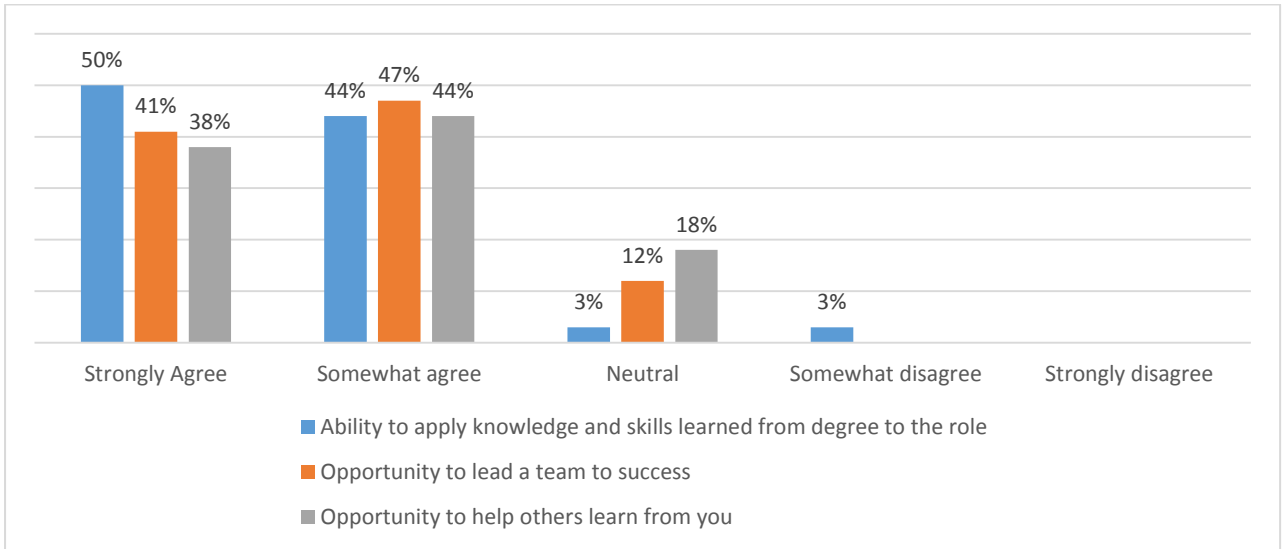


Figure 4.14 Application Value: Undergraduate Students



Summary of Objective 1

From the findings thus far, the author understands the difficulty that attracting prospective employees must pose as despite these students coming from the same college with similar degrees, in some cases they place different levels of importance on different aspects. However, standing out as most significant to both sets of students was a positive work life balance under social value, and all factors under development value. What follows will be a comparative analysis on the factors of importance displayed above in conjunction with the perception of Company X providing these.

4.4 Objective 2: Perception of Company X As An Attractive Employer

This section of the survey followed the same format as the previous section, using the five dimensions of employer attractiveness as a basis for obtaining information. However, the questions posed were in relation to Company X and aimed to discover how students perceived Company X along the dimensions of attractiveness.

The most valuable findings would be the factors of most importance to students discovered in the previous section either matching or not matching the perception students have of Company X in terms of such factors.

4.4.1 Interest Value

Figure 4.15 and figure 4.16 below show that the majority of responses were on the somewhat agree scale despite most attributes being of high importance to students in the previous section. As previously illustrated, the most important factors in attracting MS to an organisation were *valuing one's creativity and innovation* and one with *a challenging environment and great leadership*. Although over half of MS somewhat agreed that Company X do meet these

requirements, less than quarter strongly agreed, while 19-29% remained neutral. 5% of MS also strongly disagreed that Company X would value their *creativity and innovation*. MS held a high perception of Company X in terms of valuing its employees, however, this was the least important aspect to them so it wouldn't have had a major influence on their attraction towards Company X.

The perceptions of Company X as a company that values *creativity and innovation* also wasn't high amongst US despite being the most important aspect to them under interest value. In total, 23% were in disagreement with this while just over a quarter remained neutral. Working in a company with *strong company values and work practices* was also of importance to US which received a relatively positive perception in terms of Company X. However, the least important aspect to them, which was *a challenging environment and great leadership*, held the highest perception.

Figure 4.15 Interest Value: Masters Students

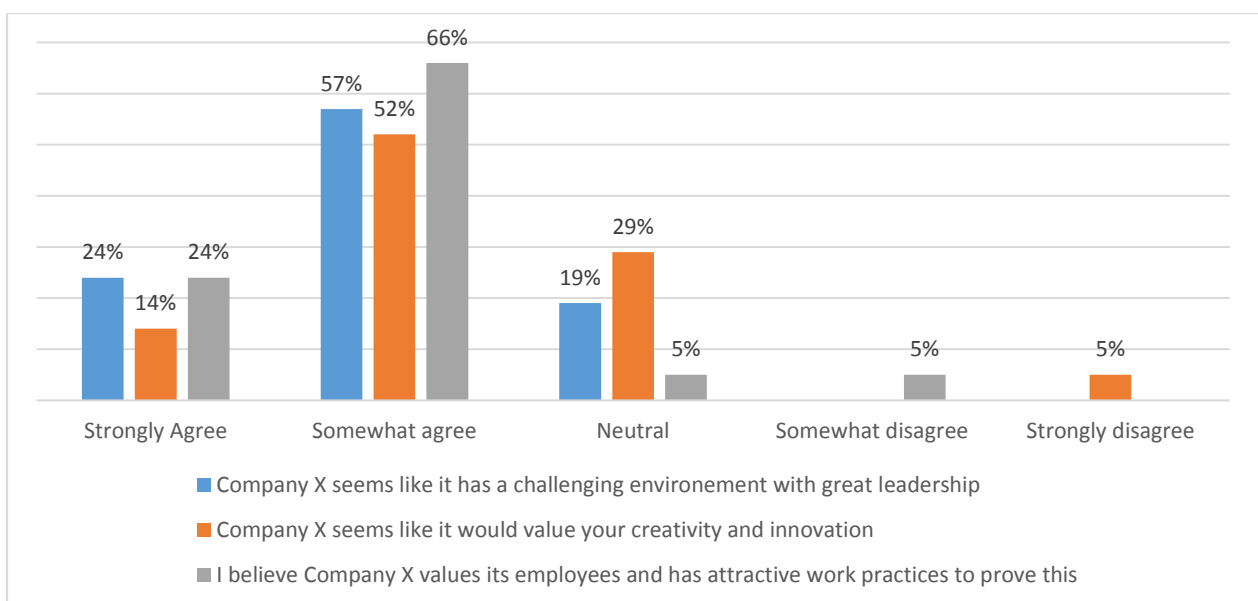
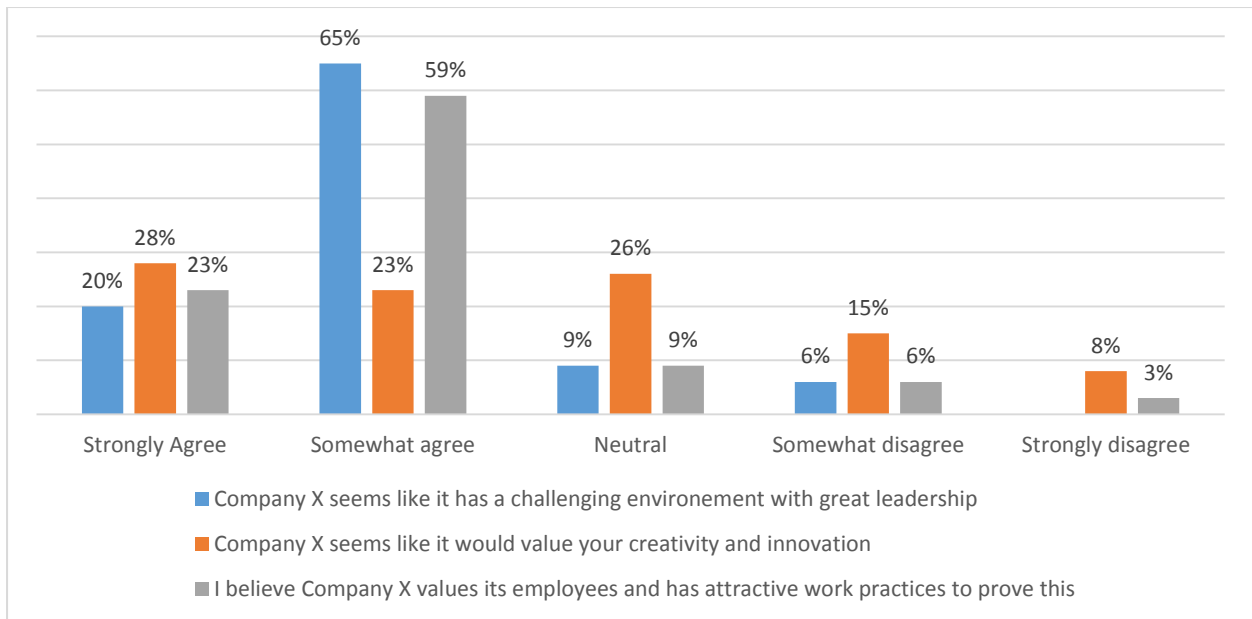


Figure 4.16 Interest Value: Undergraduate Students



4.4.2 Social Value

Figure 4.17 illustrates that MS have a relatively promising perception of the *working relationships* at Company X as no one disagreed with this factor. This was a positive finding as *a good relationship with colleagues and management* was the most important factor to MS. *A work life balance* was also highly important to MS and the perception of Company X providing this was also quite promising although 19% were neutral. The perception in terms of *management and superiors at Company X appreciating and recognising their employees* was not very high as 33% remained neutral, however, this wasn't the most important aspect to MS. Nor was *a fun and exciting work environment* despite the apparent perception that this was present at Company X.

US were in greater agreement that Company X had strong and positive working relationships rather than a satisfactory work-life balance, despite the latter being most important to them. However, working relationships were next in importance so this is still a positive finding for Company X. US were in least agreement that Company X was *a fun and exciting place to*

work, however as this was the least important factor to them this would not influence their attraction to Company X.

Figure 4.17 Social Value: Masters Students

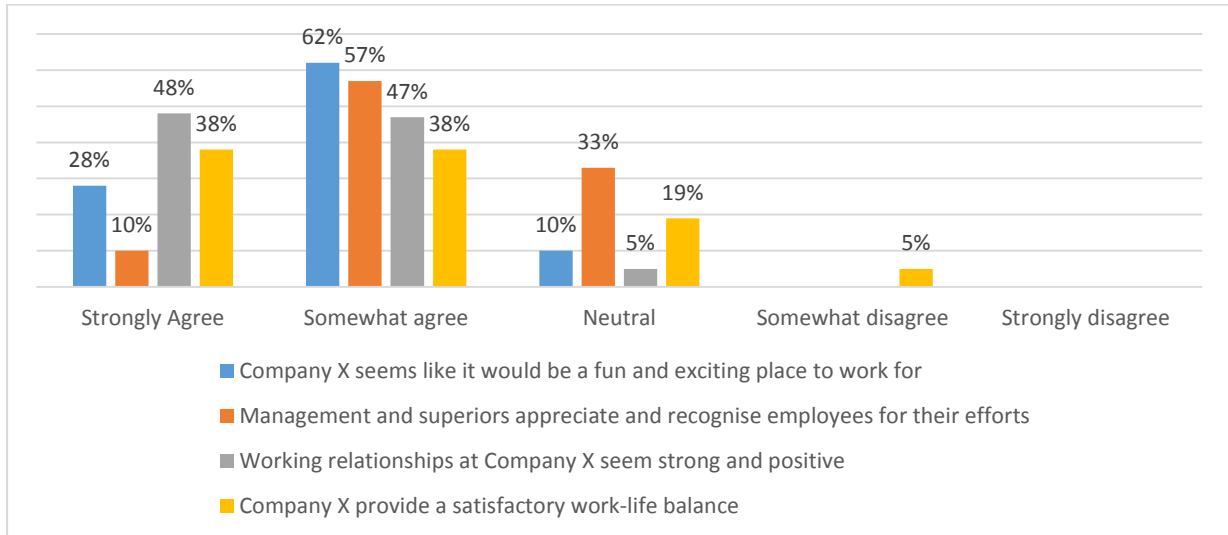
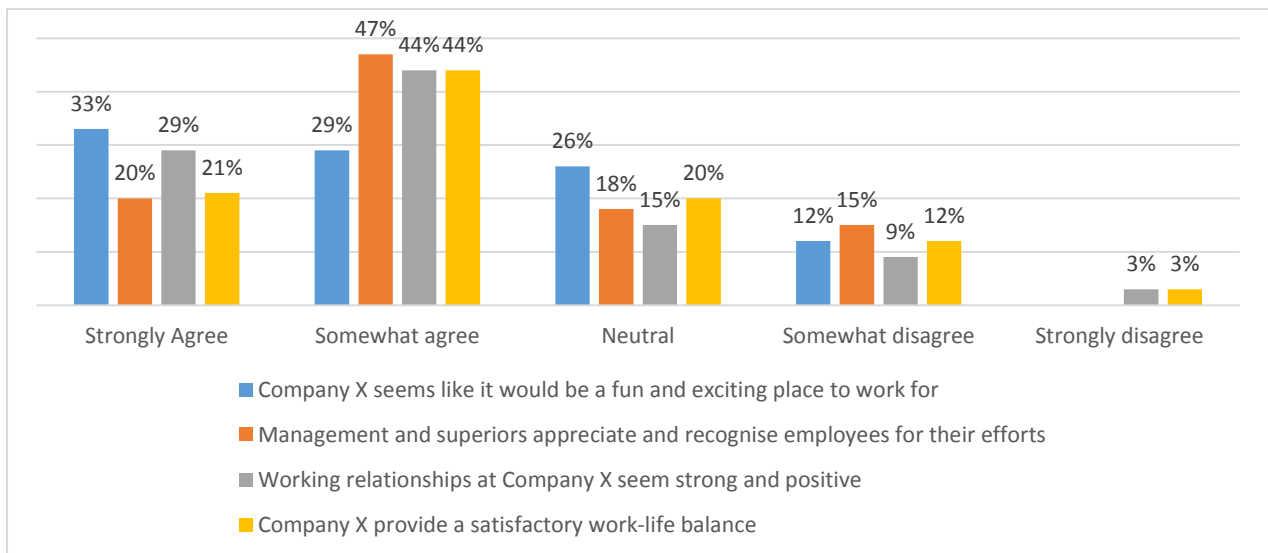


Figure 4.18 Social Value: Undergraduate Students



4.4.3 Economic Value

There was a strong divide between MS and US in terms of their perceptions of economic value at Company X, with 71% of MS somewhat agreeing that there is a high sense of job security at Company X. This was quite high compared to the other two factors which were considerably more important to US. Given that job security was most important to MS, this was a favourable finding. On the contrary, an attractive salary and benefits were also of importance to MS but the perception that Company X provides this was quite low as less than half of MS agreed that this was the case, while the remaining respondents were neutral or in disagreement. Attractive advancement opportunities also didn't receive an optimistic perception but this was the least important aspect to MS.

US had a more positive outlook in terms of Company X having *attractive salary and benefits* and *attractive advancement opportunities*. This was positive as almost all US agreed with the importance of these factors. However, quite a few students remained neutral and others disagreed that these existed at Company X.

Although almost a quarter of US were in disagreement that there was a high sense of job security at Company X, this was the least influential in attracting US to a company.

Figure 4.19 Economic Value: Masters Students

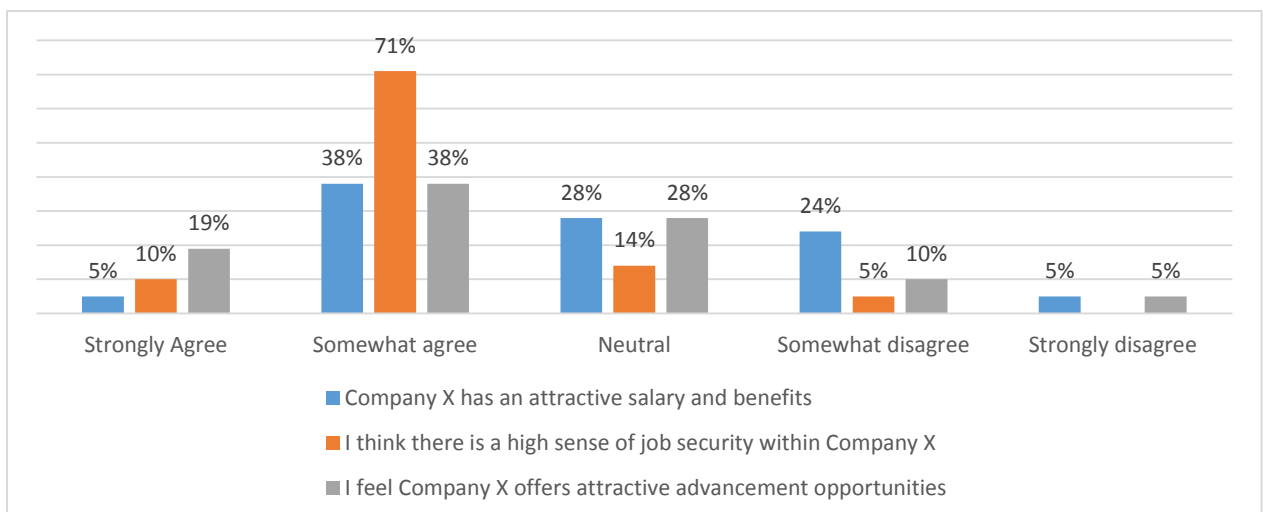
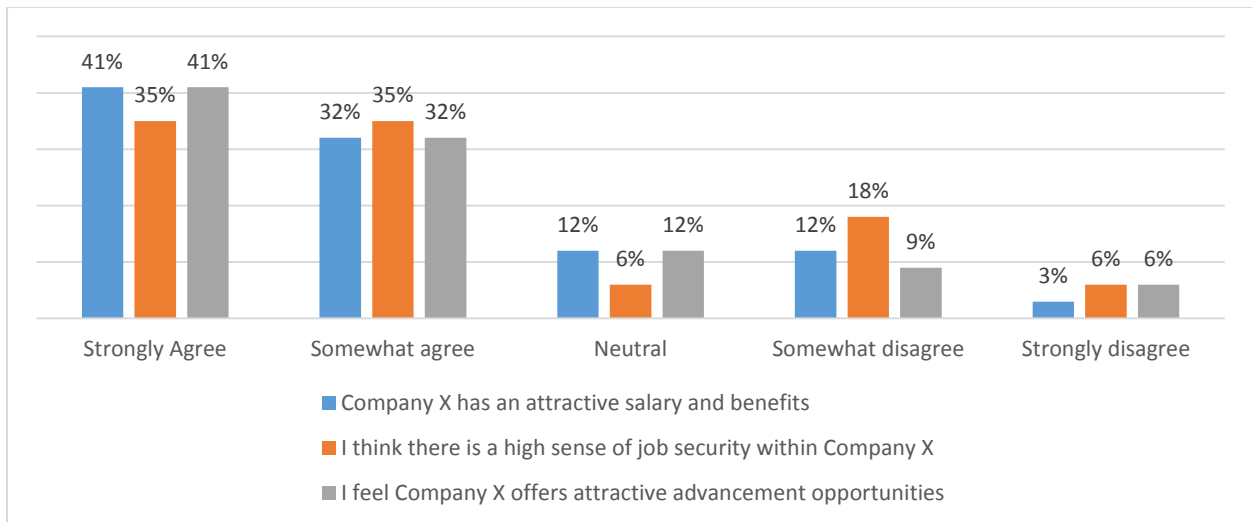


Figure 4.20 Economic Value: Undergraduate Students



4.4.4 Development Value

It is apparent from Figure 4.21 that MS are in high agreement that they could see themselves enhancing their career at Company X, along with Company X being committed to training and development as over 95% believed so. This was an assuring finding for Company X especially as career enhancing experience was most important to MS. Although training and development was of least importance, as stated previously, 70% were still in agreement as to its importance, which tells the author it is still of significance. Career advancement opportunities which were of most importance to MS, revealed a rather low perception from MS in terms of Company X. This was the least assuring finding under this value.

US held a relatively similar perception of Company X in terms of seeing themselves enhancing their career there and Company X's commitment to training and development although neutral and disagree responses were slightly scattered. Career enhancing experience was in fact one of the most important development factors to US, however, training and development was not. Future career opportunities were also of importance to US, however, this factor received the most negative perception in terms of Company X as a large percentage were neutral and disagreed.

Figure 4.21 Development Value: Masters Students

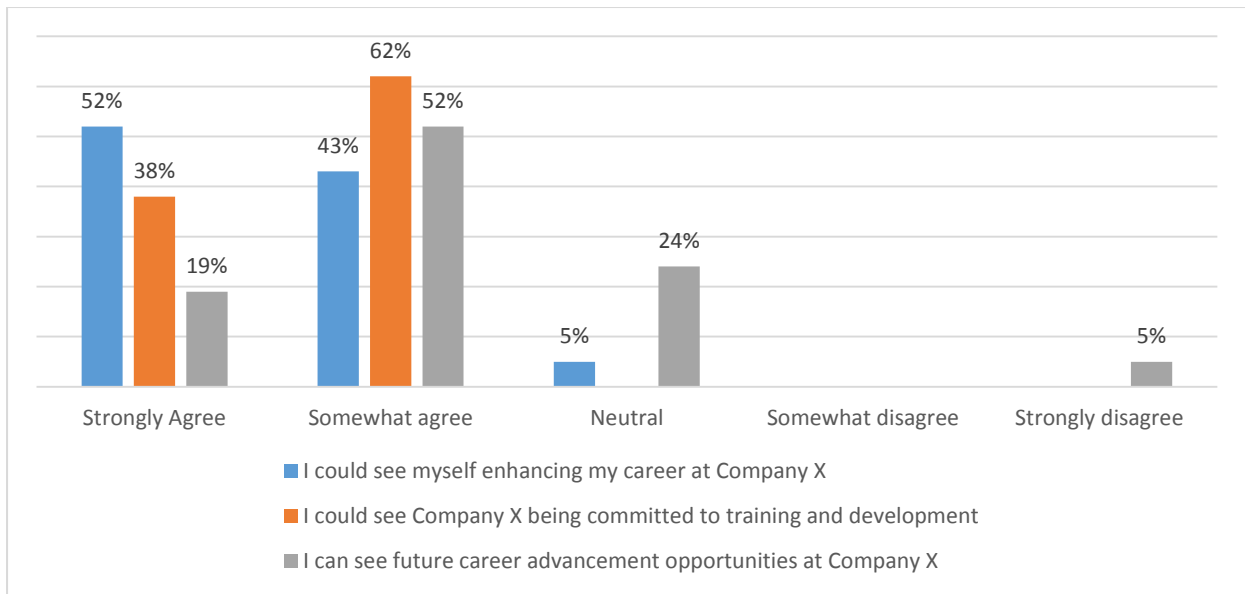
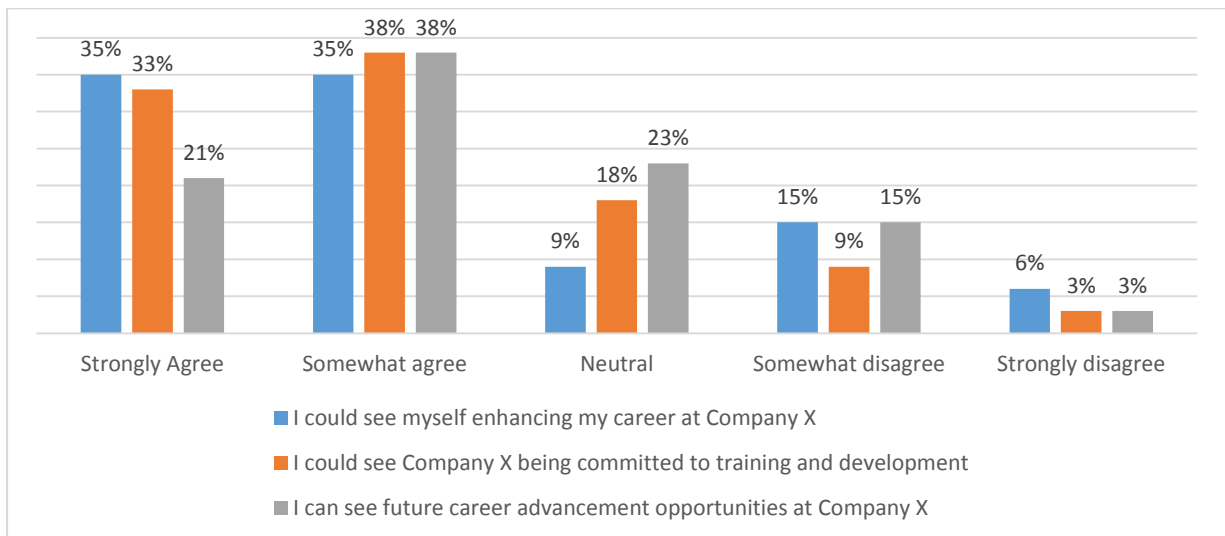


Figure 4.22 Development Value: Undergraduate Students



4.4.5 Application Value

Some 95% of MS could see themselves being able to apply their skills and knowledge learned from their degree to a role at Company X while only 5% strongly disagreed. This was a relevant finding as this was the most appealing factor under application value to these students. In total, 67% of MS agreed that they could see others learning from them at Company X, while

28% remained neutral, most likely because they were unsure. Regardless, this was also an important factor to MS. Of very little important to MS was the opportunity to lead a team to success. Fortunately, it was this factor that they were unsure of in terms of Company X as almost half of respondents remained neutral.

The application value most highly perceived by US was being able to apply their skills and knowledge learned from their degrees to a role at Company X as 82% agreed. Similar to MS, this was also the most important application factor to US. However, what was of least importance to MS was of relatively high importance to US, which was the opportunity to lead a team to success. This didn't receive as high a perception as the previous factor, as there was a higher number of students who remained neutral and 9% who disagreed. In terms of US seeing people learn from them at Company X, 67% agreed that they could which was more positive than the previous factor, however, this was of least importance to US and so didn't hold much meaning.

Figure 4.23 Application Value: Masters Students

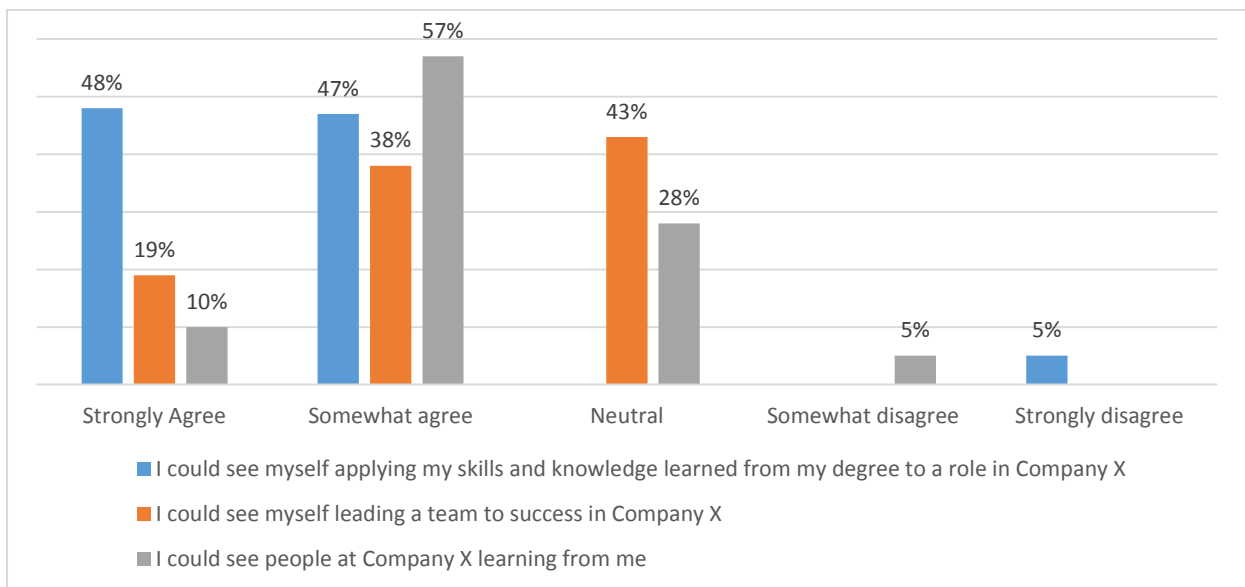
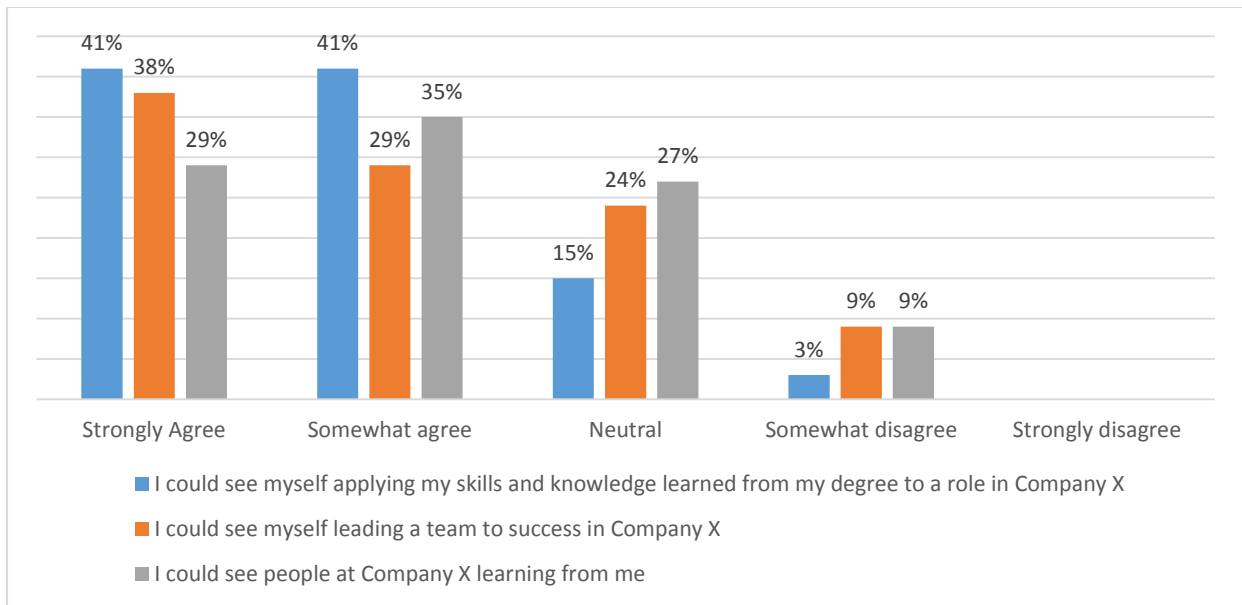


Figure 4.24 Application Value: Undergraduate Students



4.4.6 Open Ended Question

At the end of Section Three of the survey, students had the option to write a short to medium sized answer in relation to the following:

“In your own words, sum up your perception of Company X”

Keywords are provided below in terms of the positive and negative perceptions held by MS and US. Responses in their entirety can be seen in Appendix B.

Responses

The majority of MS and US held similar perceptions of the attractiveness of Company X as an employer in terms of opportunities, its positive reputation and recognition as an employer, and how it cares for its employees. However, a smaller number of respondents did not see this and believed Company X was “average”, with low pay, and a lack of growth opportunities. See Tables 4.1 to 4.4.

Table 4.1 Positive Responses: Masters Students

“Respectful”	“Secure jobs”	“Challenging, creative, innovative environment”
“Enhances employee skills”	“Great opportunities”	“Recognised international company”
“Works on cutting edge of technology”	“Good stepping stone”	“Respect employees”

Table 4.2 Negative Responses: Masters Students

“Pretty generic”	“Mainly attracted by the Masters.. not because it is an amazing place to work”	“Pay/benefits low”
“Weak salary and growth opportunity”		

Table 4.3 Positive Responses: Undergraduate Students

“Attractive to work for”	“Strong name, opportunities to climb ladder”	“Nice pay, staff have good attitude towards work”
“Financially sustaining”	“Great working hours, money, work relationships”	“Longstanding member of the software industry”
“Professional, friendly environment, cares for its employees”	“Reliable, esteemed, stable”	“Great reputation”

Table 4.4 Negative Responses: Undergraduate Students

<p>“Ad hoc approach to recruitment, vague in their commitment to new employees”</p>	<p>“Dismal to work for”</p>	<p>“Average”</p>
<p>“Losing its pre-eminent position”</p>	<p>“Not somewhere I could work forever”</p>	

Summary of Objective 2

It can be concluded from this objective that in general, students’ perceptions of Company X were broadly in line with their expectations of any employer. However, there was also a large degree of uncertainty and some negative feelings expressed across the various dimensions.

4.5 Objective 3: Employer Branding Effectiveness

The final section of the survey aimed to fulfil Objective 4 which was essentially to determine Company X’s effectiveness at attracting the said students. The following questions were perceived as most appropriate in determining the effectiveness of Company X’s employer branding process.

4.5.1 How Students Heard of Company X

Figures 4.25 and 4.26 illustrate that the majority of students had heard about Company X through the college or a lecturer, US in particular. It was also common amongst students to have heard about Company X through a friend or family member working there. No students from either degree had heard of Company X through social media, despite the most prominent ages of students being between 18-27. Additionally, no students selected the ‘other’ option which was left open for students to mention any other ways they may have heard of Company X such as from the company itself in some way.

Figure 4.25 How Masters Students Heard of Company X

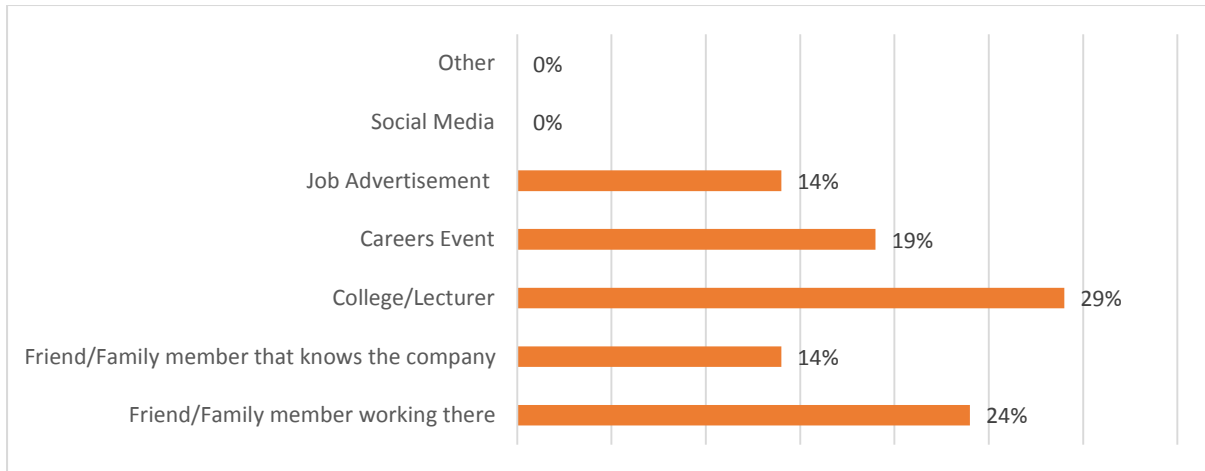
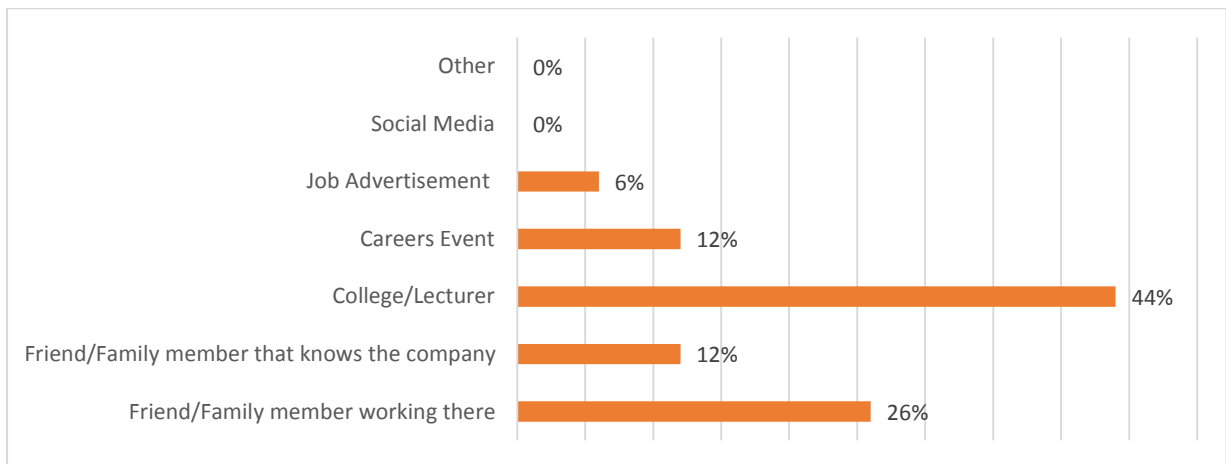


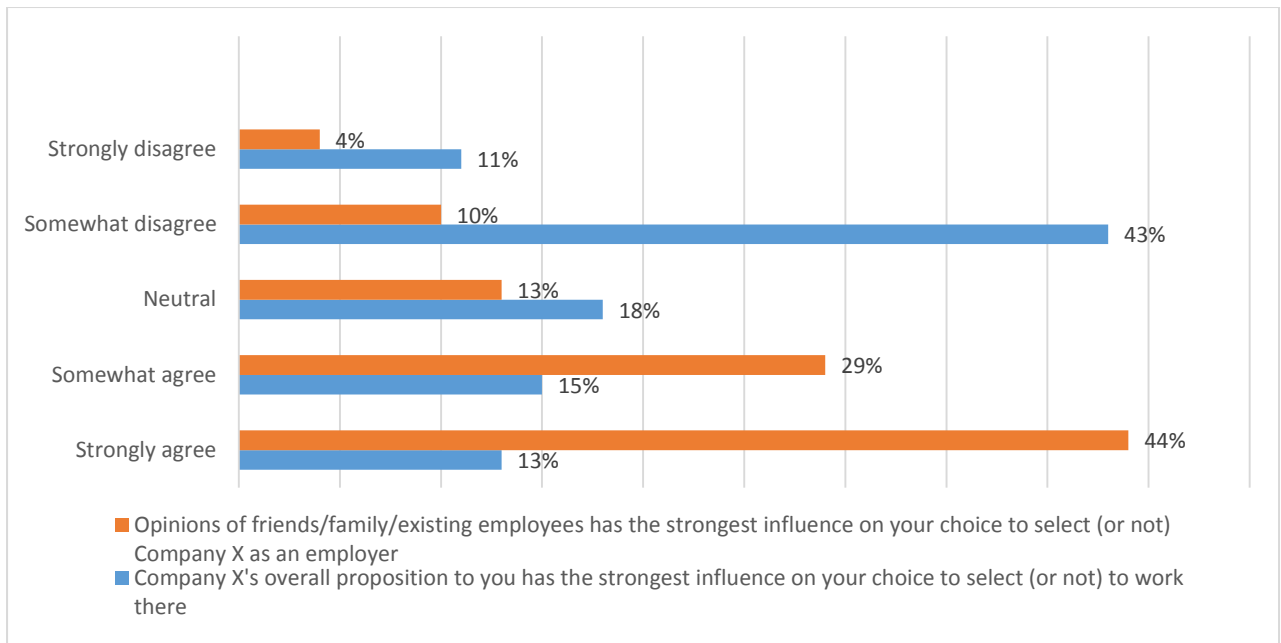
Figure 4.26 How Undergraduate Students Heard of Company X



4.5.2 Influencers of Employer Choice

Figure 4.27 combines the perceptions of MS and US. It clearly indicates that the opinions of friends, family, or existing employees had the strongest influence over their choice in selecting Company X as an employer. Over 70% agreed with this while only 28% agreed that Company X's overall proposition to them had the strongest influence over their intention to select it as an employer or not.

Figure 4.27 Influencers – Masters and Undergraduate Students



4.5.3 Promotion of Company X

On close inspection of Tables 4.5 and 4.6, it is possible to see that with the relatively high percentages across the ‘neutral’ and ‘disagree’ scales, Company X is not doing everything they can to attract College Y students, and also perhaps therefore other job seekers.

In terms of Company X effectively communicating the company culture and opportunities through various sources, just over 50% of both sets of students agreed to some extent that Company X does in fact succeed at this. However, while more MS remained neutral, more US disagreed with this statement. In both cases, there is an element of uncertainty and negativity.

There was quite a significant amount of MS and US who remained neutral or disagreed with the statement that Company X’s name is seen a lot through advertisements and sponsorship activities. Less than a quarter agreed that this was the case, although this indicates to some extent that Company X is making a slight effort to put its name in the public eye.

There was a high percentage of ‘somewhat agree’ responses from both sets of students in terms of Company X being effective at promoting its value proposition (41-52%). Not as many students strongly agreed. However, over 20% of students were in disagreement with this which suggests room for improvement.

Similar to the previous factor, there was quite a high number of student who somewhat agreed that Company X is effective at communicating what it has to offer. Just over a quarter (26%) of US also strongly agreed with this, while only 10% of MS did. Both sets of students, to a much higher extent than the other factors, perceived Company X as having created a positive reputation in terms of attracting students from College Y. However, the most concerning finding was that 18% of US were in disagreement with the statement on Company X’s reputation compared to 5% of MS. This was unsurprising as they were not going through the Masters programme which is in association with Company X.

Table 4.5 Perception of Company X’s Promotional Efforts: Masters Students

	Strongly Agree	Somewhat Agree	Neutral	Somewhat Disagree	Strongly Disagree
The culture and opportunities at Company X are effectively communicated through their website and various other sources	14%	38%	38%	5%	5%
Company X’s name is seen a lot through advertisements and sponsorship activities	10%	10%	38%	24%	19%
Company X is effective at promoting its value proposition	10%	52%	14%	24%	----
Company X is effective at communicating what it has to offer	10%	43%	28%	19%	----
Company X has created a positive reputation that attracts students from College X	43%	38%	14%	5%	----

Table 4.6 Perception of Company X’s Promotional Efforts: Undergraduate Students

	Strongly Agree	Somewhat Agree	Neutral	Somewhat Disagree	Strongly Disagree
The culture and opportunities at Company X are effectively communicated through their website and various other sources	26%	32%	26%	12%	3%
Company X’s name is seen a lot through advertisements and sponsorship activities	10%	14%	24%	37%	15%
Company X is effective at promoting its value proposition	15%	41%	23%	15%	6%
Company X is effective at communicating what it has to offer	26%	38%	21%	9%	6%
Company X has created a positive reputation that attracts students from College X	41%	26%	15%	12%	6%

4.5.4 Open Ended Question

Students were encouraged to respond to another open-ended question at the end of the survey.

This was phrased as follows:

“Finally, sum up in your own words what you think of Company X’s attempt to attract you as a future graduate from College Y. Include any suggestions for improvement you may have, if any.” Responses were filtered again as appropriate.

Table 4.7 Positive Responses: Masters Students

“...they did a good job”	“Master's course and work experience is a major influence”	“Encouraging that they are working with College X”
“...did an effective job in attracting me”	“...International company.. very attractive”	“Opportunity to complete placement.. primary factor in attracting me”

Table 4.8 Negative Responses: Masters Students

“Hard for me to find info on Masters”	“Should be doing more to promote themselves”	“Not well advertised”
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It is clear from these responses that Company X’s effectiveness at attracting these individuals was through the opportunity to go through this Masters. It was seen as a ‘major influence’ and ‘encouraging’, providing candidates with ‘valuable industry experience’ as well as a Masters. However, promotion of the Masters programme seemed to be an issue.

Table 4.9 Positive Responses – Undergraduate Students

“Many presentations and events have taken place in the college”	“...current package is quite good”	“...showing other potential career paths once inside would help”
“Very well promoted in College X by the college and lecturers”	“...great relationship with the college...”	

Table 4.10 Negative Responses – Undergraduate Students

“More awareness could be brought to the college...sponsoring societies or hosting events”	“... attempt to attract me...non-existent if not for one or two of my lecturers”	“Haven't really seen much from Company X in terms of attracting me... “Show that it's a happy place to work with a nice pay check that also lets you live a bit”
“...don't advertise positions well”		

Promotion was also an issue with US. One respondent also requested jobs that ‘specifically target graduates’ because the majority of jobs require experience. As can be seen from Figure 4.6, 74% of these students had no professional experience.

Summary of Objective 3

The vast majority of students stated that their awareness of Company X came through college sources and that their main influencers in their choice of employer were their friends, family or existing employees. However, results also revealed that Company X is not effectively influencing the students’ perception of the company through its promotional processes.

4.6 Qualitative Research

Short (5-10 minute) interviews were carried out with five employees from Company X. This was in pursuit of Objective 4 which was essentially to explore employees’ psychological contracts and long-term commitment towards Company X.

Employees selected to be interviewed had all graduated from College Y and each of them had at least three years’ of experience with Company X. See Table 4.11 for the profile of each interviewee. The full set of questions posed at the interviews can be seen in Appendix F.

4.6.1 Interviewee Profile

Table 4.11 Interviewee Profile

	Interviewee A	Interviewee B	Interviewee C	Interviewee D	Interviewee E
# years with Company X	3	6	6	10	3
Age	55	29	30	35	28
Qualification from College Y	Masters	Undergraduate	Undergraduate	Undergraduate	Masters

4.7 Objective 4: Psychological Contract Fulfilment and Employee Commitment to Company X

Employees' Psychological Contract Prior to Employment and Its Fulfilment

The psychological contract formed with each interviewee prior to commencing service with Company X and the extent to which that psychological contract was subsequently fulfilled were examined. The concept of the psychological contract was explained to each interviewee before interviews commenced so that they understood its meaning. Not surprisingly, it was discovered that each interviewee held different beliefs and expectations.

Interviewee A had over two decades of professional experience prior to commencing service with Company X and therefore held an expectation that Company X would treat him as “*an experienced hire*”. However, he found that this expectation was not met and he expressed disgruntlement that he was in fact treated as “*a newbie graduate with no prior experience*”. In this regard, he had a strong feeling that his psychological contract had not been fulfilled. He also had prior belief that Company X was “*a top company in its field, best in class, best working practices, super organised, super-efficient*”. However, since commencing employment he expressed this belief to have somewhat diminished. In summary, the most important factor to *Interviewee A* was some weight being given to his previous experience, which he reiterated “*has not happened*”.

Interviewee B's prior expectation was around the work experience he would gain at Company X. He had intended to stay for five years and looked at it as a “*very good grounding*”. He also expressed contentment in taking up employment at Company X as it was such a respected multinational company and located close to where he lived. He believed he would achieve career progression, salary growth, and travel opportunities while there.

In terms of fulfilment, he believed his expectations had been met to an extent. His career progression and travel expectations had been met, but not his salary expectations. However, during the interview he argued that he was willing to sacrifice the higher salary for a shorter commute to work as long as his other expectations continued to be met.

Interviewee C “knew very little” about Company X before she commenced employment. Prior to commencing service, she was “excited” and more relaxed once made aware that “there would be training”. Her expectations were that she could “do something good here” once given the necessary training. However, she expressed disappointment that she only got a half days training despite her friend starting before her who “had 3 slow months of training and getting to know the system.” For this reason, she felt as though she has missed out on the introduction, and thus her psychological contract had not been fulfilled to the extent she had hoped.

Interviewee D, like Interviewee C, didn’t know what to expect upon commencing employment at Company X but had a strong expectation of training. Fortunately, her training expectations had been met and she stated that “it’s everything you ever need, you can go on training courses and when you first start you get to do a full programme to explain everything”.

Interviewee E described his expectations in terms of “a whole rounded learning experience” that would help advance his career. Learning and career advancement were his main expectations which he believed had been met to some extent. As he put it:

“I have received adequate on the job training and learning which still continues. I feel I have achieved career progression, and I have gotten to pass my knowledge on to others which shows my employer has faith in me”.

The Extent to Which Employees' Beliefs and Expectations of Company X Have changed

At the time of the interview, Interviewee A had been in his third year of service with Company X, despite his initial desire to only complete his two-year contract and move on. He commented that his beliefs about and expectations of Company X have become hardened and “*somewhat cynical*”. He cited ongoing annoyance about his previous professional experience not being recognised as one of the main reasons for this. Other reasons he offered included the “*lip service that Company X pays to performance management and career management*” and that criteria for career advancement was not always consistent. He expressed that there is a difficulty in understanding “*what you need to get forward*” in Company X, emphasising that this was an ongoing expectation he desired as “*an experienced hire*”.

Interviewee B's expectations remained relatively unchanged, although he pointed out that his role at Company X is very different to what he had expected before commencing employment. However, he didn't perceive this as a negative factor as he still saw himself “*moving up*” with plenty of opportunities, even after going beyond his five-year plan. He expressed satisfaction that at Company X, his expectations regarding travel and career progressions were still being met. He believed that “*it's still a very good company to work for*”, and that “*there are very few opportunities like Company X in this location*”.

The image of Company X had become much clearer over time to *Interviewee C*. She explained that she could see all the possible opportunities which she couldn't before, stating: “*you don't have to leave the company to achieve something that you want, you just need to decide the area that you want to be in and go for it*”. Despite her initial concerns about the training, after six years she believed that really great opportunities for training exist at Company X and stated that the company “*support you in what you want to do*”.

Interviewee D expressed satisfaction around continuous learning at Company X, stating that she can “*continue to learn newer stuff and still have the freedom which there is here*”. She also mentioned that “*you’re given a task and you’re allowed the space to go and do it*”, pointing positively to her perception that there was “*no micro-management*” at Company X. Despite her uncertainty of what to expect before coming to Company X, her expectations have grown over time and after ten years with the company, she understood her place in the company.

Interviewee E didn’t have much to say in terms of this question as he believed his expectations had remained the same, although the importance of some over others had changed. However, he believed that in the future any expectations he has “*will be continually fulfilled*”.

Impact of Fulfilled or Unfulfilled Expectations on Employees’ Commitment: Reasons for Staying with Company X

Interviewee A pointed out that he had initially planned to stay with Company X for no longer than two years. The reasons he gave for this were “*more personal than professional*”. He felt that he would come to Company X, complete his two years, and then move on. Unfulfilled expectations he has experienced with Company X have not helped in swaying him from this intention but have contributed further to his intention to leave in the foreseeable future. His reason given for currently staying was partly to do with his age, expressing certain trepidation at putting himself on the job market again when it would be easier to stay. He argued that at Company X, “*you have a regular monthly pay cheque, the job’s OK, you can get by*”. However, this wasn’t satisfactory enough for the interviewee to continue to commute three hours a day and therefore his motivation was to “*get that CV in order*” and move elsewhere.

Although *Interviewee B* had initially intended to stay with Company X for five years, he was going into his seventh year of employment at the time of the interview as a result of met expectations at Company X. Although salary expectations had not been met, he still believed

Company X to be “*a brilliant company with brilliant benefits*” right on his doorstep. He expressed his willingness to make a smaller salary “*to have a better lifestyle*” in the location of Company X. *Interviewee B* saw the opportunities that exist in Company X as the main reason for staying and strongly believed he was “*only starting*” his journey there.

Despite *Interviewee C*'s initial expectations being unfulfilled, her intentions were also to stay with Company X although not necessarily in the same location. She stressed that this was not because of an unfulfilled psychological contract, but had more to do with the desire to experience opportunities within the same company's sister sites. Therefore, her expectations grew over time and were not as heavily associated with the need for training. She preferred opportunities such as getting to work “*close with customers from different regions*” and seeing “*how the customer views everything*” which had influenced her long-term desire to stay with Company X.

Interviewee D also saw herself at Company X long-term as she was “*satisfied that they are mostly meeting*” her expectations continuously. She explained that when little issues come about “*your motivation would be low but most of the time you're constantly getting new things and changing so your motivation would be higher*”. Thus, she is willing to accept such issues when expectations were being met. The importance of friendships and the convenience of Company X's location were stressed as reasons for commitment but also her enjoyment for the work. She valued the flexibility within Company X in the sense that “*if you're not happy in what you're doing you can move to a different area*”. Overall, she came across as happy in her current position at Company X.

Interviewee E stated that if his expectations had not been met he wouldn't be happy in his job. Therefore, his fulfilled psychological contract has strongly contributed to his commitment to and happiness within Company X, suggesting no intention to leave. He expressed that there is

no point in staying with an employer unless you truly want to, stating “*if you feel you must then you will end up resenting your job and your employer*”. This and his belief that he was “*still learning loads*” led the author to believe he genuinely wanted to stay with Company X.

Summary of Interviews

The results from the interviews indicated that the interviewees were happy to stay with Company X for the foreseeable future once their expectations and what they valued were mostly being met. Consequently, if their initial expectations were not met but later were exceeded, this also influenced their commitment. If not met whatsoever, it resulted in the employee committing only because he/she needed to rather than wanted to.

4.8 Conclusion

The findings established throughout both data gathering instruments have proved to be informative and valuable and have succeeded in satisfying the research aim and objectives. The perception of MS and US in terms of Company X’s attractiveness was discovered, Company X’s effectiveness at attracting said students was discovered, and finally, employees’ commitment regarding the psychological contract was explored. The next chapter moves on to discuss these findings in terms of their relevance to pre-existing literature.

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

5.1 Introduction

This chapter sets out to discuss in detail the importance and significance of the results displayed in Chapter 4. Explanations of results are discussed in relation to the relevant literature researched for Chapter 2 which highlights the significance of the findings.

The organisational factors of most importance to MS and US will be discussed more extensively in this chapter, as will the extent to which Company X is perceived to provide these factors. As was mentioned in Chapter 2, Vroom (1969) argues that each organisation has a unique and specific attractiveness. Additionally, Wallace et al. (2014, p. 26) also state that not all prospective and existing employees value the same attributes in an organisation. The author was therefore expecting the findings of the current research to convey these arguments in their comparison to previous research. However, there were also a number of similarities revealed. To address Company X's employer branding effectiveness, only the most significant findings are discussed.

Very little was found in the literature in terms of studies on employee commitment types as a result of psychological contract fulfilment; thus, the author drew assumptions by relating findings to literature which was most applicable to the current research.

5.2 Objectives 1 and 2: Employer Attractiveness

Objective 1 identified the factors of importance under each dimension of employer attractiveness to both sets of students. Objective 2 identified the extent to which students agreed that Company X provides such factors. As a comparative analysis was carried out in the previous chapter, these objectives are again discussed in collaboration to gauge the attractiveness of Company X.

5.2.1 Interest Value

With respect to Interest Value, most enticing to both MS and US was to work in an organisation that values their *creativity and innovation*. This is conclusive with Berthon et al (2005) who also discovered that innovation and creativity in an organisation was amongst the most attractive attributes to graduates. While working in an organisation with great leadership was also of importance to MS it was in fact least important to US. Roy (2008, pp. 110-130) discovered that good management and leadership were amongst the most important factors to participants, which correlates with the findings from MS, but not US.

Despite the consistent importance placed on creativity and innovation, the perception that Company X valued employees' *creativity and innovation* was not extensively high, as seen in Figures 4.15 and 4.16. This is a concern given that theorists such as Marks & Huzzard (2008) emphasise the importance of a satisfactory use of creativity by an organisation to enhance employer attractiveness. Dickson (2003, p. 40) also stated that organisations need to be innovative and foster creativity to stay ahead of their competitors and to provide an open environment for doing so. Contradictory to the above findings, one respondent argued that "*Company X is innovative, challenging and always a front runner to create innovative solutions*". This verified the author's belief that different individuals will have varied perceptions about an organisation. However, this one response does not counteract the large number of College Y students who are unsure or disagree that Company X could provide the most important organisational factors to them under Interest Value.

5.2.2 Social Value

Good relationships with colleagues, a positive work life balance, and appreciation and recognition from management and superiors were among the most salient aspects to both sets of students under social value. *A fun and exciting work environment* was least influential. Conclusively, Honeycut & Rosen (1997, pp. 271-290) discovered in their study that MBA

students and alumni also perceived work-life balance as highly attractive, however, this was mostly to those with families which was not a factor of consideration in the author's study.

The findings of Biswas & Suar (2013) are also consistent with the author's findings which discovered that good relationships with colleagues and bosses was the most important factor to participants in their study. However, this was followed by a fun working environment which as stated previously, was least important to MS and US.

The author anticipated research results to reveal a strong agreement that important social value factors would exist at Company X. Fortunately, both sets of students did foresee positive working relationships and a work-life balance at Company X. Collins & Stevens (2002, pp. 1121-1133) emphasise the importance of organisations displaying attributes of this good working environment. As Company X have succeeded in this, it has strengthened the image of the company as an attractive employer. However, a minor concern the author had was in relation to the neutral responses which suggests a lack of awareness around the positive working environment at Company X.

5.2.3 Economic Value

Berthon et al (2005) describe this dimension of attractiveness in terms of an organisation offering attractive salaries, job security, future advancement prospects, and remuneration. MS held a positive image of Company X in terms of providing job security to employees. This was imperative considering almost all MS found it appealing. Arachchige & Robertson (2013, pp. 33-48) also pinpointed job security as one of the most important aspects to MBA students in Sri Lanka. However, Biswas & Saur (2013) who studied existing employees in the manufacturing industry, revealed no mention of job security in attracting them to an organisation despite the importance placed on economic value by the participants. Compensation such as salary, rewards, and benefits were of more importance to their

participants, which is somewhat more consistent with the author's findings where salary and benefits were more enticing than job security to US. This is inconsistent however, with Arachchige & Robertson (2013) who discovered that job security was amongst the most important attributes to final year business students in Sri Lanka.

Fortunately, it was discovered that over 70% of MS somewhat agreed that *job security* was present at Company X, increasing its attractiveness to College Y students. However, 14% remained neutral as to whether it was a factor in the company, again suggesting a lack of employer knowledge.

While all US agreed with the importance of an *attractive salary and benefits*, it was also discovered that over 70% agreed that Company X did provide these, with one respondent believing the salary to be "*financially sustaining*". The remaining 'neutral' and 'disagree' responses likely developed from talking to others or because the majority of US were aged between 18-22, had no previous work experience, and therefore no salary expectations to exceed. Surprisingly, the open-ended responses from the MS mentioned the "weak" and "low" salary at Company X despite going through the Masters programme which offers a two-year internship with the company. Seemingly, the presence of job security exceeded the importance of salary to these students.

5.2.4 Development Value

Training and development, career advancement opportunities, and career enhancing experience were all highly important factors to both MS and US under development value. Consistent with these findings were the studies of Srivastava & Bhatnagar (2012), Elving et al (2013) and Arachchige & Robertson (2013) who also established that aspects such as career growth, learning opportunities and gaining experience were of importance to their participants. As the significance of these factors can now be seen amongst individuals of various

backgrounds in the regions of India, Norway, Sri Lanka and now Ireland, it implies that there is a somewhat universal obligation for companies to portray these attributes if they want to attract prospective employees and stay ahead of competitors.

Perceptions of whether or not Company X delivers on such aspects were scattered across the five rating scales, with US holding a less assuring perception. With far more 'neutral' and 'disagree' responses, it's apparent that Company X has not put in enough effort to promote their developmental factors. This adds justification to the theories of Johari et al (2012, p. 396) and Barber (1998, p. 1) who emphasise the need to put efforts into aspects such as career development as well as training and development to influence employer choice.

5.2.5 Application Value

In terms of application value, being able to apply the knowledge and skills learned from students' degrees to their role in an organisation was most appealing to them. This conflicts with the study by Biswas & Saur (2013) which illustrated that application value was the least important to respondents, particularly in relation to applying what participants learned in college to their role in an organisation, followed by teaching others. This was consistent with the author's findings from US who saw very less importance in having the *opportunity to help others learn from you*. However, MS felt this was an enticing aspect which backs up the theory of Wallace et al (2014, p. 26) that prospective employees can value different attributes in a future employer.

It was discovered that both sets of students strongly believed they would be able to apply what they had learnt from their degree to a role at Company X. This, the author believes is because of their suitability as software engineering students to take up employment in a software company, especially the MS as they are following a programme in collaboration with Company X.

In conjunction with this, 95% of MS in total could see others learning from them at Company X which is relatively positive in terms of the importance they placed on it. Overall, the application value at Company X seemed to correlate with Turban & Greening (1997) who state that prospective employees should feel proud to work for and so commit to an organisation where there is application and humanitarian value. Responses such as “*A company I've always wanted to work for*”, “*Seems like a company I'd like to work with*”, “*recognised international company*” and “*attractive company*” indicate that some respondents would indeed be proud to work to work there.

5.3 Objective 3: Company X's Employer Branding Effectiveness

5.3.1 Steps of Employer Branding

Step 1 of the employer branding process which Mosley (2007) and Backhaus & Tikko (2004) explain, should involve communicating to prospective employees what they can expect from an organisation and what would make working there worthwhile. However, a slightly discouraging finding emerged which indicated that only half of MS believed Company X was effective at communicating what it has to offer, while 64% of US agreed. This is seen as a concern for future job seekers and those who would be interested in a Masters programme such as the one Company X offers. Open-ended responses in Tables 4.8 and 4.10 also indicated that Company X could improve on the promotion of the benefits it offers, with one response stating that it was difficult to obtain information on the Masters programme. Therefore, this highlights a need for improvement at Step 1, especially as Backhaus & Tikko (2004, pp. 501-517) highlight that it is the prospective employees who will determine the attractiveness and development of an organisation in terms of what is communicated to them.

Step 2 of the employer branding process as Sullivan (1999) explains, focuses on enhancing the brand image of a company by marketing the value proposition to prospective employees through sources such as the internet, career guidance counsellors, recruitment consultants and

so on. On close inspection of Tables 4.5 and 4.6, the author discovered that almost one fifth of MS and US disagreed to some extent that Company X was effective at promoting its value proposition, while a significant number remained neutral. This indicates that Company X is perceived as not being overly effective at either Step 1 or Step 2 of the employer branding process. This assumption is consistent with the more negative and uncertain responses received in response to questions relating to Objective 2, which conflicted in many cases with the importance placed on the factors relating to Objective 1. Figures 4.25 and 4.26 also illustrated that no students had heard of Company X through social media despite the majority of students being in their twenties and likely exposed to social media on a daily basis. The importance of Step 2 is further backed up by Bouchikhi & Kimberly (2008), who state that it is easier to attract prospective employees when a firm reaches a high level of recognition through its branding. Using social media and improving promotional efforts in general at Step 1 and Step 2 could create a higher recognition for Company X.

5.3.2 Influencers of Employer Choice

Figures 4.27 and 4.28 illustrated that MS and US were more strongly influenced to choose Company X as a prospective employer because of what friends and family members thought of it, compared to the overall proposition Company X had to offer to prospective employees. This is conclusive with Kilduff (1990) who stated that college students in particular are heavily influenced by the perceptions that friends, family and classmates have of a company. If this is true then it is not only the perceptions of job seekers that determine the attractiveness of Company X. This means that the employer branding process should influence a positive awareness among non-job seekers also. As Figures 4.25 and 4.26 illustrated, over one fourth of students had heard of Company X through a family member or friend working there so the author believes psychological contract fulfilment is very important with this regard. Schwab et al., (1987, pp. 129-166) also considered the fact that many job seekers seek information from

others, mainly friends and family, about prospective employers before applying. This should further emphasise to Company X the importance of trying to influence both the internal and external markets' perception of the organisation for a more attractive employer image.

5.3.3 Low-Involvement Recruitment Practices

Collins & Hann (2004) describe the purpose of low involvement recruitment practices as creating positive signals in relation to the organisation through posters, banners, sponsorship activities and the like, all of which involve minimal effort. However, as the findings in Tables 4.5 and 4.6 illustrated, very few students agreed that Company X's name is seen a lot through advertisements or sponsorship activities. Those who were unsure or disagreed accounted for the majority of responses. This also links back to lack of promotion of the Masters programme, a type of sponsorship programme. This indicates that Company X does not pay enough attention to its low-involvement recruitment practices when attracting prospective employees from College Y. This would be particularly important for the US who are not going through the Masters programme, as Cable & Turban (2001) recommend low-involvement recruitment practices to influence those who have little prior knowledge of the organisation. The reason for this is to motivate them to seek more information later. The importance of this is further backed by the responses from US in table 4.8 and 4.10 which indicate that Company X do not carry out optimum promotion of what it has to offer prospective employees.

5.3.4 High-Involvement Recruitment Practices

As Collins & Hann (2004) express, more in-depth information is provided to job seekers through high-involvement recruitment practices such as career events, campus events, recruitment brochures, websites, and university alumni. Details provided through such practices can be in relation to company culture, growth opportunities, salary and so on. The online survey illustrated that over half of MS and US agreed that the culture and opportunities at Company X are effectively communicated through their website and various other sources.

This gauged Company X' effectiveness at utilising high-involvement recruitment practices to attract College Y students. However, a large number of students remained neutral which suggests to the author that they weren't aware that such promotion existed.

While the use of websites for recruitment purposes is also a high-involvement recruitment practice, no students had heard of Company X through social media or through online job advertisements. Less than a fifth had heard through careers events. If Company X was more effective at utilising both low and high involvement work practices, it might counteract any negative influence that word of mouth from friends and family may have on MS and US attraction towards the company. As Elving et al (2013) state, perceptions are quite often built through word of mouth.

5.4 Objective 4 Psychological Contract Fulfilment and Employee Commitment Type

This objective aimed to discover which category of commitment employees fell into as a result of their psychological contract fulfilment or otherwise. This could be done by linking responses with pre-existing literature on the three types of employee commitment.

Interviewee A, who came to Company X through the Masters programme and only planned to stay with Company X to complete his 2-year contract, initially possessed a level of normative commitment. Conclusively, Allen & Meyer (1997) describe normative commitment as the perceived moral obligation the employee believes he/she has to stay with an organisation. However, after three years, he no longer had this obligation. Due to his psychological contract in terms of being treated as "*an experienced hire*" being unfulfilled, it resulted in a further reluctance in wanting or feeling obliged to stay much longer. Instead, it was his high level of continuance commitment that was influencing his intention to stay. Allen & Meyer (1996) refer to this as the employee's commitment due to the perceived costs of leaving or lack of

alternatives, thus they feel they need to stay. In conclusion, Interviewee A was reluctant to leave not because he wanted to stay, but due to his age and putting himself on the job market again, stating that he first needed to “*get that CV in order*”.

Interviewee B’s psychological contract was fulfilled for the most part and he expressed no intention of leaving. The author gathered that he possessed a high level of affective commitment along with an element of continuance commitment, as he expressed a willingness to sacrifice his salary expectations to maintain the career and travel aspects of his job at Company X. He also believed there were “*very few opportunities like Company X in its location*”. This coincides with Allen & Meyer’s description above of continuance commitment, as the career, travel and lack of alternative opportunities in the location were the perceived costs of leaving Company X, influencing his ‘need’ to stay. However, his wanting to stay stemmed from his continuous satisfaction after six years with Company X being “*a very good company to work for*” and believing that his journey with the company was only beginning. Curtis & Wright (2001) relate to this type of strong connection and desire to work continuously hard on behalf of an organisation as ‘affective commitment’.

Mc Donald & Makin (2000) state that affective commitment is a result of the employees’ needs and expectations about an employer being matched with their experience in that organisation, i.e. psychological contract fulfilment. Interviewee C’s training expectations had not been matched with her initial experience at Company X, but she gradually developed a high level of affective commitment throughout her six years as new expectations began to be met. This challenges Johnson & O’Leary (2003), who state that such a breach can lead to stress and anger. While this was the case initially, her affective commitment enhanced due to her satisfaction with “*working close with the customer*”, and the opportunities she had to work at a sister site.

Interviewee D's affective commitment was more aligned with the McDonald & Makin (2000) theory above. Her training expectations matched her experience at Company X over the last ten years. This is consistent with Saraswathy et al. (2013) who also discovered that such development factors were of most significance in influencing employees' commitment within the Indian IT industry. In addition, Chew & Chan (2008) also discovered that training and development was recognised to influence Australian employees' intention to stay. The continuous learning that she was receiving continued to enhance her affective commitment towards Company X over time.

Correspondingly, Interviewee E who expected "*a whole rounded learning experience*" and career advancement, also held high levels of affective commitment as a result of his psychological contract fulfilment, believing all expectations to be "continuingly fulfilled" into the future. This also held consistency with Chew & Chan (2008) and Chew (2011) who exposed career advancement aspects as influencing employees' commitment.

Not only did each interviewee possess an individual psychological contract, but different types of commitment simultaneously. This backs up Mc Donald & Larkin (1999) who theorised that the psychological contract will vary from person to person and that they can experience the three commitment types at once. Meyer et al (2002, p. 39) state that continuance or normative commitment will not influence intention to leave once there is a high level of affective commitment. All interviewees besides Interviewee A who had become somewhat cynical and dissatisfied, possessed a high level of affective commitment which was very promising.

5.5 Conclusion

This chapter succeeded in correlating findings from the data gathering instruments with previous literature which enhanced the credibility of the research. Findings of consistency and inconsistency with previous research have proven to be both interesting and informative and have helped in satisfying the aims and objectives. The discussion of findings within Objective 3 has highlighted plausible reasons behind certain perceptions held by prospective employees in terms of Company X. The extent to which employees' psychological contracts were fulfilled or otherwise allowed for exploration of employee commitment types in terms of such fulfilment. Overall, the author has developed a clear view of where Company X stands in terms of attracting College Y graduates and employees long-term commitment.

CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1 Introduction

This research project studied the attractiveness of Company X to College Y students, and employee commitment types pertaining to existing employees having previously studied in College Y. This chapter presents the reader with the conclusions reached through satisfying each research objective. It also discusses the limitations experienced throughout conducting the research, and some general recommendations for both Company X and future research.

6.2 Conclusion 1: Objective 1

The first objective to fulfil was *“To determine the importance that Masters and undergraduate software engineering students at College Y place on certain organisational factors under the five dimensions of employer attractiveness”*.

The author’s findings proved the argument of Wallace et al. (2014) which is that not all prospective employees value the same factors in a prospective employer. Additionally, when comparing findings to similar studies carried out in Australia, Sri Lanka, and India, some commonality was discovered, as was identified in Chapter Five. The scope of these studies was much broader than the current research, focusing on academics and professionals of different backgrounds and industries. The author’s research was narrower in that it focused solely on one organisation associated with software engineering students from a particular third level institute. Findings revealed that factors under ‘development value’ held the highest importance to MS and US. However, the majority of factors under each dimension were also of significance, some more than others. Results do not possess an over-variance due to the narrow focus, and can be viewed with significant accuracy and meaning for Company X and possibly the Irish software industry.

6.3 Conclusion 2: Objective 2

The second research objective was *“To discover the extent to which Masters and undergraduate software engineering students from College Y agree that Company X provides the organisational factors of most importance”*.

Determinants of attractiveness were identified under objective 1 and were used as comparative parameters in objective 2, which contributed to more meaningful findings. Moreover, the author had not found previous studies which did such comparisons.

While objective 1 found that very few students disagreed with the importance of the organisational factors under each dimension, objective 2 revealed a greater proportion of ‘neutral’ and ‘disagree’ responses especially in terms of economic value at Company X. Some results were of concern but hold significant implications for understanding the areas where Company X could enhance their attractiveness to the College Y students.

6.4 Conclusion 3: Objective 3

Objective 3 was *“To examine Company X’s employer branding effectiveness from the perspective of Masters and undergraduate software students at College Y”*.

To meet this objective, the author posed questions in the survey which derived from research around the area of employer branding.

There is empirical evidence that employer attractiveness is directly influenced by employer branding. It therefore follows that findings discovered in terms of Company X’s employer branding effectiveness could be linked back to findings from objective 2.

The findings displayed in Tables 4.5 and 4.6 led the author to conclude that employer branding at Company X has its shortcomings. Furthermore, the company does not take advantage of low-involvement and high-involvement recruitment practices to create awareness of its offerings or working environment, especially through social media. Open-ended responses

from College Y students surveyed further implied that Company X does not substantially promote or create awareness of itself.

The findings from these first three objectives have led the author to conclude that in order to have an attractive image and reputation, a company must put extensive time and effort into its employer branding process and practices. It follows that companies who create and promote a work environment aligned with what prospective employees value the most are likely to be the most attractive to prospective employees.

6.5 Conclusion 4: Objective 4

The final objective was *“To explore the psychological contract fulfilment and resulting commitment type pertaining to existing employees at Company X who graduated from College Y”*.

This objective enriched the author’s research as it included the employee perspective using interviews. Findings highlighted the importance of nurturing and satisfying the psychological contract of prospective students and sustaining that through their employment to encourage commitment.

The author probed into the psychological contract of each interviewee and discovered the extent to which its fulfilment or otherwise impacted their commitment type. Findings revealed that affective commitment (wanting to stay) is less likely if the employee feels his/her psychological contract has not been fulfilled to a great extent. Such employees are more likely to possess continuance commitment (needing to stay) or normative commitment (ought to stay). However, findings also aligned with Meyer et al (2002, p. 39) who state that once there is an element of affective commitment, the other types may not influence intention to leave. Only one interviewee displayed no element of affective commitment and henceforth had no long-term commitment towards Company X. Other interviewees had either a combination of

affective and continuance commitment, or solely affective commitment. This led to the conclusion that psychological contract fulfilment at Company X does have a direct impact on employees' commitment type.

6.6 Conclusion: Overall Aim

The overall aim of this research was:

“To explore the attractiveness of a particular software company from the perspective of software engineering students within a third level institute, and employee commitment from the perspective of existing employees within the company who graduated from the same third level institute”. The following conclusions have been reached in relation to the main research aim.

Students becoming job seekers can hold both similarities and differences to that of participants from previous studies with regards to what they value in an employer. However, organisations should pay the most attention to what its own prospective employee's value in an employer to increase its attractiveness.

Despite Company X being one of its kind in its location, it is not doing everything in its power as a large multinational company to attract talent from College Y. Shortcomings in attracting talent to Company X can be tackled by enhancing the employer image through employer branding.

While an employees' psychological contract is influenced by the employer branding process, an employee's commitment type is influenced significantly by their psychological contract fulfilment.

6.7 Limitations

Despite careful planning and consideration of all research aspects, a number of understandable and common limitations arose which are acknowledged as follows:

Lack of Secondary Research

In terms of psychological contract fulfilment and employee commitment, the author found it difficult to link findings with literature as there was a lack of suitable information available. This limited the author to fitting interviewees into commitment categories according to descriptions given by previous academics.

Time Constraints

The online surveys could not be distributed until the author's summer examinations had been completed. Consequently, College Y students required to complete the online survey had a small window to complete it before they finished for the summer. If the survey had been sent out at an earlier stage, a response rate greater than 49.5% might have been achieved.

Sensitivity of Company X

The author was very pleased that Company X agreed to be part of the current research. However, as they were quite sensitive about certain information being exposed, neither the company name nor the name of the associated third level institute could be used in this research, which may have limited the reader's trust and confidence in the results and findings obtained. This anonymity, however, had no impact on the authenticity or accuracy of the research results.

6.8 Recommendations

It is highly recommended that Company X use the findings from this research as a basis for improving their strategies in the future to influence the attractiveness of the company and encourage further long-term employee commitment. Additionally, any company hoping to improve in such areas can use this research as a justification for doing so.

The author now strongly believes that employer attraction lies within the employer branding process and if this process is not carried out effectively, it will have early implications such as an uncertain or negative perception of the company or a lack of commitment at a later stage. It is therefore strongly recommended that Company X, or any company wishing to attract third level students, should focus wholeheartedly on the employer branding steps and incorporate low-involvement and high-involvement recruitment practices to attract these prospective employees. In particular, the author suggests that all companies attracting a large applicant pool from a third level institute, should be regularly using social media as a means to attract and promote itself to such students.

6.9 Future Research

The author had not discovered any empirical research that had used factors of importance to prospective employees as parameters to measure their perception of a particular company's attractiveness. While this research has attempted to do this, the author stresses that it reflects the perspective of a very small population within the Irish software industry. Future researchers could therefore undertake a similar study in this regard involving a wider sample of students and a different company.

Continuing to focus on an Irish context will continue to fill a gap in the research field. It will also make it easier for future researchers to compare more relevant and recent findings to their own research.

Furthermore, there is merit in continuing to focus on only one company per study as the author learned from this research that each organisation possesses its own unique attractiveness. Although this limits the quantity of results, focusing on a wider scope and multiple organisations can decrease the validity of results.

Finally, the author had not included the employer's perspective in terms of its perception of the employer image, brand or employee commitment within the company and so future researchers could consider this.

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Appendices
Appendix A: Online Survey

MBS Research Project Survey

Thank you for participating in this survey. It is greatly appreciated and your responses will be extremely useful for my research project.

Age

- 18-22
- 23-27
- 28-32
- 32-36
- 37-40
- 40+

Nationality

Your answer _____

What city/town are you currently living in

Your answer _____

Course of study

- Masters of Applied Software Engineering
- BEng/BSc Software -Final year

How many years of professional experience do you have?

- None
- 1-3
- 4-6
- 7+

Employer Attractiveness

To what level do you agree that the following would attract you to an organisation

Interest Value

	Strongly agree	Somewhat agree	Neutral	Somewhat disagree	Strongly disagree
Working in a challenging environment with great leadership	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Working in an organisation that values your creativity and innovation	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Working in an organisation with strong company values and work practices	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Social Value

	Strongly agree	Somewhat agree	Neutral	Somewhat disagree	Strongly disagree
Appreciation and recognition from management and superiors	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Good relationships with colleagues and management	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Positive work-life balance	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
A fun and exciting place to work	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Economic Value

	Strongly agree	Somewhat agree	Neutral	Somewhat disagree	Strongly disagree
An attractive salary and benefits	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Job security within a company	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Future advancement opportunities	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Development value

	Strongly agree	Somewhat agree	Neutral	Somewhat disagree	Strongly disagree
Training and development	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Future career advancement opportunities	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Gaining experience that enhances your career	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Application Value

	Strongly agree	Somewhat agree	Neutral	Somewhat disagree	Strongly disagree
Ability to apply knowledge and skills learned from degree to the role	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Opportunity to lead a team to success	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Opportunity to help others learn from you	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Company X as an attractive employer

To what level do you agree with the following

Interest Value

	Strongly agree	Somewhat agree	Neutral	Somewhat disagree	Strongly disagree
Company X seems like it has a challenging environment with great leadership	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Company X seems like it would value your creativity and innovation	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I believe Company X values its employees and has attractive work practices to prove this	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Social Value

	Strongly agree	Somewhat agree	Neutral	Somewhat disagree	Strongly disagree
Company X seems like it would be a fun and exciting place to work for	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Management and superiors recognize and appraise employees for their efforts	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Working relationships at Company X seem strong and positive	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Company X provide a satisfactory work-life balance	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Economic Value

	Strongly agree	Somewhat agree	Neutral	Somewhat disagree	Strongly disagree
Company X have an attractive salary and benefits	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I think there is a high sense of job security within Company	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I feel Company X offers attractive advancement opportunities	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Development Value

	Strongly agree	Somewhat agree	Neutral	Somewhat disagree	Strongly disagree
I could see myself enhancing my career at Company X	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I could see Company X being committed to training and development	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I can see future career advancement opportunities at Company X	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Application Value

	Strongly agree	Somewhat agree	Neutral	Somewhat disagree	Strongly disagree
I could see myself applying my skills and knowledge from my degree to a role in Company X	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I could see myself leading a team to success in Company X	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I could see people at Company X learning from me	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

In your own words, sum up your perception of Company X.

Your answer

Company X's effectiveness at attracting students from College X

How did you hear about Company X?

- Friend/family member working there
- Friend/family member that knows of the company
- College/lecturer
- Careers event
- Job advertisement
- Social media
- Other: _____

To what extent do you agree with the following?

	Strongly agree	Somewhat agree	Neutral	Somewhat disagree	Strongly disagree
Company X is effective at communicating what it has to offer	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Company X is effective at promoting its value proposition	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I am likely to apply to company X in the near future	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Company X has created a positive reputation that attracts students from College X	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Company X's name is seen a lot through advertisements and sponsorship activities	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The culture and opportunities at Company X are effectively communicated through their website and various other sources	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Company X's overall proposition to you has the strongest influence on your choice to select (or not) to work there	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Opinions of friends/family/existing employees has the strongest influence on your choice to select (or not) Company X as an employer	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Finally, sum up in your own words what you think of Company X's attempt to attract you as a future graduate from College X. Include any suggestions for improvement you may have, if any.

Your answer _____

Appendix B: Open-ended Questions - Responses

“In your own words sum up your perception of Company X”

Masters Students

Respondent 1	“A pretty generic software company”
Respondent 2	“A steady company with secure jobs”
Respondent 3	“Good stepping stone but has weak salary and growth opportunity”
Respondent 7	“Company X is innovative, challenging and always a front runner to create innovative solutions. There seems to be a lot of emphasis on enhancement of employee skills and I feel that I could grow in that environment to further my career”
Respondent 8	“Pay/benefits very low compared to industry standards”
Respondent 9	“Respectful reputation and recognition”
Respondent 10	“Great opportunities for a company located outside of Dublin”
Respondent 13	“Encouraging that they are working with College Y to train students and provide an opportunity for graduates to get some valuable industry experience”
Respondent 14	“A company I've always wanted to work for since I started software in 2010. I have had positive feedback from those that I know that work there”
Respondent 17	“Excellent company that respect their employees and work on the cutting edge of technology”
Respondent 18	“I have been attracted to Company X mainly because of the Masters it offers but not because it seems to be an amazing place to work. The Masters is a great opportunity though and I hope it will help me see Company X differently”

Respondent 20	“The salary at Company X is very poor compared with similar companies elsewhere in Ireland. However, being one of the few rural based companies in this industry it can get away with this”
Respondent 21	“Very positive international, innovative company”

Undergraduate Students

Respondent 1	“Company X seems to have its own development department where they apply a gardening style of recruitment where an applicant is trained to become an employee rather than someone who is versed in a particular role such as management or maintenance. This means that rather than having someone who studied business in college, they got someone and sent them to learn about their own practices and the way that they do things”
Respondent 3	“Attractive to work for, good for experience but not somewhere I could work for ever”
Respondent 5	“Old, stable and a great springboard into the industry”
Respondent 6	“A very ad hoc approach to recruitment not very professional, very vague in their commitment to new employees”
Respondent 7	“Strong name, seems like there are opportunities to climb the ladder, nice pay, staff have a good attitude towards work and work relationships. Overall a very nice place to work”
Respondent 9	“A place that would financially sustain me, be interesting to work for, and able to apply the skills that I have learned”
Respondent 12	“A reliable and esteemed company”
Respondent 14	“Great working hours, good money which offers a good chance of helping me progress my career”
Respondent 15	“Apparently dismal to work for, employees are just ID numbers”
Respondent 16	“Company X is a longstanding member of the software industry in Ireland and offers the opportunity for advancement both within the

	company and academically while providing a challenging work environment for decent financial compensation”
Respondent 17	“Seems like a company I'd like to work with”
Respondent 18	“Company X seems to be a professional but friendly environment that cares for its employees and allows them to progress and grow at the company”
Respondent 20	“I believe if Company X's environment is not for you after 5-6 years, there is nowhere in the location to move to company-wise. Hence the bigger cities are better to be living in”
Respondent 21	“Average”
Respondent 24	“Good company to work for”
Respondent 28	“If company X is able to deliver the values above, it's a best place to work in my opinion”
Respondent 30	“A company that is losing its pre-eminent position in telecoms and struggling to remain attractive to its customers”
Respondent 32	“I think the company has a great reputation regards to employee turnover. So with regards to that aspect I assume it's a company that I definitely would work for in the future”

“Finally, sum up in your own words what you think of Company X's attempt to attract you as a future graduate from College Y. Include any suggestions for improvement you may have, if any.”

Masters Students

Respondent 1	“Offering a bursary and the opportunity to complete a placement are the primary factors in attracting me to take part in this program”
Respondent 2	“Not well advertised, had to hear about it in passing”
Respondent 3	“I'm in a Masters to join Company X so yes they did a good job”

Respondent 7	“They did a bloody well job to attract me. Keep it up”
Respondent 9	“Master's course and work experience is a major influence in attracting me”
Respondent 10	“I was not in college when I heard about their Masters. It was hard for me to find info on it. A paid Masters is an amazing opportunity I hope will transform my life”
Respondent 13	“Encouraging that they are working with College Y to train students and provide an opportunity for graduates to get some valuable industry experience”
Respondent 18	“As powerful as word of mouth is, I think company X should be doing more themselves to promote themselves. I hear a lot about company X in college and from lecturers, especially because of the Masters, but maybe they could promote themselves better to those that don't want or need to do the Masters to work there”
Respondent 20	“Company X did an effective job in attracting me as a future employee”
Respondent 21	“International company in the local area is very attractive”

Undergraduate Students

Respondent 1	“Company X's attempt to attract me would be non-existent if not for one or two of my lecturers in my current course. At the open day here in College Y, the people who manned the stalls seemed less interested in actually talking about the company and just had an iPad there to insert my details into for an application, which I then had to list out again in my email to ICT Ireland. More awareness could be brought to the college by maybe sponsoring societies or hosting events. Doesn't have to be big either and a small amount can go a long way”
Respondent 2	“Many presentations and events have taken place in the college regarding graduate positions / Masters programmes in the company”
Respondent 4	“It's opportunities to educate and train employees”
Respondent 5	“Their current package is quite good. There is not much they can do to improve it However giving a timeline of development or showing other potential career paths once inside would help”

Respondent 6	“Very well promoted in College Y by the college and lectures. To improve, get feedback from people who were offered a job and declined the offer. Ask why and how could they improve”
Respondent 7	“Haven't really seen much from Company X in terms of attracting me to work for them. When getting students interested in the company they should focus on a happy atmosphere in work, the flexible hours, holiday time. Show that it's a happy place to work with a nice pay check that also lets you live a bit. Last thing graduates wants is to spend 4 years in college to spend the rest of their lives sitting at a desk. Focusing on what you could do while working at Company X would make it much more popular. Look at how Google portray their working environments”
Respondent 9	“Jobs that specifically target graduates would be appreciated as most positions only want experienced people”
Respondent 14	“I think Company X does an excellent job in attempting to attract me specifically because of its Masters programme”
Respondent 15	“They don't advertise positions well. Anyone who has had experience with them has had a bad one”
Respondent 16	“The opportunity to continue my education and have a guaranteed job in the company afterwards are very enticing offers”
Respondent 17	“I like the way they encourage their employees to do their Masters degree, and also the fact that Company X is an international company, meaning work and travel is a possibility”
Respondent 18	“It has a great relationship with the college and are always seen advertising positions around the campus and at career fairs”
Respondent 24	“Good talks”
Respondent 27	“Attractive package in general but low salary offering”

Appendix C: Permission to Interview

Hi _____,

I am a Master of Business student from College Y. As part of my course, I am required to complete a research project on a topic of interest. I have chosen to examine the attractiveness of Company X as an employer, as well as employee intention to stay with regards to the psychological contract. This research is being supervised by a lecturer in the college and is strictly anonymous.

I am hoping to interview employees who have come from College Y to gain a better insight into their intention to stay with Company X with regards to their perception of the psychological contract being fulfilled. I would therefore be extremely grateful if you would participate in this research. This will be done on a voluntary basis and you may withdraw from the process at any time.

I may use quotes from the information gathered to highlight certain findings but this will remain anonymous at all times.

If you are happy to consent to the interview being recorded by audio, I will be sure to destroy once the interview has been transcribed which will be no later than the 20th of August 2017.

Interviews will last approximately 5-10 minutes.

If you have any questions or queries, please don't hesitate to reply through this email.

Kind regards,

Appendix D: Informing Interviewees of the Interview Concept

Hi _____

I'd like to give you a briefing by email today prior to our interview tomorrow. I intend to conduct the interview in an open, exploratory, semi-structured way.

The main things I want to get from the interviews are:

- To look at what your expectations and beliefs were before commencing employment with Company X and now.
 - By this I mean the soft, unwritten set of beliefs and expectations you have of your employer i.e. your psychological contract
- Discover to what extent these expectations have been and are being met
- Explore to what extent these expectations being met (or otherwise) are influencing your intentions to stay in this employment.

I will explain the concept of the psychological contract in more detail tomorrow. However, suffice to say it is not the same as the contract that you sign.

Note:

With your permission, I would like to make an audio recording of our interview as I would find it difficult to take notes whilst conducting the interview at the same time. Don't worry - everything you say will be completely confidential and anonymous and the recording will be destroyed once I have taken notes.

If you would rather not be recorded, that is completely fine. I will have a consent and confidentiality form tomorrow either way.

I hope all of this seems straightforward and doesn't take up too much of your time. If you have any questions just let me know.

Kind regards,

Appendix F: Semi-Structured Interview Questions

No. of years with Company X: _____

Qualification: _____

Age: _____

Q1. Establish what his/her beliefs and expectations of Company X were before they started. i.e. from what was implied, read, heard, etc.

Q2. Establish to what extent he/she believes these have been met

Q.3 Establish the extent to which his/her beliefs and expectations of Company X have changed or stayed the same having worked here X amount of years? What has changed?

Q4. Discover the impact his/her fulfilled psychological contract or otherwise has had on his/her commitment and intention to stay with Company X

Q5. Discover the overall reason they are staying with Company X i.e. want to, need to, ought to.