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Talent attraction and retention through brand building:

An exploration of practices in companies that are top South African brands

By

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Master of Arts in Creative Brand Leadership

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DECLARATION

I hereby declare that the dissertation submitted for the Master of Arts in Creative Brand Leadership degree to The Independent Institute of Education is my own work and has not previously been submitted to another University or Higher Education Institution for a degree.

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ABSTRACT

South African companies, like their global counterparts, are fighting a war for talent, using brand building practices to gain a competitive advantage in attracting and retaining the talented employees required to ensure organisational success. Employer branding with an employee value proposition is used to attract talent, internal brand building is done to engage and retain talent, whilst corporate branding driving purpose and values also plays an important role in both talent attraction and retention. With strategic alignment and consistent branding across employer, internal and corporate branding platforms, talent is optimally attracted and retained as they experience the brand as coherent and trustworthy.

Whilst scholars, experts and research studies informed global leading practices in talent attraction and retention through brand building, effective brand building through employer, internal and corporate brand building in South Africa would require an exploration of the local context and the talent target market. Literature outlined several socio-economic factors held to impact attraction and retention of talent through brand building in South Africa.

This study therefore set out to explore, in the context of global leading practice, the talent attraction and retention practices pertaining to employer, internal and corporate brand building in companies that are top South African brands. An exploratory study was conducted from the interpretive paradigm using qualitative research methods. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with three strategic-level leaders across five companies that were identified as top South African brands. Fifteen interview transcriptions yielded data in the form of content, which was analysed using inductive reasoning and thematic analysis. Six themes emerged, of which the dominant theme was the value of the corporate brand in talent attraction and retention. Research findings suggest that South African talent are drawn to successful, purposeful and values-based corporate brands. Companies that are top South African brands use this to their advantage, leveraging their corporate brand in talent attraction and retention, with employer and internal brand building practices being less significant and less developed than corporate branding.

Findings suggest that, whilst there is a strong perceived relationship between talent attraction and retention and employer, internal and corporate branding, the relationship between talent attraction and retention and corporate branding is particularly strong.

The ways in which companies that are top South African brands are attracting and retaining talent through employer, internal and corporate brand building, probed by research question

2, emerged from synthesis of findings, yielding nine local leading practices in talent attraction and retention through brand building. These included talent articulation and assessment; the leveraging of a successful, purposeful and values-based corporate brand; the driving talent engagement and ownership through cross-functional leadership alignment from CEO level downwards; and the use of talent to provide word-of-mouth brand advocacy that builds brand consistency and coherence with all brand stakeholders.

The findings from this study add value to the body of current literature, but the real value is in the depth of insight provided to South African companies and their leaders, particularly those in Brand Management and Human Resources or Talent Management.

KEY WORDS:

Talent; talent management; talent attraction; talent retention; employer brand; employee value proposition; internal brand; corporate brand; brand stakeholder; consistent branding; brand coherence; strategic alignment; South Africa.

DEDICATION

I dedicate this work to my children, Rain and Alexa. You have walked my academic journey with me, providing me with the space, time and motivation to keep on walking. Your unwavering belief in me makes me feel that I can achieve anything.

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Table of Contents

DECLARATION	ii
ABSTRACT.....	iii
DEDICATION.....	v
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	vi
LIST OF FIGURES	xi
LIST OF TABLES.....	xii
CLARIFICATION OF KEY TERMS AND CONSTRUCTS	xiii
CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION AND OVERVIEW OF STUDY	1
1.1. Introduction	1
1.2 Literature review insights, terms and constructs	2
1.2.1 Talent and brand building	4
1.2.2 Talent attraction and retention and employer, internal and corporate brands.....	4
1.2.3 Consistent branding.....	5
1.2.4 Coherent, strong brands	5
1.2.5 Global leading practices in talent attraction and retention through brand building .	5
1.2.6 The South African talent and brand landscape	7
1.3 Research purpose	7
1.4 Research questions.....	8
1.5 Research design	9
1.6 Research methodology	11
1.7 Data analysis.....	12
1.8 Research findings and results	13
1.9 Reliability and validity	17
1.10 Ethical considerations	18
1.11 Limitations	18
1.12 Conclusion	19
1.13 Structure of the study	20

CHAPTER 2 LITERATURE REVIEW	22
2.1. Introduction	22
2.2. The war for talent – what talent is and why it sparked a war	24
2.3. Brand in context of talent.....	27
2.4. Talent attraction and retention through brand building in the South African context..	43
2.5. Research purpose concretised	48
2.6 Literature review conclusion	50
CHAPTER 3 RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY	53
3.1. Introduction	53
3.2. Research purpose	55
3.3. Research questions.....	56
3.4. Research design	58
3.4.1. Ontology and epistemology	58
3.4.2. Paradigm	59
3.4.3. Type of study.....	60
3.4.4. Reasoning approach	61
3.5. Research methodology	62
3.5.1. Qualitative research.....	62
3.5.2. Data collection.....	63
3.5.3. Research instrument – Semi-structured interview guide	65
3.5.4. Sampling strategy.....	71
3.5.5. Data collection methodology.....	82
3.6. Ethical considerations	83
3.6.1. Informed consent.....	83
3.6.2. Anonymity	84
3.6.3. Confidentiality	84
3.7. Conclusion	85
CHAPTER 4 DATA ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS.....	87

4.1. Introduction	87
4.2. Qualitative content analysis through thematic induction	88
4.3. Thematic analysis steps followed	90
4.3.1. Data analysis step 1: Data presentation and familiarisation	90
4.3.2. Data analysis step 2: Coding	92
4.3.3. Data analysis step 3: Categories	94
4.3.4. Data analysis step 4: Themes	95
4.4. Introduction to themes and subthemes.....	96
4.4.1. Decisions guiding theme and subtheme identification.....	97
4.4.2. Themes and subthemes identified	98
4.4.3. Sliding scale applied to the discussion of theme and subtheme findings	100
4.5. Research findings.....	101
4.6. Conclusion	126
CHAPTER 5 RESEARCH RESULTS DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS	129
5.1. Introduction	129
5.2. Presentation of themes in relation to each other and literature	130
5.3. Discussion of research findings in context of the research purpose and questions.	140
5.4. Feedback from experts in respect of the themes	150
5.5. Recommendations for further research	151
5.5.1. Collaboration between South African brand and human resources/talent management in employer and internal brand building	151
5.5.2. The impact of millennials on the South African employer brand and internal brands	153
5.5.3. Global brands in the local context	154
5.5.4. Employer brand and employee value propositions without compensation or benefits	154
5.5.5. Talent gaps in the middle layers	155
5.6. Limitations and delimitations	156
5.7. Significance of the study.....	157

5.8. Conclusion	158
REFERENCE LIST	160
APPENDIX A	174
SAMPLE OF TOP SOUTH AFRICAN CORPORATE BRANDS FROM THE SUNDAY TIMES TOP BRANDS SURVEY 2017	174
APPENDIX B	175
EXAMPLE OF A RESEARCH INFORMATION DOCUMENT SENT TO TOP BRANDS....	175
APPENDIX C	182
EXAMPLE OF TRANSCRIBED INTERVIEW WITH NOTES CODES	182
APPENDIX D	183
EXAMPLE OF DATA CODING INTO CATEGORIES	183
APPENDIX E	184
EXAMPLE OF DATA CODING CATEGORIES INTO THEMES	184

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1.1: A snapshot of key terms, constructs and insights pertaining to talent and brand	3
Figure 1.2: An overview of the research design and methodology.....	10
Figure 1.3: An overview of research results, showing themes and subthemes in relation to each other	15
Figure 2.1: Brand building constructs related to talent attraction and retention.....	39
Figure 3.1: An introduction to the research design and methodology	54
Figure 3.2: Process followed to compile the interview guide questions	66
Figure 4.1: Example of transcribed interview data with coded notes	92
Figure 5.1: Visual representation of themes and subthemes in relation to each other	139

LIST OF TABLES

Table 1.1: Research findings - themes and subthemes	14
Table 3.1: Semi-structured Interview Guide	67
Table 3.2: South African brand surveys	73
Table 4.1: Themes and subthemes delivered by the data analysis	99
Table 4.2: Sliding scale applied to theme discussion	100

CLARIFICATION OF KEY TERMS AND CONSTRUCTS

The most important terms and constructs used in this study are presented here, along with a working definition obtained from a synthesis of literature.

Brand

Functionally, a brand is a unique name, term, symbol, sign or other related attributes or features that are used to identify a product or service offering, differentiating the brand from others in the marketplace (Aaker & Joachimsthaler 2012; Kotler & Armstrong 2018). This functional brand logo or name is enriched by the intangible subjective responses of people to a brand, which is informed by factors such as recalling previous experiences with the brand or impressions formed during contact with the brand (Kapferer 2012; Kotler & Armstrong 2018).

Brand coherence

Brand coherence stems from cross-functional strategic leadership alignment, which drives purposeful and meaningful brand experiences, delivered consistently across all branding platforms to all who come into contact with the brand (Balmer 2017; Li, Littleton & Akhtar 2017; Urde & Greyser 2016). This consistent reinforcement of the coherent brand's purpose and values strengthens the reputation of the brand and builds trust in the brand (Hsu 2017; Kanter 2011; Li, Littleton & Akhtar 2017).

Brand stakeholders

Brand stakeholders are individuals or groups that come into contact with a corporate brand, interacting with the brand and/or contributing to the brand (Balmer 2017; Punjaisri & Wilson 2017). Multiple stakeholders build a brand (Iglesias, Ind & Alfaro 2013; Ind, Iglesias & Schultz 2013; Merrilees 2017; Punjaisri & Wilson 2017), including internal stakeholders such as employees or investors, and external stakeholders like customers, suppliers or community groups (Balmer 2017; Kapferer 2012). All brand stakeholders should experience their contact with the brand positively and find meaning and value in engaging with the brand (Balmer 2017; Hsu 2017; Kauffman, Loureiro & Manarioti 2016).

Consistent branding

Consistent branding sees the aligned and consistent portrayal of the brand's purpose and values to different brand stakeholders as they engage with the brand through contact points, communication and experiences across different brand building platforms (Balmer 2017; Hsu 2017; Li, Littleton & Akhtar 2017).

Corporate brand

Corporate brands have a brand orientation that sees the company's brand speak on behalf of the company as a whole (Aaker 2004; Balmer 2017; Punjaisri & Wilson 2017; Urde 2013). Corporate brands are built from the inside with the purpose, vision and mission and values providing strategic direction (Li, Littleton & Akhtar 2017; Merrilees 2017) to the way in which the brand is portrayed outward to brand stakeholders (Balmer 2012; Balmer 2017; Lacroix 2013; Urde 2013; Urde & Greyser 2013).

Employer brand

An employer brand comprises a unique and compelling brand message (Edwards 2017; Mosley 2016) to prospective employees which proclaims the functional, financial and personal benefits offered by the employer (Russell & Brannan 2016; Venkatesh & Geetha 2015). Employer branding differentiates an employer in the marketplace (Edwards 2017; Keller & Meaney 2017; Mosley 2015) and aims to evoke positive associations with the employer that will ultimately attract talent (Bali & Dixit 2016; Keller & Meaney 2017).

Employee value proposition

As part of the employer brand, the employee value proposition holds an appealing, clear, relevant and distinctive proposition of the promised value that employees will experience as part of their employment (Bali & Dixit 2016; Keller & Meaney 2017). The employee value proposition can be tailored to appeal to a specific target market group's needs, and can contain value promises ranging from financial gain to career growth, learning opportunities, great leadership or culture (Bali & Dixit 2016; Edwards 2017; Mosley 2015).

Human resource management

Human resource management is a business function focused on human resources – employees. As a business partner, human resources management drives and implements legally and contractually compliant people practices (Collings 2014; Erkmen, Hancer & Leong

2017; Ulrich 2015) and supports leaders in managing their people in a manner that adds value to the employee experience and elicits the people performance required to achieve business goals (Bafaro, Ellsworth & Ghandi 2017; Collings 2014; Ulrich 2015).

Internal brand

Internal brand focuses on building the brand from within, targeting current employees (Erkmen, Hancer & Leong 2017; Punjaisri & Wilson 2017; Saleem & Iglesias 2016) with brand communication and practices that reinforce the brand's values and purpose, increase positive brand associations and optimise employee engagement with the brand (Erkmen & Hancer 2015; Punjaisri & Wilson 2017; Saleem & Iglesias 2016).

Talent

Prospective or current employees are labelled as talent when they have shown high levels of proven performance (Cappelli & Keller 2017; Gallardo-Gallardo, Dries & Gonzalez-Cruz 2013; Gallardo-Gallardo & Thunnissen 2016) along with high levels of potential for development and career growth (Gallardo-Gallardo & Thunnissen 2016; Keller & Meaney 2017).

Over and above performance and potential factors, employees could be labelled as talent when they fit well with the brand, showing that their own values and behaviour align with the brand's purpose and values (Charan, Barton & Carey 2018; Russell & Brannan 2016; Ulrich & Smallwood 2012). In some instances, employees offering highly desirable, rare or critical skills required for organisational success could be labelled as talent (Barriere, Owens & Pobereskin 2018; Cappelli & Keller 2017; Gallardo-Gallardo & Thunnissen 2016; Keller & Meaney 2017).

Talent attraction

Talent attraction is a set of practices used to evoke positive, favourable responses that appeal to prospective talent (Cappelli & Keller 2017; Keller & Meaney 2017; Mosley 2015), drawing their interest and encouraging engagement with the brand (Keller & Meaney 2017; Mosley 2015), which ultimately leads to an employment application with the brand (Bali & Dixit 2016; Born & Kang 2015; Mosley 2015).

Talent management

Talent management firstly concerns itself with the anticipation and identification of the specific talent requirements to enable the achievement of strategic goals (Barriere, Owens &

Pobereskin 2018; Charan, Barton & Carey 2018; Keller & Meaney 2017). Thereafter, talent management sees the planning and managing of approaches (Cappelli & Keller 2017; Sparrow, Hird & Balain 2011; Sparrow & Makram 2015; Venkatesh 2014) that ultimately ensure that the talent requirements are met and talented employees are attracted and retained (Bafaro, Elsworth & Ghandi 2017; Cappelli & Keller 2017; Venkatesh 2014).

Talent retention

Talent retention is a set of practices aimed at optimally engaging, committing, supporting and aligning current talented employees with the business brand and goals (Barriere, Owens & Pobereskin 2018; Keller & Meaney 2017; Ulrich 2015). As such, talented employees continually experience the value and benefits of employment (Balmer 2017; Coetzee & Stoltz 2015; King 2015; Keller & Meaney 2017) so that they remain engaged with and employed by the company (Cappelli & Keller 2017; Collings 2014; Kauffman, Loureiro & Manarioti 2016).

Strategic alignment

Strategic alignment happens when an organisation's cross-functional senior and/or strategic leadership unites behind a shared purpose, vision, values and strategy (Bafaro, Ellsworth & Ghandi 2017; Balmer 2017; Charan, Barton & Carey 2018; Rosethorn 2018), integrating and aligning their approaches and tactics in order to achieve a common purpose and shared goals (Balmer 2017; Charan, Barton & Carey 2018; Li, Littleton & Akhtar 2017; Venkatesh & Geetha 2015).

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION AND OVERVIEW OF STUDY

1.1. Introduction

This study explores the talent attraction and retention practices pertaining to employer, internal and corporate brands in companies that are top South African brands.

Globally, brand and brand building have become central to the attraction and retention of talent (Keller & Meaney 2017; Russell & Brannan 2016; Schaefer 2016). The literature review insights presented in Section 1.2 of this chapter will point to the relevance of employer brand, internal brand, corporate brand, consistent branding and coherent branding in fighting what is known as a “war for talent” (Chambers, Foulon, Handfield-Jones, Hankin & Michaels 1998). With critical global shortages of talent (Manpower Group Talent Shortage Survey 2018), companies are using brand building practices to differentiate themselves (Bali & Dixit 2016; Russell & Brannan 2016) and appeal positively to talent as they compete against each other to attract and retain the talent required to ensure organisational success (Bafaro, Elsworth & Ghandi 2017; Edwards 2017).

In South Africa, the war for talent is intensified as a result of socio-economic factors playing out in high unemployment rates (Aucoin & Cilliers 2016; Subban 2016) fuelled by a poor education system (Asmal 2015; Subban 2016), resulting in a talent paradox – a large pool of unemployed job seekers of whom most lack the skills required for employment (Anand, Kothari & Khumar 2016; Subban 2016; Tshilongamulenzhe 2017).

South African companies look to brand building to assist them in attracting and retaining talent amidst a challenging socio-economic backdrop (Aucoin & Cilliers 2016; Mazibuko & Govender 2017; Tladinyane 2016). Brand and talent scholars urge further exploratory research into the South African landscape in order to tailor branding practices to the unique needs and context of talent (Enslin & Kloppe 2011; Ferreira 2016; Subban 2016; Vaiman, Sparrow, Schuler & Collings 2018). This study provides insights into the local context, adding to the body of literature pertaining to talent and brand building in South Africa.

However, the true value of this study is that insights are gained from top South African brands, who literature hold to be coherent brands that would be expert sources in talent attraction and

retention through brand building (Balmer 2017; Charan, Barton & Carey 2018; Urde & Greyser 2016). With a selection of five top South African brands that are leaders in industries ranging from telecommunications to banking, health insurance, motor vehicles and life insurance, this study is able to contribute findings that can be seen as leading South African practices in talent attraction and retention through brand building.

Throwing forward, the findings of the study, which include the leading practices and the themes that informed them, are presented in Section 1.8 of this chapter.

But first, Sections 1.2 to 1.7 outline the journey undertaken to get to these findings, providing the key insights obtained from literature, followed by the research purpose and questions, an overview of the research design and methodology, and finally, the data analysis process that yielded the findings.

The chapter concludes after presenting reliability and validity and ethical considerations, and discussing limitations to the study.

1.2 Literature review insights, terms and constructs

The literature review cuts a wide swath, spanning literature in the field of talent and talent management, delving into the world of brand and brand building for talent and exploring consistent and coherent branding. Ten literature review insights emerge from a synthesis of literature, eight of which comprise global literature review insights and two of which inform literature review findings pertaining to the South African context.

The visual depiction of the key terms emerging from literature in the field of talent and brand building provides a snapshot of the literature reviewed and the departure point for an underpinning discussion that comprises an overview of the insights, terms and constructs that emerge from literature reviewed. The terms and constructs included in Figure 1.1 are those that provide the theoretical framework to the study and provide the theoretical foundation for the study.

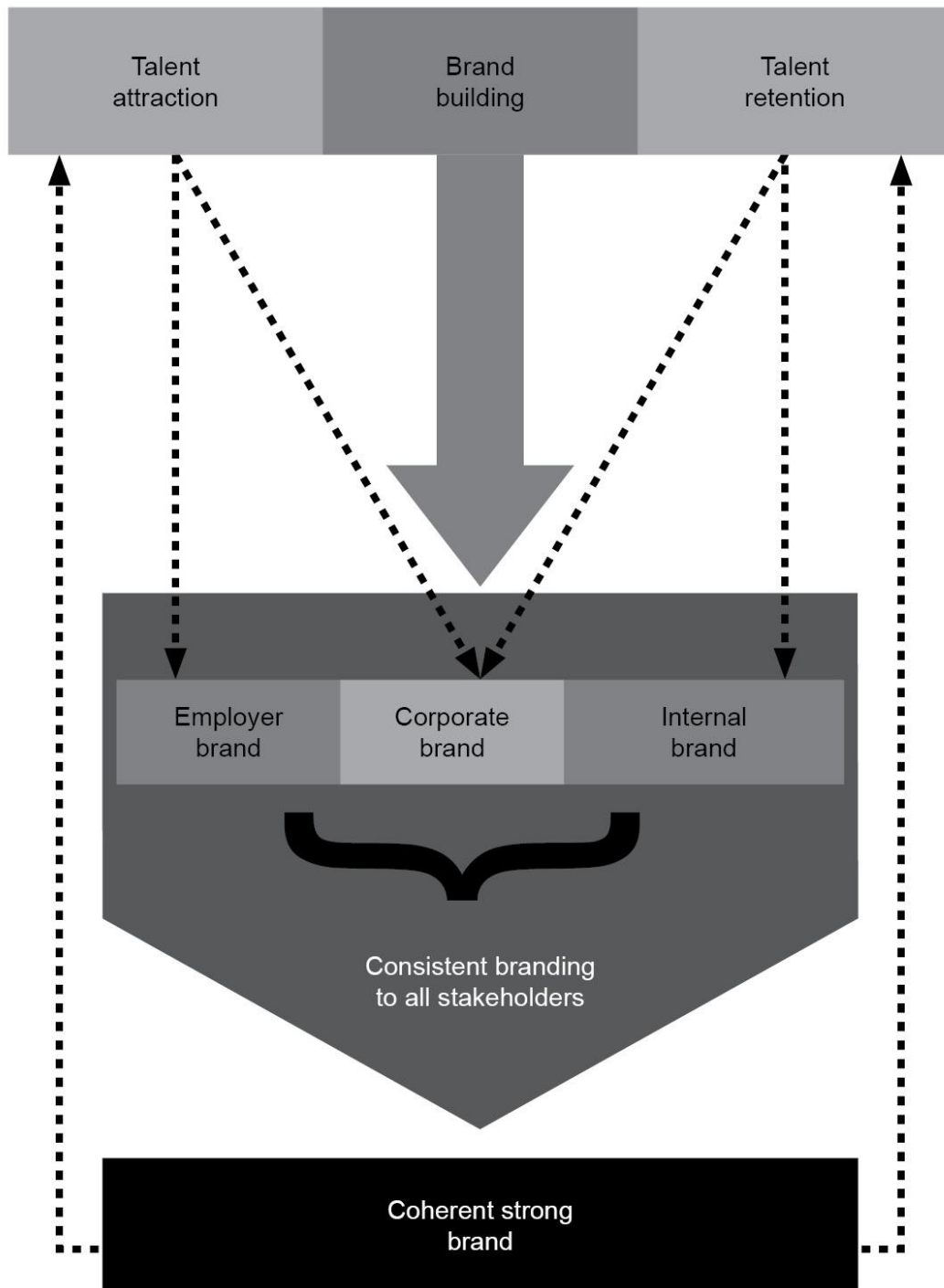


Figure 1.1: A snapshot of key terms, constructs and insights pertaining to talent and brand

1.2.1 Talent and brand building

At the top of Figure 1.1, the terms talent attraction and talent retention are joined by brand building. The departure point of the literature review is the term talent, in order to inform a working definition of talent. In Chapter 2, literature review insight 1 shows that talent can be defined in terms of performance, potential, brand fit and/or critical skill sets (Cappelli & Keller 2017; Gallardo-Gallardo & Thunnissen 2016; Keller & Meaney 2017; Russell & Brannan 2016).

Literature review insight 2 presents a view of talent in high demand and short supply globally, underlining the need for focused talent management strategies (Bafaro et al. 2017; Barriere et al. 2018; Cappelli & Keller 2017; Charan et al. 2018; Keller & Meaney 2017).

Literature review insight 3 stems from an exploration of the intersection between talent and brand building. Literature presents a mutually reciprocal relationship between talent and brand, holding that branding is relevant to talent (Mosley 2015; Russell & Brannan 2016; Shaefer 2016), whilst talent is also relevant to the building of brands (Balmer 2017; Charan et al. 2018; Keller & Meaney 2017; Lacroix 2013; Mc Coy 2013).

Talent and brand building are linked together at the top of Figure 1.1 as literature suggests that talent and brand are joined in a mutually beneficial manner.

1.2.2 Talent attraction and retention and employer, internal and corporate brands

At the top of Figure 1.1, the terms talent attraction and talent retention are presented, showing arrows that link these terms with employer, internal and corporate brands.

Literature review insight 4 informs the arrow that links talent attraction with employer brand, revealing that employer brand attracts talent (Bali & Dixit 2016; Edwards 2017; Russell & Brannan 2016). A working definition of talent attraction and the related brand building constructs employer brand and employee value proposition is presented in the clarification of key terms and constructs at the outset of the study.

Literature review insight 5 shows that internal brand retains talent, which is why talent retention and internal brand are linked with an arrow in Figure 1.1 (Erkmen et al. 2017; Russell & Brannan 2016; Saleem & Iglesias 2016). A working definition of talent retention and the related brand building construct internal brand is presented in the clarification of key terms and constructs at the outset of the study.

Note the arrows in Figure 1.1 linking both talent attraction and retention and corporate brand. Literature review insight 6 reveals that corporate brands have a stakeholder focus that attracts and retains the talent required to live the brand (Balmer 2017; Hatch & Schultz 2001; Punjaisri & Wilson 2017; Sharif & Islam 2017; Urde & Greyser 2016). A working definition of corporate brand and brand stakeholder is presented at the clarification of key terms and constructs at the outset of this study.

1.2.3 Consistent branding

In Figure 1.1, the constructs employer, internal and corporate brands are bracketed together by a new construct, consistent branding. Literature review insight 7 shows that consistent branding across employer, internal and corporate brand building platforms builds strong brands that attract and retain talent (Balmer 2017; Erkman et al. 2017; Foster, Punjaisri & Cheng 2010; Merrilees 2017; Urde & Greyser 2016). A working definition of consistent branding and strategic alignment is presented in the clarification of key terms and constructs at the outset of this study.

1.2.4 Coherent, strong brands

Coherent, strong brands, placed at the bottom of Figure 1.1, feed the attraction and retention of talent (Andrianova, Maor & Schaninger 2018; Charan et al. 2018; Urde & Greyser 2016), as depicted by the arrows joining coherent, strong brands with the talent constructs at the top of Figure 1.1. Furthermore, the role of talent in building experiences and relationships that enable coherent brands reveals a magnetic relationship between coherent brands and talent (Charan et al. 2018; Lacroix 2013; Li et al. 2017; Merrilees 2017; Urde & Greyser 2016). Literature review insight 8 presents a pointed statement that summarises literature in this regard: coherent brands are talent magnets. A working definition of brand coherence is presented in the clarification of key terms and constructs at the outset of this study.

1.2.5 Global leading practices in talent attraction and retention through brand building

The nine global leading practices in talent attraction and retention that emerge from a synthesis of global literature reviewed are presented sequentially, with one practice building on another and no practice rated above any other. These practices are discussed in depth in Chapter 2 of this study.

Practice 1: Identify the specific talent needed to enable organisational success (Barriere et al. 2018; Charan et al. 2018; Keller & Meaney 2017; King 2015; Russell & Brannan 2016; Venkatesh 2014).

Practice 2: View prospective talented employees as a brand stakeholder that should be positively influenced at every brand contact point (Balmer 2017; Keller & Meaney 2017; Russell & Brannan 2016; Schaefer 2016).

Practice 3: Develop an employer brand with a distinctive, relevant and persuasive employee value proposition (Bali & Dixit 2016; Born & Kang 2015; Mosley 2016; Mosley 2015; Sharif & Islam 2017; Venkatesh & Geetha 2015).

Practice 4: Implement strategically-driven talent retention initiatives that incorporate aligned human resource management practices, leadership practices and internal brand communication (Bafaro et al. 2017; Erkmen et al. 2017; Punjaisri & Wilson 2017; Saleem & Iglesias 2016).

Practice 5: View internal talented employees as a brand stakeholder that should be positively influenced at every brand contact point (Bafaro et al. 2017; King 2015; Merrilees 2017; Punjaisri & Wilson 2017; Saleem & Iglesias 2016).

Practice 6: Implement effective internal branding initiatives that reinforce the brand purpose and values and enhance the employee's engagement with the brand (Erkmen et al. 2017; Russell & Brannan 2016; Saleem & Iglesias 2016; Ulrich & Smallwood 2012).

Practice 7: Consistently brand to stakeholders across employer brand, internal brand and corporate brand platforms (Balmer 2017; Foster et al. 2010; Lacroix 2013; Li et al. 2017; Merrilees 2017; Urde & Greyser 2016).

Practice 8: Ensure that cross-functional leadership across human resources management, brand management and line management strategically aligns to drive talent and brand initiatives (Andrianova et al. 2018; Balmer 2017; Charan et al. 2018; Hatch & Schultz 2001; Iglesias, Ind & Alfaro 2013; Keller & Richey 2016; Sharif & Islam 2017; Urde & Greyser 2016).

Practice 9: Ensure that strategic leadership, from CEO level down, is committed to building brand coherence and strength through talent (Andrianova et al. 2018; Balmer 2017; Charan et al. 2018; Kanter 2011; Li et al. 2017; Merrilees 2017; Ulrich & Smallwood 2007; Ulrich & Smallwood 2012; Urde & Greyser 2016).

These nine global leading practices provide a solid theoretical foundation for primary research, and allow local practices to be explored in the context of global leading practices.

1.2.6 The South African talent and brand landscape

The literature review turns to the local talent and brand landscape. Literature review insight 9 presents the views of scholars that encourage a focused literature review to explore the local talent and brand context (Aaker & Joachimsthaler 2012; Enslin & Klopper 2011; Schiemann 2014; Subban 2016; Vaiman et al. 2018).

Literature review insight 10 is presented after a rich review of all available South African literature pertaining to talent and brand, supplemented by literature to provide deeper insights into the South African talent and brand landscape. This insight highlights that the South African talent landscape is impacted by several socio-economic factors that should be considered when tailoring branding messages to appeal to talented South Africans (Ferreira 2016; Muleya, Ngirande & Rachidi 2016; Theron, Barkhuizen & Du Plessis 2014; Vaiman, Scullion & Collings 2012; Vaiman et al. 2018). Furthermore, the significance and relevance of these socio-economic factors emerge from studies conducted in the field of talent attraction and retention through brand building in South Africa (Abbott, Goosen & Coetzee 2013; Barkhuizen & Schutte 2015; Barkhuizen, Welby-Cooke, Schutte & Stantz 2014; Du Preez & Bendixen 2015; Mazibuko & Govender 2017; Mohlala, Goldman & Goosen 2012; Tladinyane 2016).

1.3 Research purpose

Before outlining the research purpose, it is helpful to summarise the tension points emerging from literature, which present a problem that research could attempt to address. Whilst global leading practices in talent attraction and retention through brand building provide helpful guidelines in branding for talent, the context in which employer, internal and corporate brand building is deployed, deserves due consideration (Enslin & Klopper 2011; Vaiman et al. 2018). Any brand building efforts should be adapted to suit the unique needs of the customer (Aaker & Joachimsthaler 2012), which in this instance is prospective and current talented employees. A brief review of South African literature in the field of talent attraction and retention through brand building reveals several socio-economic factors that would need to be considered in the local marketplace (Ferreira 2016; Theron, Barkhuizen & Du Plessis 2014). In addition to this, it would seem that talent attraction and retention through brand building is an under researched field and scholars call for further research in the local context (Mazibuko & Govender 2017; Tsilongamulenzhe 2017). With due consideration of the fact that roughly 28%

of South African adults are unemployed (Statistics South Africa 2018), a critical shortage of skilled workers (Anand, Kothari & Kumar 2016) and a volatile economic climate (Subban 2016), it is feasible that South African companies are placing the war for talent high on their agenda. Local companies and their leaders would stand to benefit from insights that will allow optimal brand building practices in the attraction and retention of talent.

The research purpose is informed by literature review findings that call for exploratory primary research to shed light on the talent attraction and retention practices pertaining to employer, internal and corporate brand building in the South African context, where unique local socio-economic factors are at play. (Subban 2016; Vaiman et al. 2018). The research purpose is formulated to articulate what would be done to address the need for research that emerged from literature (Newman & Covrig 2013).

The purpose of this research is:

To explore, in the context of global leading practice, the talent attraction and retention practices pertaining to employer, internal and corporate brand building in companies that are top South African brands.

1.4 Research questions

Two research questions are presented herein. Note that the first question probes the relationships between the constructs articulated in the research purpose – the perceived relationship between talent attraction and retention and a company's employer, internal and corporate brands. The second research question addresses the central issue of the study, and illuminates the data that would need to be collected – a set of practices or “ways in which” these companies are attracting and retaining talent through employer, internal and corporate brand building (Flick 2018; Newman & Covrig 2013).

The following are the research questions that guide this study, each underpinned with a brief description of the research methods that will be used to address the research question:

Research question 1: What is the perceived relationship between talent attraction and retention and a company's employer, internal and corporate brands?

The perceived relationship will firstly be established from a review of literature. This perceived relationship will also be established during primary research. The research

instrument, a semi-structured interview guide that will be presented shortly, contains a question that probes this perceived relationship.

Research question 2: In which ways are companies that are top South African brands attracting and retaining talent through employer, internal and corporate brand building?

This research question is partially informed by literature, although the practices identified are global leading practices. This research question is mainly addressed in primary research. The research methodology, outlined shortly, will show how qualitative research conducted with semi-structured interviews, will probe the practices used by companies that are top South African brands.

The researcher aims to achieve consistency between the title of the study, the research purpose and research questions through repetition of key words, consistent use of an exploratory tone and reinforcement of who would be studied where: companies that are top South African brands (Flick 2018; Newman & Covrig 2013).

1.5 Research design

Figure 1.2 to follow provides a visual overview of the research design and methodology.

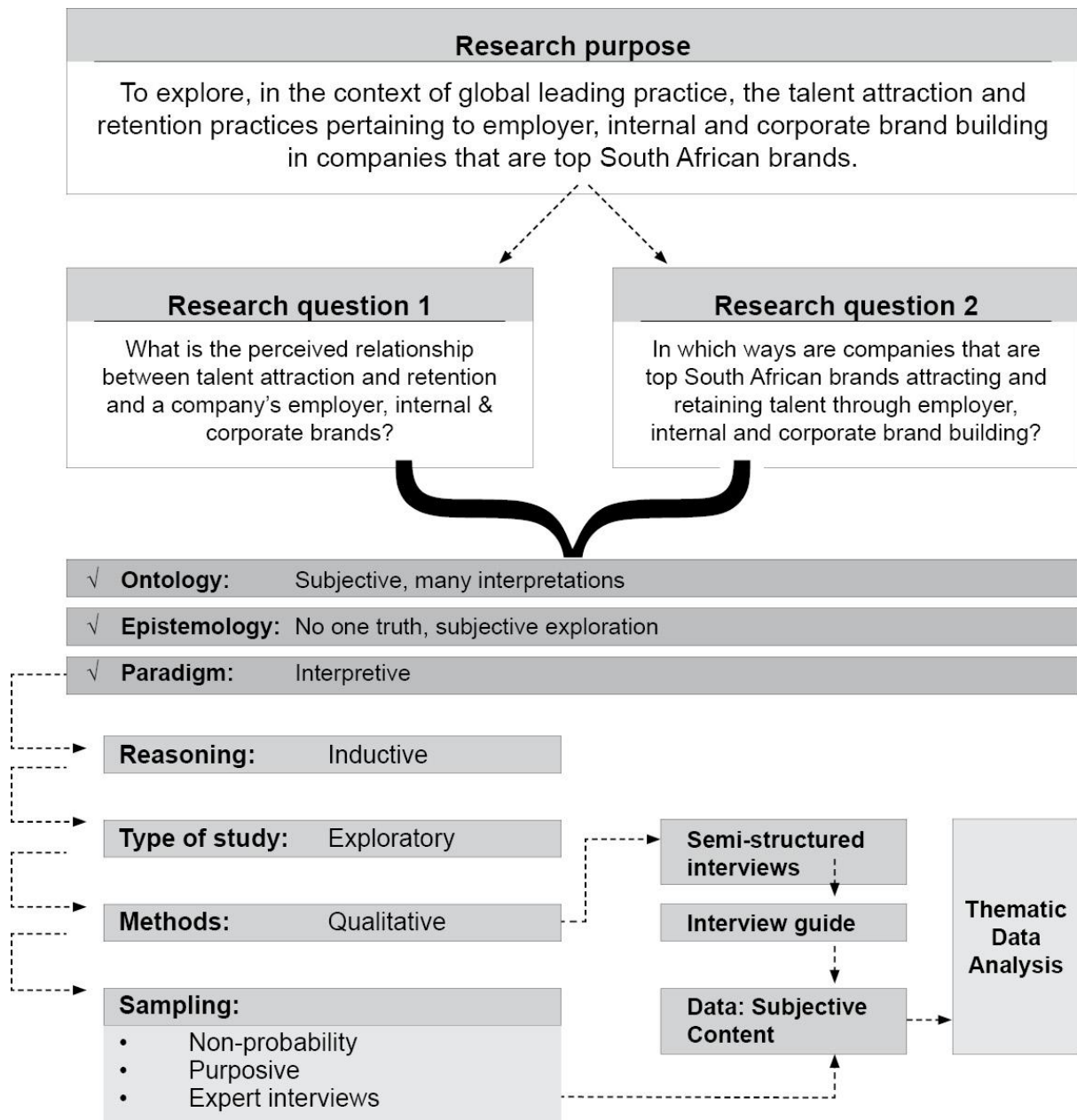


Figure 1.2: An overview of the research design and methodology

As indicated at the top of Figure 1.2 the research design of this study is informed by the research purpose, which is to explore, in the context of global leading practices, the talent attraction and retention practices pertaining to brand building in companies that are top South African brands. The purpose of the research indicates that a broad, exploratory stance would be needed to uncover rich insights about the South African context, as advocated by scholars (Subban 2016; Vaiman et al. 2018). The research questions reveal the data that the study needed to uncover (Newman & Covrig 2013), which appear to be broad insights related to perceived relationships and practices.

The research purpose and questions lead to the selection of a wide subjective ontology and epistemology, allowing the study to explore reality in a subjective fashion in order to arrive at rich insights required and evident in multiple truths (Lewis 2015; Rahi 2017). This approach leads to the selection of the interpretive paradigm, informed by a worldview that is broad and encourages exploration and interpretation of multiple realities (Rahi 2017; Wright et al. 2016).

Explorative research is selected (Babin & Zikmund 2015) as the exploration of the local context is advocated by scholars in order to add insights into the talent and brand reality in South Africa (Subban 2016; Vaiman et al. 2018).

1.6 Research methodology

Figure 1.2 indicates the selection of qualitative methods, enabled by semi-structured interviews. Section 1.6 to follow outlines the research methodology in terms of qualitative methods, sampling strategy, interviews and the thematic analysis of data – all briefly introduced in Figure 1.2.

Qualitative research methods are selected above quantitative methods, as this is deemed the most appropriate methodology to address the research purpose and questions. Qualitative methods allow for the exploration of subjective reality and the gaining of deeper insights into the world of others (Flick 2018; Rahi 2017). In contrast to the objective, measureable approach of quantitative methods, which sees the researcher standing outside of the data collection approach, qualitative methods would allow the researcher to become involved in the research and engage in a meaningful and deep manner to explore the reality of participants (Flick 2018; Wright et al. 2016). Qualitative methods best align to the subjective ontology and epistemology, which holds that there is no one truth, as well as the interpretive paradigm, which allows a broad worldview and the interpretation of multiple realities (Rahi 2017; Wright et al. 2016). Interviewing of participants is selected as the best qualitative method, as the researcher's involvement in the interview process would aid the eliciting of rich insights and true exploration of the subjective reality of experts (Percy, et al. 2015; Thanh & Thanh 2015).

Through semi-structured interviews, the questions prepared beforehand provides a consistent structure to interviews that hone in on talent and brand building, but still allows for flexible and open responses from expert participants that enriches insights (Percy, et al. 2015; Stuckey 2013). Seven interview questions are compiled after considering the research purpose and questions, along with the literature review insights.

A non-probability, purposive sampling approach is deployed to identify the companies and participants that could offer the richest insights and expertise (Flick 2018; Sharma 2017). The sampling strategy firstly focuses on inclusion and exclusion criteria to arrive at a suitable brand sample that identified top South African brands (Robinson 2014). After selecting the *Sunday Times Top brand Survey 2017*, inclusion and exclusion criteria sees the identification of 20 top corporate brands, who are approached to participate in research. These 20 corporate brands are available as Appendix A to this study.

Five companies that are top South African brands participate in this study. These companies are top South African corporate brands in the fields of telecommunications, health and medical insurance, banking, motor vehicles and life insurance. The research participants within each company are purposefully sampled and informed by literature review findings, holding that three strategic-level leaders play an equally important role in talent through brand building (Balmer 2017; Charan et al. 2018; Saleem & Iglesias 2016): brand management, human resource or talent management and line management respectively. The period September 2018 to May 2019 saw interviews conducted with these three identified strategic-level leaders within each of the five participating companies that are top South African brands.

1.7 Data analysis

During the data analysis process, the researcher became immersed in the data collected, applying inductive reasoning to the interpretation of data, making sense of it and giving meaning to it (Elo Kääriäinen, Kanste, Pölkki, Utriainen & Kyngäs 2014; Nowell, Norris, White & Moules 2017; Vaismoradi, Jones, Turunen, & Snelgrove 2016). The researcher goes to great lengths to implement a rigorously documented data analysis process, which allows transparency and clear motivation, supported by literature reviewed, for every step and decision made (Elo et al. 2014; Nowell et al. 2017; Vaismoradi et al. 2016).

Qualitative content analysis is conducted using thematic analysis with inductive reasoning. To conduct thematic analysis, the researcher follows the steps advocated by scholars (Nowell et al. 2017) to firstly transcribe and then familiarise herself with the data, followed by a coding process that assign notes with meaning or summary statements to large chunks of text (Nowell et al. 2017; Percy et al. 2015). A further abstraction of the meaning of these notes and the grouping of the notes together allows categories to emerge, into which notes are sorted in step 3 of the process (Nowell et al. 2017; Rahi 2017). Finally, the categories are reviewed in

order to establish patterns, link constructs, and create themes and subthemes in step 4 (Rahi 2017; Vaismoradi et al. 2016).

Six themes emerge, five of them supported by subthemes. These themes are introduced hereafter in a table. Note that one theme emerges as the primary or dominant theme as this theme contributes more than half the responses and is consistent across all five brands and 15 participants. The role of the corporate brand in talent attraction and retention through brand building appears to be significant in companies that are top South African brands, with South African talent not only lured by a commercially successful corporate brand, but also resonating with purpose-driven corporate brands. The dominance of the corporate brand is furthermore supported by the finding that corporate brand building is more evolved than employer or internal branding, and is leveraged in the place of employer and internal brand.

1.8 Research findings and results

The six themes that emerge as research findings are briefly introduced here. In Chapter 4 of this study, these themes are explored in the context of literature and supported by quotations and insights from the research participants.

Table 1.1: Research findings - themes and subthemes

Theme	Subthemes
1. The value of the corporate brand in talent attraction and retention	1.1. The lure of a successful corporate brand 1.2. Corporate branding appears to be more important and/or well-developed than other brand building platforms 1.3. Purposeful, values-based corporate brands resonate with talent
2. Brand-aligned practices to articulate and assess aspirational talent	2.1. A clear, brand-aligned articulation of what talent is 2.2. Assessments to identify talent 2.3. Brand-aligned aspirational element of talent
3. The employer brand, employee value proposition and internal brand: relevant but still a work in progress	3.1. Employer brand and employee value proposition are relevant to attracting talent 3.2. Internal brand is relevant to retaining talent 3.3. Employer brand, employee value proposition and internal brand are under construction
4. Strategic leadership alignment for talent and brand	4.1. Brand and talent are CEO-driven 4.2. Cross-functional leadership collaboration emerging 4.3. Line managers are taking ownership
5. Talent retention through engagement and meaningful work	5.1. Talent retained through employee engagement 5.2. Talent retained through meaningful work, allowing talent to contribute to purpose and brand
6. Talented brand ambassadors contribute to brand coherence	

A deeper synthesis of these themes in relation to each other results in a visual representation of the themes in relation to each other, presented as Figure 1.3.

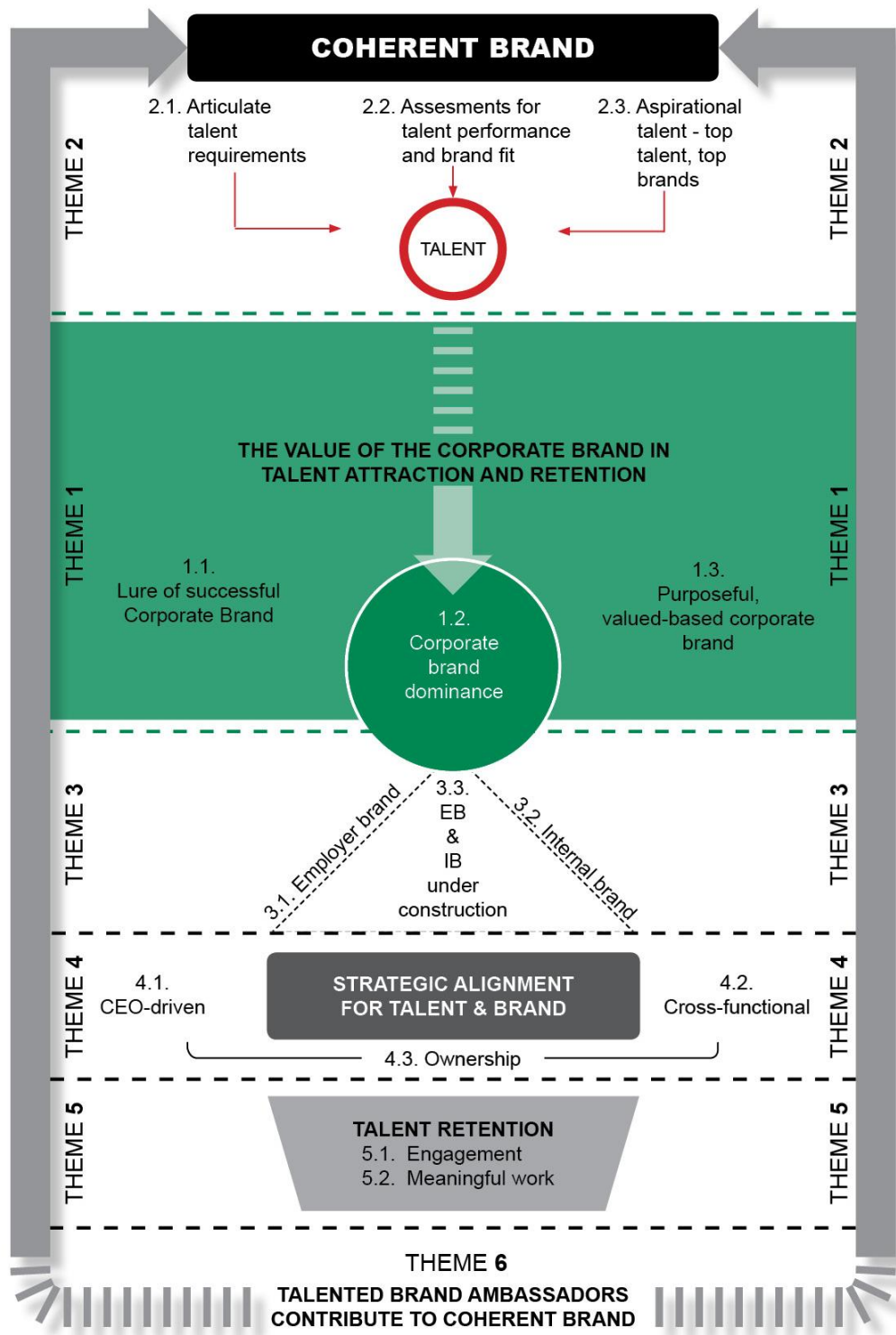


Figure 1.3: An overview of research results, showing themes and subthemes in relation to each other

A higher abstraction of the themes and subthemes allows ten local leading practices in talent attraction and retention through brand building to emerge. Whilst these local leading practices

are briefly introduced hereafter, Chapter 5 contains a deeper discussion of each local leading practice in context of literature.

Local leading practice 1: In companies that are top South African brands, human resource/talent management and leadership **co-create and articulate the specific talent requirements** to enable brand building and organisational success. This articulation includes performance and potential requirements, as well as personal attributes that will ensure the optimal brand fit.

Local leading practice 2: In companies that are top South African brands, prospective and current talent undergo psychometric **assessments to evaluate their suitability in terms of performance, potential and brand alignment**.

Local leading practice 3: In companies that are top South African brands, prospective talented employees are viewed as an **important corporate brand stakeholder** that should be positively influenced by the corporate brand.

Local leading practice 4: In companies that are top South African brands, the corporate brand is positioned as **commercially successful, as well as purposeful and values-based**, which attracts talent.

Local leading practice 5: In companies that are top South African brands, **employer branding** and employee value proposition lead with opportunities for learning and **development and career growth**.

Local leading practice 6: In companies that are top South African brands, **internal branding** initiatives are enabled by regular leader-led brand communication, reputable human resource practices and a culture of belonging driven by supportive leadership.

Local leading practice 7: In companies that are top South African brands, **leadership** owns and drives **employee engagement**, ensuring that current talented employees are viewed as an important brand stakeholder that should be positively influenced by the internal brand to ensure brand coherence and talent **retention**.

Local leading practice 8: In companies that are top South African brands, talented employees are provided with **meaningful work** that gives them the opportunity to **contribute to the brand purpose and values**.

Local leading practice 9: In companies that are top South African brands, engaged current talented employees are deployed as **brand ambassadors**, providing them with opportunities to spread word-of-mouth messages that **reinforce the brand's purpose and values and build coherent brands**.

Local leading practice 10: In companies that are top South African brands, cross-functional **leadership alignment is driven from the CEO downwards**, encouraging collaboration and leader-led initiatives for talent and branding.

1.9 Reliability and validity

Noble and Smith (2015, p. 2) hold that reliability is key to high quality research findings, taking into consideration the consistency of research data collection and analysis. It is especially important when approaching qualitative data analysis that the researcher has a clear, consistent process which can be replicated by other researchers and which is free of bias.

The researcher takes the following steps to ensure reliability:

1. A thorough literature review is conducted, and findings are summarised in nine global leading practice propositions. As such, the researcher ensures that she is familiar with and informed by global literature (Flick 2018; Lewis 2015; Noble & Smith 2015).
2. The profile of the participant sample is informed by the literature review (Charan et al. 2018; Hatch & Schultz 2001; Iglesias, Ind & Alfaro 2013; Kanter 2011), and the methodology for the identification of the primary research sample is clearly outlined and argued (Gentles, Charles, Ploeg & Mc Kibbon 2015; Noble & Smith 2015).
3. The semi-structured interview format considers the global leading practices, but is guided by the need to explore and gain deeper insights. As such, interview questions are designed to be open-ended and invite subjective responses within the parameters of the research purpose and questions (Rahi 2017; Stuckey 2013).
4. The thematic analysis process adheres to recommendations from Nowell et al. (2017, p. 4) to ensure trustworthiness, following well-documented steps from familiarisation to coding, categorising and allowing themes to emerge (Percy, Kostere & Kostere 2015; Stuckey 2015).
5. The research findings emerge as six themes presented in the context of literature and underpinned by subthemes, which include interview quotations to support the subthemes (Stuckey 2015; Vaismoradi, Jones, Turunen & Snelgrove 2016).

As the findings are exploratory in nature, these are presented as insights that could be explored in further empirical research (Lewis 2015; Rahi 2017).

1.10 Ethical considerations

Ethical considerations are of prime importance to this study, as the reputation of companies that are top South African brands and their leaders is at stake. The researcher took care to gain informed consent from companies and their leaders and commits to anonymity and confidentiality of both the brands and leaders participating (Flick 2018; Sanjari, Bahramnezhad, Fomani, Shoghi, & Cheraghi 2014).

As the research uses a qualitative approach, the researcher is engaged in the research and connects with participants in interviews. This high level of interaction between the researcher and the study, as well as the study's participants, requires the researcher to set appropriate ethical guidelines to steer the study. The ethical process addresses informed consent, anonymity and confidentiality to arrive at a set of ethical guidelines (Flick 2018; Sanjari et al. 2014).

1.11 Limitations

One overarching limitation to this study is the limited literature findings in the study field of talent and brand building in the uniquely South African context.

A further potential limitation to this study is the qualitative approach through thematic analysis, which leans heavily on gaining subjective insights from the research participants. These subjective insights are inductively analysed using thematic analysis. Whilst every attempt is made to maintain a rigorous and transparent data analysis process, there are high levels of subjectivity and interpretation present.

The largest delimitation to the study is the sample of companies that are top South African brands that are selected for this study, as well as the sample profile of research participants in these companies. The selection of both these samples is motivated by literature and is outlined in depth in Chapters 2 and 3.

A further delimitation of this study is the exclusion of South African talented employees from the study, as the focus of the study is not rooted in the perceptions of talented employees, but the practices deployed by top brands.

One of the delimitations of this study emerges from the ethical considerations and the promise of anonymity and confidentiality of participants. It is regrettable that the participating brands cannot be disclosed, but the ethical code is honoured above all else.

1.12 Conclusion

The research purpose that fuels this study is the need to explore, in the context of global leading practice, the talent attraction and retention practices pertaining to employer, internal and corporate brand building in companies that are top South African brands. The need for this research is informed by literature that encourages an understanding of the local context into which brand building for talent is done (Subban 2016; Vaiman, Sparrow, Schuler & Collings 2018).

The richest source of insights is held to be companies that are top South African brands. Literature holds that these brands have achieved consistency across their employer, internal and corporate brand building platforms, resulting in trustworthy, coherent branding that resonates positively with all brand stakeholders, including talent (of talent (Andrianova et al. 2018; Charan et al. 2018; Urde & Greyser 2016). These brands have also managed to attract and retain the talent required to build such strong brands, as literature holds that corporate brands are built through talented employees that bring the brand's purpose and values to life in their work and contact with stakeholders (Charan et al. 2018; Lacroix 2013; Li et al. 2017; Merrilees 2017; Urde & Greyser 2016).

The explorative study is conducted using qualitative research methods, enabled by semi-structured interviews in a purposive sample of five companies that are top South African brands, with research participants being three strategic-level leaders in each company. Research data obtained from interview transcriptions is analysed thematically through the application of inductive reasoning supported by literature (Nowell et al. 2017; Vaismoradi et al. 2016).

Six themes are identified, five of them underpinned by subthemes. The dominant theme is the lure of a successful, purposeful corporate brand in attracting and retaining talent. In response to the research purpose and related research questions, the practices employed by companies that are top South African brands is abstracted from themes, synthesised and presented as research results in the form of ten practices.

This study is significant and valuable in that it is the first study of its kind in South Africa and presents findings obtained from an unprecedented sample of top South African brands, brands that have built such strong reputations with South African brand stakeholders that they are the number one brands, leaders in their respective industries.

It stands to reason that the practices applied by these top brands would present the local leading practices in talent attraction and retention through brand building, and other South African companies and their leaders can benefit significantly from these insights.

The research results are applicable to a wide range of cross-functional leaders, ranging from leaders in human resources or talent management to brand leaders and strategic-level line managers. As the research results are obtained from research conducted in South Africa, the results consider the local talent landscape and the socio-economic factors that appear to have a pervasive impact on local talent practices and the needs of the local talented individual.

The insights provide brand builders with an enriched view of the target customer of employer, internal and corporate brand building efforts, namely the talented employee. With talent in high demand and short supply, employer, internal and corporate brand building initiatives can be tailored to appeal optimally to the needs of South African talent, resulting in talent attraction and retention practices that are enabled by clear, well-targeted and differentiated brand building approaches.

1.13 Structure of the study

Chapter 2 comprises the literature review, which firstly explores talent and talent management, then delves into talent and brand and finally outlines the socio-economic factors in South Africa that motivate for further research into the local context. Ten literature review insights are presented therein. All key terms and constructs are clarified at the outset of the study.

Chapter 3 outlines the research design and methodology, describing the selection of the interpretive paradigm in order to conduct exploratory, qualitative research. The research instrument is presented, along with an argument to support the purposive sample selection.

Chapter 4 describes the data analysis process and motivates the selection of thematic analysis. The steps followed in the thematic analysis process are outlined and supported with examples of documentation. Finally, six themes, five of them with related subthemes, are

presented and briefly described in context of literature, supported by quotations and insights from the data.

In Chapter 5 the research results discussion ensues, with a revisiting of the themes in relation to each other, as well as in relation to the research purpose and questions. A visual depiction of themes and subthemes is presented. Deeper synthesis of the data allows for the emergence of ten South African local leading practices in talent attraction and retention through brand building. Recommendations for further research are provided, along with supporting data. The chapter presents the limitations and delimitations of the study before concluding.

Chapter 5 is followed by a Reference List. Thereafter, Appendixes A to E contain relevant documentation and examples referred to during the study.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Introduction

Through a systematic review of literature, the researcher was able to grasp key theories, constructs and ideas and apply a critical evaluation of the current literature to justify and motivate the research purpose that fuelled this study (Flick 2018; Hart 2018). The review of literature is central to the research questions that guide this study. The first research question probes the perceived relationship between talent attraction and retention and a company's employer, internal and corporate brands. As the literature review will reveal, global literature suggests that there is a strong relationship at play – however, the literature review insights require further exploration in primary research. The literature review will furthermore show how the second research question, which queries the ways in which South African companies are attracting and retaining talent through brand building, could not be sufficiently addressed by literature. This appears to be due to the lack of empirical research into this field in South Africa. This stands in contrast to the rich volume of global research in this regard, which provided sufficient insights to allow a synthesis of literature into a set of global leading practices.

An outline of the literature review approach introduces the reader to the method and reasoning that informs the outline of this chapter. Literature pertaining to one topic or construct was reviewed and synthesised into literature review findings before moving on to the next topic. This approach was necessary as a broad swath of literature had to be reviewed in different fields of study, ranging from talent and talent management, to brand and brand building, to focused talent attraction and retention through brand building, and finally focused South African literature in the field of talent and brand.

The researcher commenced the structured literature review by reviewing background information about talent and talent management - these literature review insights will be presented in Section 2.2 of this chapter. As a human resources and talent professional in South Africa, the researcher had experienced first-hand how dire the talent crisis was, and was keen to deepen her understanding about the talent landscape, constructs, ideas, trends, issues and key authors and scholars.

The researcher then reviewed background information about the field of talent attraction and retention through brand building. Whilst the researcher stemmed from a human resources background, she has gained exposure and experience in brand building and was keen to embark on a study that would add value to human resources and talent professionals as they apply brand-building practices to the field of people and talent. To do this, the researcher had to conduct an extensive literature review on the field of brand and brand building, uncovering the basics of brand, fundamental brand constructs, key brand authors, and brand terms, ideas and issues pertaining to the attraction and retention of talent. The background literature review on brands and brand building in context of talent is outlined in Section 2.3 of this chapter. Furthermore, Section 2.3 contains literature review insights obtained from emerging new constructs that arose when exploring the intersection between talent and brand building. The constructs of consistent brand building and coherent branding in context of talent are amongst these emergent insights in Section 2.3.

The literature review then pauses to provide a visual depiction of literature review insights obtained by reviewing global literature in the field of talent and brand. Thereafter, these insights are further synthesised into a set of proposed global leading practices in talent attraction through brand building.

The final phase of the literature review, Section 2.4, focuses on studies and research survey findings in the field of talent attraction and retention through brand building in South Africa. This section also presents an argument for further exploratory research into the unique South African landscape to inform talent attraction and retention practices through brand building that will thrive in this local context.

The growing awareness of the need for exploratory research in South Africa finally finds its home in the research purpose of this study, which is concretised in Section 2.5.

The literature review presented hereafter in Section 2.2 to 2.4 features literature review insights obtained from a synthesis of literature pertaining to a construct or sub-section of literature. The researcher will show in Chapter 3 of this study how the interpretive paradigm and inductive reasoning plays a central role in this study's primary research and data analysis. The interpretive paradigm and inductive reasoning also informs the approach to the literature review, with the researcher interpreting literature reviewed and then applying inductive reasoning to synthesise and present literature review insights that encapsulate the central message that emerges from the literature. To this end, the reader will find ten literature review insights presented in Section 2.2 to 2.4. Each literature review insight is presented, and

thereafter supported by a discussion of the literature informing the insight. This approach is also followed in Chapter 4 of this study, which sees research findings presented as themes and sub-themes, supported by data and insights to support the themes and sub-themes.

2.2. The war for talent – what talent is and why it sparked a war

In today's highly competitive global business world, the products and services that businesses offer are no longer a sustainable competitive edge – even the most innovative offerings can be imitated and are only unique and competitive for a short period of time until competitors copy it or even improve upon it (Bafaro, Ellsworth & Ghandi 2017; Kanter 2011). The unique value that human capital or people bring to companies cannot be copied so readily by competitors (Charan et al. 2018; Kanter 2011; Keller & Meaney 2017; Merrilees 2017; Van Dam 2017). Human capital is the force behind the achievement of business goals and ensures that the company creates and maintains a competitive advantage through people. Employees that are highly skilled, engaged and committed have a direct positive impact on commercial success and overall organisational performance (Bafaro et al. 2017; Barriere et al. 2018; Charan et al. 2018; Kaliannan & Adjovu 2015).

Against this backdrop, it is understandable that companies are competing against each other to secure the services of these highly skilled, engaged and committed employees, also referred to as talent. A Mc Kinsey and Company article by Chambers, Foulon, Handfield-Jones, Hankin and Michaels, published roughly two decades ago in 1998, coined the term “war for talent” and warned that this war for talent will only intensify in the years to come (Chambers et al. 1998).

Literature review insight 1: Talent defined in terms of performance, potential, brand fit and/or critical skill sets

Literature reviewed could offer no one, agreed upon or accepted definition of talent. Having conducted an in-depth review of talent literature in order to establish what talent means in a workplace context, Gallardo-Gallardo et al. (2013, p. 297) conclude that there is still much debate amongst scholars and thought leaders around the meaning of talent. Their study presents a conceptual framework for talent identification that include factors like skills, experience, qualifications, personal attributes, perceived potential and overall fit with the company (Gallardo-Gallardo et al. 2013), which the researcher noted and explored with a deeper review of literature.

For some scholars, talent is seen as prospective or current employees that offer rare or very desirable attributes, knowledge, skills or experience required by the organisation in order to achieve strategic goals (Barriere et al. 2018; Gallardo-Gallardo & Thunnissen 2016; Sparrow & Makram 2015), which is aligned with the human capital drivers required for organisational success, presented earlier. It would appear that business strategy, brand, purpose, values and goals inform the requirements for the identification of talent, uniting business leadership in considering the exact talent they would need to achieve their goals and add value (Barriere et al. 2018; Charan et al. 2018; Russell & Brannan 2016; Ulrich & Smallwood 2012).

Ulrich and Smallwood (2012, p. 60) view talent as those employees who offer a mix of competence, contribution and commitment. Whilst competence and contribution appear aligned with performance and potential indicators, commitment emerged as another talent identifier for consideration. Scholars seem to support the view held by Ulrich and Smallwood (2012, p. 60), confirming a significant positive relationship between talented employees and their *commitment* to the company strategy, goals and brand (Cappelli & Keller 2017; Gallardo-Gallardo & Thunnissen 2016; Russell & Brannan 2016; Ulrich & Smallwood 2012).

Whilst earlier talent identification models held that performance and potential were the main talent criteria, the matter of commitment and engagement with the brand emerged strongly from current literature. Talent should not only possess desirable skills and competencies but should display the personality attributes and behavioural qualities that ensure that they “fit” with the brand and are aligned with the brand values (Cappelli & Keller 2017; Kaufmann et al. 2016; Keller & Meaney 2017; Russell & Brannan 2016).

One additional consideration appears to enjoy widespread support: the role of highly desirable, critical or scarce skills in talent identification. If an organisation needs these highly desirable, critical or scarce skills to enable organisational success (such as software developers in a certain scarce field), they will go out and look for talent that offer these skills. These skilled employees are labelled as talent as a direct result of the unique, scarce skill they bring (Barriere et al. 2018; Cappelli & Keller 2017; Gallardo-Gallardo & Thunnissen 2016; Keller & Meaney 2017).

A synthesis of literature pertaining to talent identification yielded the following working definition of talent: Prospective or current employees are labelled as talent when they have shown high levels of proven performance (Cappelli & Keller 2017; Gallardo-Gallardo et al. 2013; Gallardo-Gallardo & Thunnissen 2016) along with high levels of potential for development and career growth (Gallardo-Gallardo & Thunnissen 2016; Keller & Meaney

2017). Over and above performance and potential factors, employees could be labelled as talent when they fit well with the brand, showing that their own values and behaviour align with the brand's purpose and values (Charan et al. 2018; Russell & Brannan 2016; Ulrich & Smallwood 2012). In some instances, employees offering highly desirable, rare or critical skills required for organisational success could be labelled as talent (Barriere et al. 2018; Cappelli & Keller 2017; Gallardo-Gallardo & Thunnissen 2016; Keller & Meaney 2017).

Literature review insight 2: Talent in high demand and short supply, necessitating focused talent management strategies

Literature holds that the attraction and retention of people that possess the required skills to enable business success has become a global business priority (Adrianova et al. 2018; Charan et al. 2018; Iglesias, Ind & Alfaro 2013; Russell & Brannan 2016).

Talented employees are in high demand but unfortunately in short supply. *The Manpower Group Talent Shortage Survey 2018* presents some staggering statistics, namely that amongst others, global talent shortages have reached a 12-year high. Surveying roughly 39 000 employers across 43 countries globally, the survey found that 45% of small and medium size organisations cannot find the talent they are looking for – a figure which rises to as high as 67% in large corporates (The Manpower Group Talent Shortage Survey 2018). *Deloitte Human Capital Trends 2017* report confirms that acquiring the right talent is a top priority for global organisations, with 81% of companies surveyed placing this in the top three Human Capital Trends currently being addressed by organisational leadership (Deloitte Human Capital Trends Global 2017).

The Global Talent Crunch, a 2018 study conducted by the Korn Ferry Institute, predicts that by the year 2030 there will be a global talent shortage of 85 million people, with the highest talent shortages in emerging markets and developing countries. The study suggests that the talent shortage will be informed by a lack of critical or key skills. With a globally competitive marketplace, rapidly evolving technological trends, and an emphasis on change readiness and agility, tomorrow's talent will be required to offer a rare and highly specialised skill set, which will broaden the talent supply and demand gap even further (Korn Ferry Institute 2018).

With looming talent shortages that are likely to intensify, companies are being advised to implement focused talent management strategies. Talent management firstly concerns itself with the anticipation and identification of the specific talent requirements to enable the achievement of strategic goals (Charan et al. 2018; Barriere et al. 2018; Keller & Meaney

2017). Thereafter, talent management sees the planning and managing of approaches (Adrianova et al. 2018; Cappelli & Keller 2017; Sparrow et al. 2011; Sparrow & Markram 2015; Venkatesh 2013) that ultimately ensure that the talent requirements are met and talented employees are attracted and retained (Bafaro et al. 2017; Cappelli & Keller 2017; Venkatesh 2014).

A recent Mc Kinsey Global Survey that examined the effect of talent management strategies on business outcomes confirms the positive effects of talented people on business outcomes. The surveyed global companies that had effective talent management programmes in place not only outperformed their competitors but improved value to all shareholders (Adrianova et al. 2018). It would seem that effective talent management strategies not only minimise the risks associated with critical talent shortages (Bafaro et al. 2017; Venkatesh 2013), but have a direct positive impact on organisational performance (Adrianova et al. 2018).

In closing, this section of the literature review explored what talent is and why it sparked a war, providing a conceptual foundation of literature that informed a working definition of talent and insights pertaining to the talent shortages that necessitate a focused talent management strategy.

2.3. Brand in context of talent

With the literature review on talent presented, this section focuses on brand in context of talent, commencing with a working definition of brand and then exploring literature review insights around brand constructs that are relevant to talent. These include employer brand, internal brand, corporate brand, consistent branding and coherent branding.

A working definition of brand, presented hereafter, shows the functional and deeply subjective emotional aspects of a brand, suggesting that people are central to brand experiences, a matter that will be explored in depth further in this section.

Functionally, a brand is a unique name, term, symbol, sign or other related attributes or features that are used to identify a product or service offering, differentiating the brand from others in the marketplace (Aaker & Joachimsthaler 2012; Kotler & Armstrong 2018). This functional brand logo or name is enriched by the intangible subjective responses of people to a brand, which is informed by factors such as recalling previous experiences with the brand or impressions formed during contact with the brand (Kapferer 2012; Kotler & Armstrong 2018).

Literature review insight 3: Brand and brand building are relevant to talent, whilst talent is also relevant to brand and brand building.

With a war for talent raging, companies are using brand-building practices as they compete against each other to attract and retain the services of talented employees (Chambers et al. 1998; Keller & Meaney 2017; Russell & Brannan 2016). Rampl and Kenning (2014, p. 229) suggest that talent attraction and retention practices have evolved to incorporate the same brand building practices that companies formerly used to attract customers.

It must be noted that the recruitment and selection of employees and the management of the employee experience have traditionally been functions of human resources management (Erkmen et al. 2017; Ulrich 2015). Bersin (2016, p. 49) argues that: "In the last ten years, Human Resources have turned into a function focused on optimising all areas of talent by focusing on integrated talent solutions". Talent appears to have become a priority for human resources management. Schaefer (2016) states in the Harvard Business Review article, "*Why and how HR needs to act more like marketing*", that human resources can benefit from adopting the approach used to brand and market to customers, as they as they compete for talent the way marketing competes for customers. By using targeted advertising that appeals to talented employees in the same manner that targeted advertising appeals to customers, prospective talented employees can be reached and engaged. Scholars agree that using marketing or advertising approaches to recruit talent, backed by company employees that live and positively enforce the brand message, will ensure that talent attraction messages are spread and amplified through word-of-mouth (Mosley 2016; Mosley 2015; Russell & Brannan 2016; Shaefer 2016).

Bali and Dixit (2016, p. 8) confirm that companies are leveraging brand building practices to differentiate themselves in an increasingly competitive talent marketplace, whilst Born and Kang (2015, p. 2) holds that the creation and implementation of a brand strategy and authentic brand message tailored to prospective talent is a best practice in the space of talent attraction and retention.

Brand and brand building appear to be highly relevant to talent. However, in a mutually reciprocal manner literature reviewed and presented hereafter suggests that talent has become highly relevant to brand and brand building too.

Branding is typically a function of a company's marketing or advertising department, which has traditionally focused on the external portrayal of the brand to consumers (Kotler &

Armstrong 2018; Neumeier 2015). However, Mc Coy (2013, p. 291) argues that brand, values and culture have become interwoven, and brands require the involvement of and alignment of leadership and people across the organisation. Given the functional and emotional aspects of a brand, building a strong brand is reliant on so much more than the marketing and advertising of a brand, requiring the involvement of people across the organisation to live the brand and portray it positively to all people who come into contact with it (Aaker & Joachimsthaler 2012; Balmer 2017; Kaufmann et al. 2016; Urde 2013).

Iglesias, Ind and Alfaro (2013, p. 677) maintain that brand leaders are no longer in control of the brand and the way that people experience the brand, but that brand management relies on people inside the organisation to help them build the brand positively. Literature suggests that the field of brand and brand building has become dependent on employees, especially talented employees who have the skills, aptitude and commitment required to bring the brand to life and project the values of the brand (Balmer 2017; Barton et al. 2018; Iglesias, Ind & Alfaro 2013; Kaufmann et al. 2016).

Literature review insight 4: Employer brand attracts talent

Instead of waiting for the right employees to apply to a company, companies have tailored their recruitment and selection practices to appeal to talented employees (Bali & Dixit 2016; Born & Kang 2015; Cappelli & Keller 2017). Talent attraction is a set of practices used to evoke positive, favourable responses that appeal to prospective talent (Cappelli & Keller 2017; Keller & Meaney 2017; Mosley 2016; Mosley 2015), drawing their interest and encouraging engagement with the brand (Keller & Meaney 2017; Mosley 2015), which ultimately leads to an employment application with the brand (Bali & Dixit 2016; Born & Kang 2015; Mosley 2015).

The literature reviewed suggests that talent attraction is an important brand building and business priority, seeing organisational leadership join forces to identify their talent needs and drive talent attraction initiatives (Adrianova et al. 2018; Charan et al. 2018). The attraction of talent is no longer a human resource management recruitment and selection function, but requires an aligned leadership team (Bafaro et al. 2017; Balmer 2017; Barton et al. 2018) with human resources facilitating the process and providing support to organisational leadership (Bafaro et al. 2017; King 2015). Human resources management have therefore joined forces with brand to create an employer brand and employee value proposition that will attract talent (Bali & Dixit 2016; Cappelli & Keller 2017; Mosley 2016; Mosley 2015; Venkatesh & Geetha 2015).

An employer brand comprises a unique and compelling brand message (Edwards 2017; Mosley 2016) to prospective employees which proclaims the functional, financial and personal benefits offered by the employer (Russell & Brannan 2016; Venkatesh & Geetha 2015). Employer branding differentiates an employer in the marketplace (Edwards 2017; Keller & Meaney 2017; Mosley 2015) and aims to evoke positive associations with the employer that will ultimately attract talent (Bali & Dixit 2016; Keller & Meaney 2017).

Authentic communication of the brand's values, purpose and promised employee experience through the employer brand is particularly appealing to talent that resonates with the brand (Keller & Meaney 2017; Mosley 2015). Talent that resonates with the brand and are aligned to the brand's values (Merrilees 2017; Xie, Bagozzi & Meland 2015) can offer the personal attributes and brand fit that will see them thriving in the company (Adrianova et al. 2018; Bali & Dixit 2016; Born & Kang 2015; Mosley 2015; Russell & Brannan 2016).

As part of the employer brand, the employee value proposition holds an appealing, clear, relevant and distinctive proposition of the promised value that employees will experience as part of their employment (Bali & Dixit 2016; Keller & Meaney 2017). The employee value proposition can be tailored to appeal to a specific target market group's needs, and can contain value promises ranging from financial gain to career growth, learning opportunities, great leadership or culture (Bali & Dixit 2016; Edwards 2017; Mosley 2015).

In summary, the employer brand with its employee value proposition appears to be important to the attraction of talented employees to the brand.

Literature review insight 5: Internal brand building retains talent

It stands to reason that, in a competitive talent marketplace, talent is in high demand and there are many opportunities for talent to leave their company and join competitors if they wish to do so (Iglesias et al. 2016; Punjaisri & Wilson 2017; Saleem & Iglesias 2016).

Talent retention is a set of practices aimed at optimally engaging, committing, supporting and aligning current talented employees with the business brand and goals (Barriere et al. 2018; Keller & Meaney 2017; Ulrich 2015). As such, talented employees continually experience the value and benefits of employment (Balmer 2017; Coetzee & Stoltz 2015; King 2015; Keller & Meaney 2017) so that they remain engaged with and employed by the company (Cappelli & Keller 2017; Collings 2014; Kauffman et al. 2016).

Talented employees should experience the employer brand and employee value proposition promises and messaging come to life in their working experience (Botha, Bussin & De Swardt 2011; Erkmen et al. 2017; Roberts-Lombard, Burin & Klopper 2016; Russell & Brannan 2016). With talent in high demand and short supply, organisations should have pro-active talent retention strategies and practices in place (Barriere et al. 2018; Keller & Meaney 2017; Ulrich 2015). Retention of talent should be driven by an integrated strategy, involving all organisational leaders. Human resource management practices, leadership and organisational culture should be aligned to increase the engagement of talented employees with the company (Coetzee & Stoltz 2015; Erkmen et al. 2017; Kaliannan & Adjovu 2015). Companies should monitor their individual and organisational talent goals, ensuring that talented employees remain engaged and committed. (Barkhuizen & Schutte 2015; Cappelli & Keller 2017). Engagement emerges frequently in literature related to talent retention. Having explored the evolving definitions of employee engagement, Schuck and Wollard (2013, p. 138) put forth that employee engagement can be defined as “a positive cognitive, emotional, and behavioural state directed toward organisational outcomes”. Bersin (2016, p. 15) confirms the cognitive, emotional and behavioural aspects of engagement and the impact thereof on talent retention. If talented employees feel connected to the company, believe in the company’s brand, vision and mission, feel supported by and connected to their leaders and resonate with the company culture, they are likely to stay (Erkman et al. 2017; Saleem & Iglesias 2016).

Literature review insights related to talent retention underline the role of brand commitment and employee engagement in talent retention. Internal branding is the recommended brand-building tool to activate and deploy talent retention strategies and build employee engagement (Erkmen et al. 2017; Saleem & Iglesias 2016). Roberts-Lombard et al. (2016, p. 51) postulate that building a strong brand identity within the organisation through internal branding has a positive impact on employee attitudes and actions. Not only does it enhance the working experience and commitment to the organisation, but it increases loyalty and retention. Du Preez and Bendixen (2015, p. 87) agree that internal brand building has a direct positive impact on talent’s intention to stay with the company, confirming a relationship between internal brand and talent retention.

Internal brand focuses on building the brand from within, targeting current employees (Erkmen et al. 2017; Punjaisri & Wilson 2017; Saleem & Iglesias 2016) with brand communication and practices that reinforce the brand’s values and purpose, increase positive brand associations and optimise employee engagement with the brand (Erkmen & Hancer 2015; Punjaisri & Wilson 2017; Saleem & Iglesias 2016).

Literature review insights suggest four key practices that are central to internal branding: internal brand communication that reinforces the brand's purpose and values (Erkmen et al. 2017; Saleem & Iglesias 2016); leadership practices that portray the brand's values and fosters employee engagement (Bali & Dixit 2016; Saleem & Iglesias 2016); fair, consistent and legally compliant human resources practices (Erkmen et al. 2017; Kaliannan & Adjovu 2015; Slavich, Cappetta & Giangreco 2014); and an organisational culture that supports talent and builds a sense of belonging (Kaliannan & Adjovu 2015; Russell & Brannan 2016).

Internal branding through these four key practices not only serves to retain talent, but engages talent optimally so their behaviour is brand-aligned and they live the brand in their working experience (Iglesias, Ind & Alfaro 2013; Merrilees 2017; Russell & Brannan 2016;). With effective internal branding and the optimal engagement of talent, current talented employees can be leveraged to advocate or evangelise the brand to all they come into contact with (Barrow & Mosley 2011; Balmer 2017; Erkmen et al. 2017; Russell & Brannan 2016; Venkatesh & Geetha 2015).

Literature review insight 6: Corporate brands have a stakeholder focus that attracts and retains the talent required to live the brand

Literature review insights show the relationship between employer brand and talent attraction, as well as the relationship between internal brand and talent retention. Deeper exploration of literature revealed a strong relationship between corporate brand and talent.

Before delving into the relationship between corporate brand and talent, it is essential to discuss and provide a working definition of corporate brands.

Corporate brands have a brand orientation that sees the company's brand speak on behalf of the company as a whole (Aaker 2004; Balmer 2017; Punjaisri & Wilson 2017; Urde 2013). Corporate brands are built from the inside with the purpose, vision and mission and values providing strategic direction (Li, Littleton & Akhtar 2017; Merrilees 2017) to the way in which the brand is portrayed outward to brand stakeholders (Balmer 2012; Balmer 2017; Lacroix 2013; Urde 2013; Urde & Greyser 2013).

Corporate brands are significant to this study as the corporate brand plays a role with employees, especially talented employees. Brand stakeholders, individuals or groups that come into contact with the brand, interact with the brand and/or contribute to the brand are central to the corporate brand (Balmer 2017; Punjaisri & Wilson 2017). Multiple stakeholders

build a corporate brand (Iglesias, Ind & Alfaro 2013; Merrilees 2017; Punjaisri & Wilson 2017) including internal stakeholders such as employees or investors, and external stakeholders like customers, suppliers or community groups (Balmer 2017; Kapferer 2012). All brand stakeholders should experience their contact with the corporate brand positively and find meaning and value in engaging with the brand (Balmer 2012; Balmer 2017; Hatch & Schultz 2001; Kaufmann et al. 2016).

Corporate brand building is concerned with the planned management of brand building behaviour in such a way that it attains favourable and positive responses from all stakeholders who encounter the overall company brand (Balmer 2017; Punjaisri & Wilson 2017; Urde 2013). This planned management of brand building behaviour seems to focus on the experiences that brand stakeholders have when engaging with the corporate brand (Kaufmann et al. 2016; Lacroix 2013; Li et al. 2017).

Given these insights around corporate brands, talent attraction and retention appear to be relevant to corporate branding for two reasons. Firstly, talented employees are seen as central brand stakeholders who should experience the brand positively as they come into contact with the brand (Balmer 2017; Kapferer 2012; Keller 2012; Merrilees 2017). This implies that the corporate brand aims to build strong relational or emotional bonds with prospective or current talent (Balmer 2017; Kaufmann et al. 2016; Merrilees 2017) – the very strong relational and emotional bonds that draw talent to the brand (Bali & Dixit 2016; Keller & Meaney 2017) and retain talent through employee engagement (Erkmen & Hancer 2015; Punjaisri & Wilson 2017; Saleem & Iglesias 2016). As such, corporate branding influences and enables both talent attraction and talent retention (Barriere et al. 2018; Keller & Meaney 2017).

Secondly, the corporate brands are built from the inside and rely on people to portray the brand's purpose and values outwards (Balmer 2017; Hatch & Schultz 2001; Kaufmann et al. 2016; Merrilees 2017). Recalling the working definition of talent, talent should fit with the brand, aligning with the brand's purpose and values (Barriere et al. 2018; Charan et al. 2018; Russell & Brannan 2016; Ulrich & Smallwood 2012). This brand fit in turn informs the degree to which talent will behave in ways that positively portray the brand and reinforce the brand's values (Kaufmann et al. 2016; Punjaisri & Wilson 2017; Sharif & Islam 2017). An engaged, talented employee, aligned with the corporate brand's purpose and values would therefore be a valuable asset in bringing the corporate brand to life to others in their working experience (Barriere et al. 2018; Charan et al. 2018; Hatch & Schultz 2001; Russell & Brannan 2016).

Mc Coy (2013, p. 329) states that corporate branding has become interwoven with other internal and external brand building practices. Strategy, values, culture, leadership and people practices are all part of the intangible mix that makes up a corporate brand, and all part of the intangible mix that attracts and retains talent (Balmer 2017; Punjaisri & Wilson 2017; Sharif & Islam 2017). Ind, Iglesias and Schultz (2013, p. 22) argue that the meeting of these two intangible mixes opens a space for brand co-creation, which sees talent co-creating the brand with other brand stakeholders. In this process of brand co-creation, the lines between employer, internal and corporate brand building become blurred as a co-creative community of stakeholders participate and contribute to the brand. (Ind, Iglesias & Schultz 2013; Kaufmann et al. 2016; Lacroix 2013).

Literature review insight 7: Consistent branding across employer, internal and corporate brand building platforms builds strong brands that attract and retain talent

Foster, Punjaisri and Cheng (2010, p. 405) present a framework that was of particular significance to this study. Their framework suggests that consistent alignment of brand messaging across employer, internal and corporate branding platforms will create a triangle of brand strength. As employer, internal and corporate brands have all been shown to positively impact talent attraction and retention. It stands to reason that strong brands that consistently align across these platforms would be particularly significant to talent, pointing the researcher to a deeper exploration of literature in this regard.

Collins (2014, p. 12) seems to support the theoretical framework presented by Foster et al. (2010, p. 405) in stating that talent research has been too confined to single areas of practice (e.g. talent attraction, talent retention) and has neglected to look at talent holistically. No one branding platform functions in isolation to attract and retain talent – there is an inextricable interrelatedness between all brand-building platforms (Born & Kang 2015; Mosley 2015; Sharif & Islam 2017).

Consistent branding sees the aligned and consistent portrayal of the brand's purpose and values to different brand stakeholders as they engage with the brand through contact points, communication and experiences across different brand building platforms (Balmer 2017; Hsu 2017; Lacroix 2013; Li et al. 2017). This consistent branding positively impacts both talent attraction and retention as talent experiences the brand true to its purpose and values across multiple brand contact points, and therefore is appealing and trustworthy (Collins 2014; Erkmen et al. 2017; Kanter 2011; Mosley 2015).

To achieve consistency across branding platforms, the strategic alignment of leadership is essential. Strategic alignment happens when an organisation's cross-functional senior and/or strategic leadership unites behind a shared purpose, vision, values and strategy (Bafaro, Ellsworth & Ghandi 2017; Balmer 2017; Charan, Barton & Carey 2018; Rosethorn 2018), integrating and aligning their approaches and tactics in order to achieve a common purpose and shared goals (Balmer 2017; Charan, Barton & Carey 2018; Li, Littleton & Akhtar 2017; Venkatesh & Geetha 2015).

Balmer (2017, p. 20) refers to “a sense of dynamic calibration” between stakeholders, leaders and the business environment. The strategic alignment of leadership in a so-called “leadership brand” (Ulrich & Smallwood 2007) sees human resources, brand management and line management join forces to drive a consistent brand (Balmer 2017; Merrilees 2017; Russell & Brannan 2016). In companies that are strong brands, leaders unite behind the business strategy, which drives the consistent enablement of the brand strategy and talent strategy (Balfaro et al. 2017; Kanter 2011; Mc Coy 2013).

Literature holds that companies that have consistently aligned their employer, internal and corporate brand building platforms become strong brands (Balmer 2017; Hatch & Schultz 2001; Li et al. 2017). This consistency stems from cross-functional strategic leadership alignment (Balfaro et al, 2017; Kanter 2011; Mc Coy 2013; Ulrich & Smallwood 2007). If one turns this argument around, and literature reviewed holds true, one could argue that a strong brand is one who has strategically aligned their cross-functional leadership and achieved consistent branding across employer, internal and corporate branding platforms. This argument re-emerges in Chapter 3 as the researcher sets out to identify a sample of corporate brands for primary research and looks to strong or top brands as literature would suggest that these brands have achieved the triad of brand strength proposed by Foster et al. (2010, p. 405) through strategically aligned leadership and consistent brand building.

Literature review insight 8: Coherent brands as talent magnets

Literature reviewed has shown that aligned, consistent branding builds trust in the brand, as brand stakeholders experience consistent reinforcement of the brand's purpose and values across multiple branding platforms and touchpoints (Balmer 2017; Kanter 2011; Lacroix 2013).

The relationship with the brand stakeholder strengthens with each brand experience, and as such, brands should mindfully consider stakeholder relationships with the brand across touchpoints and over time (Lacroix 2013; Li et al. 2017). With consistent experiences building

a strengthened relationship, brand stakeholders come to trust the brand to be coherent and congruent and the brand builds a reputation that promises consistent, value-adding experiences in future (Merrilees 2017; Urde & Greyser 2016).

It must be noted that this perceived brand coherence does not emerge by accident, nor after a few consistent branding experiences. Lacroix (2013, p. 13) outlines a Brand Coherence Infinity Loop and suggests that it requires meticulous strategic planning to pull together the foundational aspects of a brand (such as vision and values) with the aspects that give the brand momentum (such as experiences with the brand through media or other channels) in a cohesive manner. This infinity loop of coherent branding builds brand equity with stakeholders (Balmer 2017; Lacroix 2013). Seminal brand author Keller (1993, p. 8) defines customer-based brand equity as the value that a customer attributes to a brand in comparison to other, similar brands, informed by their brand knowledge. This brand knowledge hinges on the customer's relationship with the brand and experiences of the brand (Keller 1993). Whilst Keller's customer-based brand equity definition may be dated and customer-focused, it holds firm in context of the more current brand coherence school of thought. Customers include all brand stakeholders (Balmer 2017; Li et al. 2017) and these brand stakeholders will draw on their brand knowledge, evident in relational experiences, to attribute perceived value to a brand (Keller 1993; Keller 2012; Lacroix 2013). Coherent branding will increase the stakeholder's relational experiences with the brand and the subsequent value they attribute to the brand (Balmer 2017; Kaufmann et al. 2016; Urde & Greyser 2016). Rosethorn (2018, p. 2) refers to "purpose in action" and described how brands should activate purpose to be consistently experienced by all stakeholders across touchpoints in a manner that both creates and sustains shared value for all parties. Note that Rosethorn (2018, p. 2) does not just refer to the creation of value, but the sustaining thereof, and this sustaining seems to be key ingredient to coherent branding – it is in this sustainable experience of constantly reinforced value creation that brand coherence is created through a strengthened relationship (Lacroix 2013; Li et al. 2017).

A working definition of brand coherence emerges. Brand coherence stems from cross-functional strategic leadership alignment, which drives purposeful and meaningful brand experiences, delivered consistently across all branding platforms to all who come into contact with the brand (Balmer 2017; Li, Littleton & Akhtar 2017; Urde & Greyser 2016). This consistent reinforcement of the coherent brand's purpose and values strengthens the reputation of the brand and builds trust in the brand (Hsu 2017; Kanter 2011; Li, Littleton & Akhtar 2017).

Now to the matter of coherent brands as talent magnets. To abridge, there appears to be a magnetic pull that draws coherent brands and talent together– talent are drawn to coherent brands, and find value in their experiences with coherent brands, whilst coherent brands are drawn to the talent that can add value to stakeholders across their brand experiences.

Experiences and relationships have emerged as central ingredients to achieving brand coherence (Li et al. 2017; Merrilees 2017). A brand should consider all stakeholder experiences with the brand across touchpoints and over time (Balmer 2017; Li et al. 2017). Stakeholder experiences lead to relationships based on the stakeholder's perceived value of the brand (Lacroix 2013; Li et al. 2017; Rosethorn 2018). The brand should mould these experiences and relationships around stakeholder needs, ensuring that experiences are personal and relevant to where stakeholders are in their lives (Hsu 2017; Li et al. 2017).

Anchoring three insights around brand coherence, namely experiences, relationships and value, the researcher revisited the brand building practices of employer, internal and corporate branding discussed earlier in this section. Brands need to build a relationship with talent based on value, and this value is communicated through the employer brand offering (Bali & Dixit 2016; Keller & Meaney 2017; Mosley 2015; Russell & Brannan 2016), reinforced by internal branding (Erkmen et al. 2017; Saleem & Iglesias 2016; Ulrich & Smallwood 2012) and held by the purpose and values focus of the corporate brand (Balmer 2012; Balmer 2017; Punjaisri & Wilson 2017; Urde 2013). If talent engages with a brand and has multiple positive experiences that add value, a relationship of trust would seem to result from this coherent branding (Balmer 2017; Lacroix 2013; Li et al. 2017; Merrilees 2017). As such, coherent branding appears to be highly attractive to talent, as coherent branding should offer talent personal, relevant and value-adding experiences that build the strong and enduring brand relationships required to optimally attract and retain talent. (Balmer 2017; Ind et al. 2013; Kaufmann et al. 2016; Lacroix 2013; Li et al. 2017; Merrilees 2017).

The same force that draws talent to coherent brands – value – also appears to make talent magnetically attractive to coherent brands, as the following review of literature will show. It is clear that the role of employees in the infinite loop of brand coherence is essential as employees directly impact the many stakeholder experiences that are so central to brand coherence (Balmer 2017; Lacroix 2013; Li et al. 2017). Lacroix (2013, p. 3) conducted a brand coherence study in 120 companies globally and concluded that companies that are struggling to achieve brand coherence are missing a vital piece of the puzzle in that their internal employee behaviours are not reinforcing a coherent brand message.

In their Mc Kinsey and Company article entitled “*Linking Talent to Value*”, Barriere et al. (2018, p. 36) presents talent as the ultimate value creator and urged companies to deploy talent to roles that have the optimal impact on stakeholder value experiences. Linking talent to value requires careful analysis to establish roles that are key to value creation, coupled with the management of talent deployment into these roles. As such, a brand that has considered its value offering and key value contribution points will need the talent required to bring that value to life (Barriere et al. 2018; Lacroix 2013). In coherent brands with an aligned experience strategy, employees are key drivers to the enablement of that strategy (Li et al. 2017) and talented employees are indispensable assets in living the brand and values in such a manner that it provides optimal experiences to all stakeholders (Barriere et al. 2018; Sharif & Islam 2017; Ulrich & Smallwood 2012). The concept of matching talent to value has emerged in the earlier review of literature. To revisit, the strategic intent of a brand was held to focus on the unique and compelling value that the brand can add to all stakeholders (Balmer 2017; Sharif & Islam 2017; Urde 2013) and it is this value that ultimately informs talent requirements (Sharif & Islam 2017; Venkatesh 2013). This supports the link between talent and value creation, which highlights the importance of talent in building coherent brands that aim to add value across stakeholder experiences (Barriere et al. 2018; Lacroix 2013).

To draw this argument to a close, coherent brands require people that will reinforce value in each stakeholder experience (Barriere et al. 2018; Lacroix 2013; Li et al. 2017). Talent does that best (Barriere et al. 2018; Sharif & Islam 2017; Urde 2013; Venkatesh 2013). Whilst most employees will typically comply to the standards and rules laid down by leadership and brand (Kaufmann et al., 2016), a talented employee goes the extra mile. This is because talent internalises brand values and lives it out through deeds and words (Barriere et al. 2018), improving stakeholder experiences and building brand coherence (Barriere et al. 2018; Barton et al. 2018; Kaufmann et al. 2016; Lacroix 2013).

The magnetic force pulling coherent brands and talent together appears to be value – the value that coherent brands create for talent (Balmer 2017; Ind et al. 2013; Kaufmann et al. 2016; Merrilees 2017), and the value talent can create in building coherent brands (Barriere et al. 2018; Kaufmann et al. 2016; Lacroix 2013).

This magnetic force between coherent brands and talent is revisited when the research purpose is discussed in Section 2.5 of this study, showing how coherent brands are of particular significance to this study.

Literature review insights 3 – 8 synthesised visually

Literature review insights 3 to 8, presented in Section 2.3 of this chapter, outline brand in context of talent and bring to the fore the central brand and brand building constructs pertaining to talent attraction and retention. Figure 2.1 below depicts the insights visually, followed by a brief description thereafter.

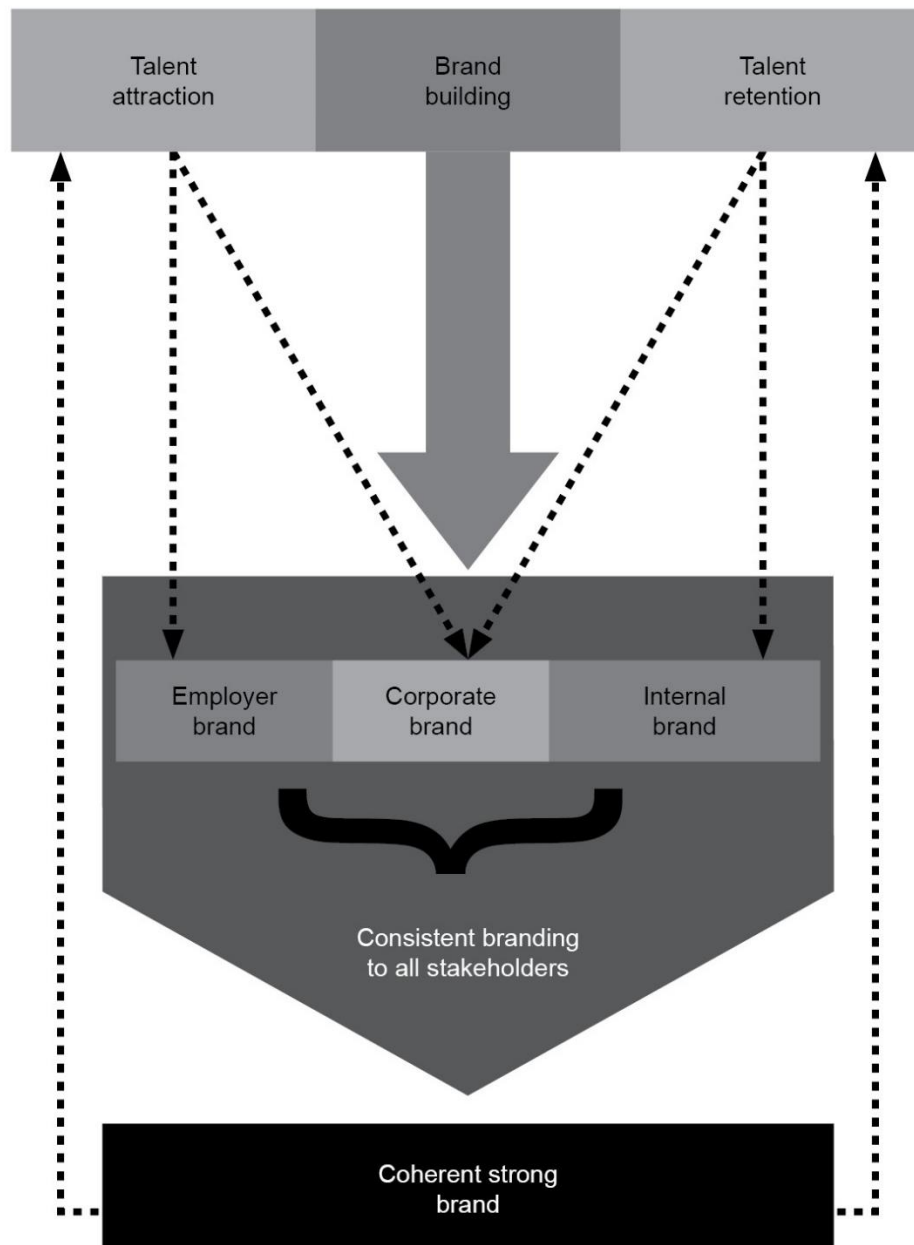


Figure 2.1: Brand building constructs related to talent attraction and retention

At the top of Figure 2.1, the terms talent attraction and talent retention are joined together with brand building, as brand building has been shown to be central to both talent attraction and retention (Bali and Dixit 2016; Mosley 2015; Russell & Brannan 2016; Shaefer 2016), whilst talent is also relevant to the building of brands (Aaker & Joachimsthaler 2012; Balmer 2017; Kotler & Armstrong 2018; Mc Coy 2013; Neumeier 2015). To enable talent attraction and retention, employer, internal and corporate brand building is used, as shown in the middle of Figure 2.1. Note the links between talent attraction and employer brand (Bali & Dixit 2016; Russell & Brannan 2016), talent retention and internal brand (Erkmen et al. 2017; Russell & Brannan 2016; Saleem & Iglesias 2016), and both talent attraction and retention and corporate brand (Balmer 2012; Balmer 2017; Kaufmann et al. 2016; Punjaisri & Wilson 2017; Urde 2013). Consistent branding to all stakeholders ensues when all three brand-building platforms are aligned (Balmer 2017; Foster et al. 2010; Merrilees 2017; Urde & Greyser 2016). Coherent, strong brands, placed at the bottom of Figure 2.1, in turn feed the attraction and retention of talent (Adrianova et al. 2018; Barton et al. 2018; Urde & Greyser 2016), as depicted by the arrows joining these constructs in Figure 2.1.

Literature review findings 3 to 8 were synthesised by visually depicting brands in context of talent. This point of the literature review also marked the completion of global literature reviewed in the field of talent and brand building. Before turning to the review of South African literature pertaining to talent and brand, the researcher synthesised the literature review insights obtained from global scholars, experts and thought leaders into global leading practices in talent attraction and retention through brand building.

Literature review insights 1 – 8 synthesised into global leading practices in talent attraction and retention through brand building

Literature review insights 1 to 8 were obtained from reviewing global literature from scholars, thought leaders and experts across multi-disciplinary fields that inform talent attraction and retention through brand building. A synthesis of these literature review insights (focused on practices widely advocated in the global arena) allowed the emergence of nine global leading practices in talent attraction and retention through brand building, which are presented herein.

Note that the numerical placement in order from one to nine is informed by literature reviewed and the emergence of literature review insights in a logical flow, one building on the other, commencing with talent identification and culminating in coherent branding. Each global leading practice is however equally important to the one before – as such, the numbering in no way ranks practices in order of importance.

The nine global leading practices in talent attraction and retention that emerged from a synthesis of global literature reviewed are presented as:

Practice 1: Identify the specific talent needed to enable organisational success (Barriere et al. 2018; Charan et al. 2018; Keller & Meaney 2017; King 2015; Russell & Brannan 2016; Venkatesh 2014).

Practice 2: View prospective talented employees as a brand stakeholder that should be positively influenced at every brand contact point (Balmer 2017; Keller & Meaney 2017; Russell & Brannan 2016; Schaefer 2016).

Practice 3: Develop an employer brand with a distinctive, relevant and persuasive employee value proposition (Bali & Dixit 2016; Born & Kang 2015; Mosley 2016; Mosley 2015; Sharif & Islam 2017; Venkatesh & Geetha 2015).

Practice 4: Implement strategically driven talent retention initiatives that incorporate aligned human resource management practices, leadership practices and internal brand communication (Bafaro et al. 2017; Erkmen et al. 2017; Punjaisri & Wilson 2017; Saleem & Iglesias 2016).

Practice 5: View internal talented employees as brand stakeholders that should be positively influenced at every brand contact point (Bafaro et al. 2017; King 2015; Merrilees 2017; Punjaisri & Wilson 2017; Saleem & Iglesias 2016).

Practice 6: Implement effective internal branding initiatives that reinforce the brand purpose and values and enhance the employee's engagement with the brand (Erkmen et al. 2017; Russell & Brannan 2016; Saleem & Iglesias 2016; Ulrich & Smallwood 2012).

Practice 7: Consistently brand to stakeholders across employer brand, internal brand and corporate brand platforms (Balmer 2017; Foster et al. 2010; Lacroix 2013; Li et al. 2017; Merrilees 2017; Urde & Greyser 2016).

Practice 8: Ensure that cross-functional leadership across human resources management, brand management and line management strategically align to drive talent and brand initiatives (Andrianova et al. 2018; Balmer 2017; Charan et al. 2018; Hatch & Schultz 2001; Iglesias, Ind & Alfaro 2013; Keller & Richey 2016; Sharif & Islam 2017; Urde & Greyser 2016).

Practice 9: Ensure that strategic leadership, from CEO level down, is committed to building brand coherence and strength through talent (Andrianova et al. 2018; Balmer 2017; Charan

et al. 2018; Kanter 2011; Li et al. 2017; Merrilees 2017; Ulrich & Smallwood 2007; Ulrich & Smallwood 2012; Urde & Greyser 2016).

With global leading practices emerging from literature reviewed presented, the researcher focused the literature review on the local South African landscape.

Before proceeding with Section 2.4 of this literature review, a brief motivation is provided for the separation of global literature and South African literature into two different sections. Initially, as the researcher embarked on the literature review, no clear distinction was made between global and local literature. However, the researcher noticed a different tone in global literature versus local literature. Global literature sources appeared to be presenting leading practices, with scholars building on each other's work and presenting new models, frameworks and theories (Charan et al. 2018; Keller & Richey 2016; Russell & Brannan 2016; Sharif & Islam 2017; Urde & Greyser 2016). South African literature held a somewhat more exploratory tone, exploring the application of and challenges associated with global leading practices in South African companies. For example, Theron, Barkhuizen and Du Plessis (2014) investigated factors influencing talent retention, whilst Du Preez and Bendixen (2015) studied the impact of internal branding on talent retention. Mazibuko and Govender (2017) explored workforce diversity in context of talent and organisational effectiveness, and Tladinyane (2016) studied organisational commitment of the South African workforce.

It must also be noted that at the time of this research there were very few South African studies in the field of talent and brand building, and the departure point of these studies appeared to be similar: a discussion of the socio-economic challenges that impact the talent and brand landscape in South Africa (Anand, Kothari & Kumar 2016; Botha & Rasool 2014; Mazibuko & Govender 2017; Tshilongamulenzhe 2017). Roughly 30 South African studies are presented in Section 2.4, and of the 30, two thirds have a talent and/or brand focus, whilst a third provides insight into the socio-economic challenges in South Africa. Of the roughly 20 studies in the field of talent and/or brand, no more than three put forth a new model, framework, theory or leading practice. The remainder of these studies explored the application of global leading practices in South Africa, or studied factors negatively impacting talent attraction and retention through brand building.

It became clear that global literature and South African literature would need to be held separately, and it was this separation that would ultimately lead to the identification of the research purpose.

2.4. Talent attraction and retention through brand building in the South African context

Earlier in this literature review, survey findings revealed critical talent shortages globally. The *Manpower Group Talent Shortage Survey 2018* suggested that global talent shortages have reached a 12-year high, with almost half of the 39 000 employers surveyed globally reporting critical talent shortages (The Manpower Group 2018). *The Global Talent Crunch 2018* report predicts a global talent shortage of 85 million people by 2030, with the highest shortfalls in developing countries (Korn Ferry Institute 2018). How does South Africa compare in terms of these looming global statistics?

The best way to understand South Africa's talent landscape in relation to the global talent landscape is by studying the *IMD World Talent Ranking 2018* report. This annual talent ranking study includes 63 countries globally, who are evaluated in terms of talent development criteria, appeal to talent and readiness in terms of the skills and competencies at hand in the country. South Africa's world ranking overall is 50th out of 63 countries. In terms of development of talent, South Africa ranks even lower, 56th globally (IMD Business School 2018).

South Africa therefore not only faces the global talent shortages predicted for a developing country, but also appears to be lagging behind its global counterparts in terms of talent development, appeal and readiness. As such, talent attraction and retention through brand building in South Africa is of critical importance in order to address the talent shortages and establish the country's talent competitiveness globally. As such, the research purpose of this study, namely to explore, in context of global leading practices, the talent attraction and retention practices pertaining to brand building in companies that are top South African brands, was supported by literature review findings and emerged to address the South African context of talent and brand.

In this section of the literature review, two key insights are presented from literature reviewed. Literature review insight 9 argues that global practices in talent and brand building would need to consider the local context, as branding to talent locally may require a tailored approach to meet the target market needs. Literature review insight 10 presents the literature review findings from South Africa in the field of talent and brand in relation to the socio-economic factors at play in the country.

Literature Review insight 9: Branding for talent should consider the context of talent

Looking firstly at the talent landscape, scholars and experts in the field of talent advised against seamless application of global practices in a local context, highlighting that factors like geographical location, economic status and cultural diversity could impact talent attraction and retention best practices and create variables or anomalies that need to be addressed (Subban 2016; Vaiman et al. 2018). Vaiman, Scullion and Collings (2012) argue that any talent practice decisions must recognise the context of the talent marketplace, holding that there are many specific factors that impact talent in emerging markets and that this impact has not been adequately explored with research in emerging markets. Schiemann (2014, p. 2) agrees that talent is impacted by the factors in the labour marketplace and talent pool. Vaiman et al. (2018, p. 28) highlight the consideration of variances between countries and regions before adopting a global talent view to a local context, holding that developing countries have to deal with a complex set of legal, economic and educational challenges in their talent attraction and retention quest (Schiemann 2014; Vaiman et al. 2012; Vaiman et al. 2018). Subban (2016, p. 14) states, “it must be noted that not everything can be adopted and practiced in the South African context”, citing a volatile economic climate, legal parameters, unemployment and skills shortages as some of the unique local challenges faced.

Literature therefore suggests that talent attraction and retention through brand building should consider the local context and calls for a deeper exploration of the South African talent landscape.

In the field of brand building, scholars and experts present a remarkably similar argument to motivate the exploration of the local context before embarking on brand building initiatives. Branding is a social construct, dependent on the subjective responses of the targeted customer (Aaker & Joachimsthaler 2012; Enslin & Klopper 2011). One could argue that a brand like Coca-Cola is branded across continents and countries as a single, global brand. Many would say that the identity of the Coca-Cola brand, encapsulated in the brand associations and experiences that customers should have when engaging with the brand, maintains a level of consistency regardless of context. Whilst the aim is always to maintain a level of consistency as the brand identity is portrayed globally, brand experts and scholars admit that a single brand identity across geographical or national marketplaces may be inadequate (Aaker & Joachimsthaler 2012; Keller, Parameswaran & Jacob 2011). The brand's identity may need to be tailored to the local context, catering to the specific needs of the local customer. As such, brands should conduct a customer analysis and gain as much information

as possible about the customer profile and geo-demographic and socio-psychographic factors before embarking on brand building initiatives (Aaker & Joachimsthaler 2012; Enslin & Kloppe 2011). This allows the brand to position itself in a manner that elicits positive associations from the targeted customer, resonating with the customer and differentiating itself from the clutter of other brands competing for attention in the same marketplace (Aaker & Joachimsthaler 2012; Enslin & Kloppe 2011). Employer brand building targets potential talent employees in a highly competitive talent marketplace. Talent is the brand customer (Bali & Dixit 2016; Barton et al. 2018). Internal brand building targets current talent employees in the organisation. Talent is the internal brand customer (Saleem & Iglesias 2016; Sharif & Islam 2017). Corporate brand building targets a wide range of brand stakeholders in the internal and external marketplace – prospective and current talented employees comprise a key brand stakeholder that is targeted through corporate brand building (Balmer 2017; Erkman et al. 2017). As such, it seems that employer, internal and corporate brand building should explore the needs and desires, the context of the targeted customer – prospective and current South African talented employees. With deeper insight into this customer, branding can be tailored to evoke positive subjective responses and resonate with local talent (Barton et al. 2018; Cappelli & Keller 2017).

With talent scholars and brand scholars urging an exploration of the South African landscape pertaining to talent through brand building, the researcher set out to explore South African literature that would provide insights in this regard.

Literature review insight 10: The South African talent landscape holds several socio-economic factors that should be considered in branding for talent

A literature review of 30 South African studies conducted between 2010 and 2018 allowed the researcher to obtain rich insight into the South African context. The literature review findings presented socio-economic factors that have had, and are predicted to continue having a significant effect on talent attraction and retention through brand building.

Economic uncertainty appears to be a reality in the lives of South African talent. The *Quarterly Labour Force Survey* from Statistics South Africa (2018) places the South African unemployment rate at a record high of 28%, meaning that approximately 6.2 million South Africans are unemployed (Statistics South Africa 2018). Furthermore, the volatile economic climate has resulted in widespread retrenchments and job losses (Aucoin & Cilliers 2016; Subban 2016). South African talent may be economically motivated, with financial compensation, benefits and job stability being desirable aspects of the employer brand and employee value proposition (Muleya et al. 2016; Theron et al. 2014; Vaiman et al. 2012). In

fact, some scholars hold that the corporate brand of the company, the purpose, vision and values, is less significant and persuasive in attracting and retaining South African talent (Ferreira 2016; Moloi, Oksitycz-Munyawiri & Ndong 2014; Muleya et al. 2016), who are looking for economic and financial stability above all else.

Socially, there are several factors at play that impact talent through brand building in South Africa. The education system, labour laws and organisational culture and leadership appear to play a role in the social setting within which both talent attraction and retention occurs.

The failing South African education system appears to be struggling to meet the employment demand for skilled workers (Anand, Kothari & Kumar 2016; Asmal 2015; Badat & Sayed 2014), causing the so-called “talent paradox” – high levels of unemployment causing a surplus of job seekers, paradoxically complemented with a critical shortage of skilled employees (Bhorat, Hirsch, Kanbur & Ncube 2014; Mateus, Allen-Ile & Iwu 2014; Subban 2016; Tshilongamulenzhe 2017). South Africa also continues to lose highly skilled workers in the “brain drain”, seeing talent emigrate abroad to avoid the political and economic uncertainty and high crime rates locally (Botha & Rasool 2014; Tshilongamulenzhe 2017). The talent pool may be relatively small in South Africa, despite a large pool of unemployed workers, and reaching talent among the many unemployed, unskilled job seekers may require focused brand building efforts.

Several uniquely South African labour laws appear to have an impact on the South African talent marketplace (Benjamin & Cooper 2016). The Broad Based Black Economic Empowerment Act 53 of 2003, shortly known as BBBEE, accompanied the Codes of Good Practice, drives the empowerment of previously disadvantaged groups. Companies that abide by the codes of good practice are required to pro-actively empower and advance black African employees in the workplace. Companies are required to commit to and drive the achievement of goals that see the appointment and rapid advancement of black African employees. As such, black African talent would have an advantage over other racial groups, with what is known as BBBEE “quotas” or goals driving the talent identification and development process in order to appoint, fast track and promote previously disadvantaged groups, most significant of which being the African black ethnic group (Benjamin & Cooper 2016; Horwitz 2013; Subban 2016). The Employment Equity Act, No. 55 of 1998 (EE for short) drives equality in the workplace, ensuring that equal opportunities are given to all employees. As part of an annual EE-plan, companies commit to the equitable distribution of the workplace in terms of race, gender and age. As such, EE commitments and planned targets could see the favouring

of a race, gender or age when it comes to identifying, attracting and retaining talent (Benjamin & Cooper 2016; Mazibuko & Govender 2017). The Skills Development Act 97 of 1998, known in short as the SDA, has seen significant investment in the development of employees, with companies contributing a portion of their annual salary bill to a governing body that monitors skills development within a sector. Companies are required to submit an annual skills plan and report on skills development initiatives in order to claim a portion of their financial contribution back. The investment in skills development has seen an upsurge in employer development initiatives, as well as the prioritising of development scarce skills. The SDA could impact the attraction and retention of talent in terms of the employer and internal branding value propositions, which are likely to focus on the development of skills as a mechanism to lure talent to the company (Benjamin & Cooper 2016; Subban 2016).

Besides the impact these labour laws have on employment practices in South Africa, the complexity associated with labour law compliance appears to have dominated leadership practices and overshadowed the intended wider agenda of transformation and rapid skills development (Barkhuizen & Schutte 2015; Mazibuko & Govender 2017; Mohlala et al. 2012). Furthermore, with labour laws promoting the employment and upliftment of previously disadvantaged groups, the term “talent” is likely to have race and/or gender qualifiers in South Africa favouring black (non-white) and/or female employees (Abbott, Goosen & Coetzee 2013; Mazibuko & Govender 2017). Legal compliance would impact brand building to talent, as the targeted talent customer would in all likelihood be non-white, whether African, Indian or Coloured and talent branding could possibly purposefully target female and/or disabled talent (Barkhuizen & Schutte 2015; Mazibuko & Govender 2017).

Labour laws that dictate the inclusion of previously disadvantaged racial groups in the workforce have resulted in rapidly increasing workforce diversity in terms of race, gender, culture, language, religion and so forth, which has placed pressure on South African organisations’ culture and leadership (Mazibuko & Govender 2017; Subban 2016). Literature suggests that South African leaders have struggled to embrace diversity and inclusion and transform their leadership practices (Shrivastava, Selvarajah, Meyer & Dorasamy 2014. Subban 2016; Tladinyane 2016) with some scholars suggesting that deep covert cultural undercurrents of discrimination, prejudice and stereotyping are prevalent in South African workplaces (Mazibuko & Govender 2017; Tladinyane 2016). Studies show that talented South Africans leave organisations where culture and leadership do not foster belonging and inclusion (Mazibuko & Govender 2017; Shrivastava et al. 2014; Theron et al. 2014; Tladinyane 2016). Organisational culture and leadership thus presents two considerations for talent

attraction and retention through brand building. Firstly, the diverse nature of the South African workforce may impact employer branding efforts, given that some South African companies have to develop multiple, diverse employee value propositions to attract interest from different targeted racial segments, specific genders, geographical areas or first language preference groups (Tladinyane 2016; Vaiman et al. 2012). Secondly, leadership practices and organisational culture, both key factors in internal branding (Saleem & Iglesias 2016), would appear to be negatively impacting talent retention in South African companies (Mazibuko & Govender 2017; Theron et al. 2014; Tladinyane 2016) and would require further exploration before embarking on internal branding initiatives.

Literature review insight 10 presents socio-economic factors that impact the South African talent and brand building landscape (Barkhuizen & Schutte 2015; Ferreira 2016; Mazibuko & Govender 2017; Theron et al. 2014). These socio-economic factors appear to confirm the argument that emerged from literature review insight 9, namely that the local context requires a deeper exploration in order to tailor talent and brand building practices to the unique talent marketplace (Schiemann 2014; Subban 2016; Vaiman et al. 2012; Vaiman et al. 2018).

On the one hand, the literature presents global leading practices in talent attraction and retention through brand building, which could arguably add value to South African companies and their leaders as they set out to attract and retain talent with brand building. On the other hand, Section 2.4 of the literature review presents arguments that caution against the adoption of these practices in the local context, and reveals uniquely South African socio-economic factors that could play a role in talent and branding. The need for further exploratory research into the local context is recommended by talent and brand scholars alike (Aaker & Joachimsthaler 2012; Enslin & Klopper 2011; Schiemann 2014; Vaiman et al. 2018). It was in this recommendation for further exploratory research that the research purpose found root.

2.5. Research purpose concretised

Before outlining the research purpose, it is helpful to summarise the tension points emerging from literature, which present a problem that research could attempt to address. Whilst global leading practices in talent attraction and retention through brand building provide helpful guidelines in branding for talent, the context in which employer, internal and corporate brand building is deployed, deserves due consideration (Enslin & Klopper 2011; Vaiman et al. 2018;). Any brand building efforts should be adapted to suit the unique needs of the customer (Aaker & Joachimsthaler 2012), which in this instance is prospective and current talented employees.

A brief review of South African literature in the field of talent attraction and retention through brand building reveals several socio-economic factors that would need to be considered in the local marketplace (Ferreira 2016; Theron, Barkhuizen & Du Plessis 2014). In addition to this, it would seem that talent attraction and retention through brand building is an under researched field and scholars call for further research in the local context (Mazibuko & Govender 2017; Tsilongamulenzhe 2017). With due consideration of the fact that roughly 28% of South African adults are unemployed (Statistics South Africa 2018), a critical shortage of skilled workers (Anand, Kothari & Kumar 2016) and a volatile economic climate (Subban 2016), it is feasible that South African companies are placing the war for talent high on their agenda. Local companies and their leaders would stand to benefit from insights that will allow optimal brand building practices in the attraction and retention of talent.

Considering that the literature advised research into the local South African context, the researcher looked to companies that are top South African brands. This decision was informed by section 2.3 of this chapter, which revealed that companies that have strong, coherent brands were seen to be talent magnets (Balmer 2017; Charan et al. 2018; Lacroix 2013; Li et al. 2017; Urde & Greyser 2016). The richest South African source for exploratory research insights would be South African corporate brands that appear to have achieved consistent alignment across employer, internal and corporate branding platforms in their talent attraction and retention attempts. As such, strong or top South African brands became the focal point of the research purpose.

The **research purpose** of this study is concretised as:

To explore, in the context of global leading practice, the talent attraction and retention practices pertaining to employer, internal and corporate brand building in companies that are top South African brands.

With the research purpose concretised, the conclusion that follows pulls together the insights obtained from literature that informed the research purpose and paves the way to Chapter 3 of this study, which introduces the research design and methodology.

2.6 Literature review conclusion

Ten literature review insights arise from a synthesis of literature reviewed. The ten insights are presented next, followed by a brief summative discussion to provide a fitting conclusion to the literature review chapter.

Literature review insight 1: Talent defined in terms of performance, potential, brand fit and/or critical skill sets

Literature review insight 2: Talent in high demand and short supply, necessitating focused talent management strategies

Literature review insight 3: Brand and brand building are relevant to talent, whilst talent is also relevant to brand and brand building

Literature review insight 4: Employer brand attracts talent

Literature review insight 5: Internal brand building retains talent

Literature review insight 6: Corporate brands have a stakeholder focus that attracts and retains the talent required to live the brand

Literature review insight 7: Consistent branding across employer, internal and corporate brand building platforms builds strong brands that attract and retain talent

Literature review insight 8: Coherent brands as talent magnets

Literature review insight 9: Branding for talent should consider the context of talent

Literature review insight 10: The South African talent landscape holds several socio-economic factors that should be considered in branding for talent

The literature review insights are presented numerically in order to show how the review of literature unfolded and not as a means of ranking importance. Commencing with a review of literature pertaining to the war for talent, the literature defines talent in terms of performance, potential, brand fit and/or critical skill sets (Cappelli & Keller 2017; Gallardo-Gallardo & Thunnissen 2016; Keller & Meaney 2017; Russell & Brannan 2016).

With talent in high demand and short supply globally, the need for focused talent management strategies is underlined (Bafaro et al. 2017; Barriere et al. 2018; Cappelli & Keller 2017; Charan et al. 2018; Keller & Meaney 2017; Venkatesh 2013).

As to the matter of the relevance of brand and brand building to talent, the literature suggests a mutually reciprocal relationship between the two, holding that branding is relevant to talent (Mosley 2015; Russell & Brannan 2016; Shaefer 2016), whilst talent is also relevant to the building of brands (Balmer 2017; Charan et al. 2018; Kotler & Armstrong 2018; Mc Coy 2013; Neumeier 2015).

According to the literature, employer brand drives talent attraction (Bali & Dixit 2016; Keller & Meaney 2017; Russell & Brannan 2016), internal branding retains talent (Erkmen et al. 2017; Russell & Brannan 2016; Saleem & Iglesias 2016) and the stakeholder focus of corporate brand impacts both the attraction and retention of talent required to live the corporate brand (Balmer 2017; Hatch & Schultz 2001; Punjaisri & Wilson 2017; Sharif & Islam 2017; Urde 2013).

Literature suggests that consistent branding across employer, internal and corporate brand building platforms builds strong brands that attract and retain talent (Foster et al. 2010; Merrilees 2017; Urde & Greyser 2016). Furthermore, the role of talent in the building of experiences and relationships that enable coherent brands reveals a magnetic relationship between coherent brands and talent (Charan et al. 2018; Lacroix 2013; Li et al. 2017; Merrilees 2017; Urde & Greyser 2016).

The relationship between talent attraction and retention and the related brand constructs of employer brand, internal brand, and corporate brand, consistent branding and coherent branding was visually presented. A further synthesis of global literature reviewed in the field of talent attraction and retention through brand building yielded nine global leading practices in this regard.

Scholars encouraged a focused literature review to explore the local talent and brand context (Aaker & Joachimsthaler 2012; Enslin & Klopper 2011; Schiemann 2014; Subban 2016; Vaiman et al. 2018). An exploration of literature pertaining to the South African talent and brand landscape revealed several socio-economic factors (Anand et al. 2016; Ferreira 2016; Muleya et al. 2016; Theron et al. 2014; Vaiman et al. 2012) relevant to talent attraction and retention through brand building in South Africa (Abbott et al. 2013; Barkhuizen & Schutte 2015; Mazibuko & Govender 2017).

The presented research purpose was concretised within the context of the need for exploratory primary research to shed light on the talent attraction and retention practices pertaining to employer, internal and corporate brand building. The research purpose stipulates that this research would be done on companies that are top South African brands as literature indicates that these coherent, strong brands could offer the richest possible insights pertaining to talent and brand building.

Holding the global literature review findings close whilst embarking on a study to lend rich insight into what emerged as a unique South African talent and brand landscape, the researcher concludes the literature review and transitions to the research design and methodology to enable this research purpose, which is outlined in Chapter 3.

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

3.1. Introduction

Chapter 3 outlines the research design and methodology that informed this study. The research purpose articulated at the end of Chapter 2 comes to life through research. This chapter outlines the scientific method of enquiry (Flick 2018; Rahi 2017) deployed to explore, in the context of global leading practices, the talent attraction and retention practices pertaining to employer, internal and corporate brand building in companies that are top South African brands.

Figure 3.1 to follow, shares the research design and methodology in response to the research purpose and research questions. A brief introduction to the terms and constructs represented in Figure 3.1 is presented thereafter, followed by a detailed discussion of the research design and methodology related to this study.

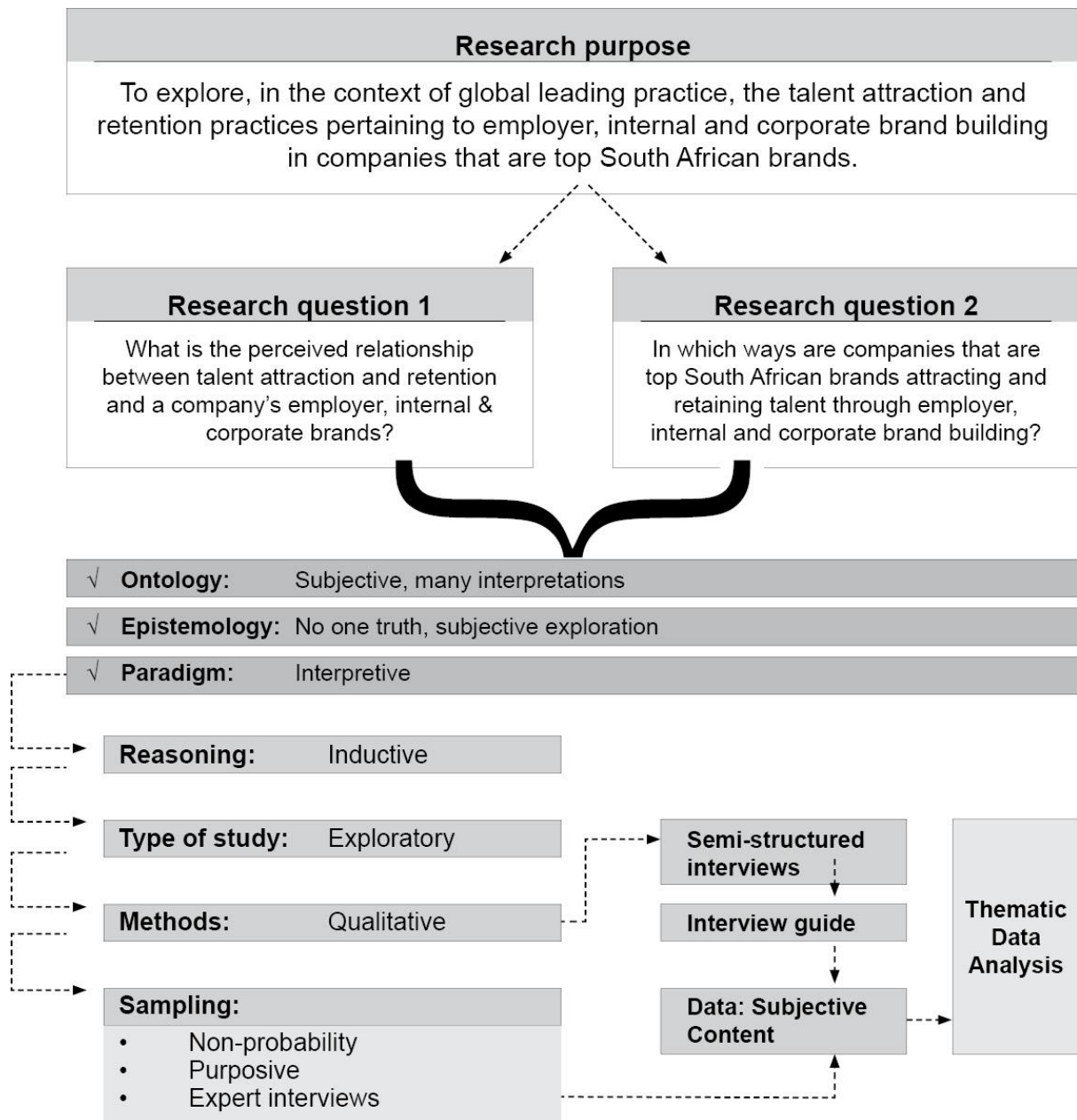


Figure 3.1: An introduction to the research design and methodology

At the top of Figure 3.1, the research purpose outlines what will be studied. Research questions follow, providing direction to the study (Newman & Covrig 2013). Research question 1 explores the perceived relationship between talent attraction and retention and a company's employer, internal and corporate brands (Newman & Covrig 2013). Research question 2 points to the gathering of data in the form of practices, shedding light on the talent attraction and retention practices pertaining to brand building used by top South African brands (Newman & Covrig 2013). The researcher will show how consistency was achieved between the title of the study, the research purpose and research questions through repetition of key

words, consistent use of an exploratory tone and reinforcement of who would be studied where: companies that are top South African brands (Newman & Covrig 2013; Flick 2018).

Figure 3.1 also presents the selected ontology and epistemology, which leads the way to the selection of the interpretive paradigm (Flick 2018; Thanh & Thanh 2015) to drive exploratory research that would allow rich insights to emerge (Babin & Zikmund 2015). The chapter describes the use of qualitative research methods to drive high levels of empathetic engagement with research participants (Percy, et al. 2015; Wright et al. 2016). Literature reviewed held that three strategic-level leaders play an equally important role in talent through brand building (Balmer 2017; Charan et al. 2018; Saleem & Iglesias 2016): Brand management, human resource or talent management and line management respectively. These three purposefully sampled research participants were interviewed during the period September 2018 to May 2019 across five companies, all of which were corporate brands that held the top brand position and achieved a first place in their industry category, in the *Sunday Times Top Brands Survey 2017*.

Section 3.6 of this chapter addresses ethical considerations, which were of great significance for this study. The study was conducted in what can only be called a powerhouse of brands: South Africa's number one brands in telecommunications, health and medical care, banking, motor vehicles and life insurance. Within these brands, the research sample included participants that are arguably amongst the most influential leaders in their fields in South Africa. Ethical considerations will show how informed consent, anonymity and confidentiality protected the identity of these companies and leaders and eliminated any reputational risk that may have resulted from participation in this study.

By doing this research, the researcher aimed to find the truth about the phenomena being studied (Lewis 2015; Flick 2018). This truth revealed itself through data in the form of content obtained from transcribed semi-structured interviews (Flick 2018; Rahi 2017). In Chapter 4 of this study, the researcher will show how inductive reasoning through thematic analysis was used to find the truth in the form themes and subthemes that answer the research questions and fulfil the research purpose of this study.

3.2. Research purpose

Chapter 2 of this study presented literature review insights, which were further synthesised into nine global leading practices in attracting and retaining talent through brand building. The literature review also included expert and scholarly views that called for a deeper exploration

of the local context into which brand building for talent would be done (Subban 2016; Vaiman et al. 2018). A review of South African literature indicated that there were in fact several socio-economic factors that could impact branding for talent in South Africa (Barkhuizen & Schutte 2015; Mazibuko & Govender 2017; Subban 2016; Tshilongamulenzhe 2017).

The research purpose was formulated in response to the emerging need for further empirical investigation and deeper insight into the local context, as motivated by literature review insights (Flick 2018; Newman & Covrig 2013).

The **research purpose** of this study was as follows:

To explore, in the context of global leading practice, the talent attraction and retention practices pertaining to employer, internal and corporate brand building in companies that are top South African brands.

The purpose statement was carefully formulated to inform the approach the researcher would use, the central phenomenon being investigated, and to introduce the likely research methods, participants and probable empirical data that the study would set out to collect (Flick 2018; Lewis 2015; Newman & Covrig 2013).

3.3. Research questions

The research purpose provides insight into what this study intended to do (talent attraction and retention practices pertaining to brand building were to be explored) and who would be studied where (companies that are top South African brands). The what, who and where contained in the research purpose were further unpacked in the formulation of research questions, that not only mobilised the research purpose but provided a clear view of what data would need to be collected during primary research (Flick 2018; Newman & Covrig 2013).

Two research questions guided this study, the first of which probed the relationships between the constructs articulated in the research purpose – the perceived relationship between talent attraction and retention and a company's employer, internal and corporate brands. The second research question addressed the central issue of the study, and illuminated the data that would need to be collected – a set of practices or “ways in which” these companies were attracting and retaining talent through employer, internal and corporate brand building (Newman & Covrig 2013).

The following research questions guided this study, each underpinned by a brief descriptor of the research methods that will be used to address the question:

Research question 1: What is the perceived relationship between talent attraction and retention and a company's employer, internal and corporate brands?

This research question is addressed in part by literature, which suggests a relationship between talent attraction and retention and a company's employer, internal and corporate brands (Balmer 2017; Hatch & Schultz 2001; Li et al. 2017). In particular, literature confirms the relationship between employer brand and talent attraction (Bali & Dixit 2016; Sharif & Islam 2017), as well as internal brand and talent retention (Bafaro et al. 2017; Punjaisri & Wilson 2017). However, the inclusion of corporate brand in talent attraction and retention, and the consistent branding across employer, internal and corporate brand building platforms, appears to be a leading practice which is advocated to build strong, coherent brands (Balmer 2017; Merrilees 2017) and is arguably being applied by brands that are strategically aligned and focused on building a strong, coherent brand (Keller & Meaney 2017; Lacroix 2013). It is unclear what the relationship is between talent attraction and retention and South African companies' employer, internal and corporate brand, with some scholars suggesting that socio-economic factors in the South African workplace could create a lack of leadership alignment (Mazibuko & Govender 2017; Tladinyane 2016) or impact the perceived importance of one brand building platform over another (Ferreira 2016; Muleya et al. 2016). For this reason, primary research is required to ascertain the perceived relationship in question, making research question 1 an important driver in the formulation of the research instrument to be used in primary research.

Research question 2: In which ways are companies that are top South African brands attracting and retaining talent through employer, internal and corporate brand building?

This research question is partially informed by literature, although the practices identified are global leading practices. This research question is mainly addressed in primary research. The research methodology, outlined shortly, will show how qualitative research conducted with semi-structured interviews, will probe the practices used by companies that are top South African brands.

Research question 1 was explored in global literature reviewed, which suggested a strong relationship between talent attraction and retention and a company's employer, internal and corporate brands. However, few South African studies explored this relationship in the local context. Scholars expressed the need for further empirical research in South Africa to confirm theories and findings (Barkhuizen & Schutte 2015; Coetzee & Stoltz 2015; Ferreira 2016; Mazibuko & Govender 2017; Roberts-Lombard et al. 2016). Research question 1 therefore probes the perceived relationship between the constructs talent attraction and retention, and the related brand building practices, which will be addressed further in primary research.

Research question 2 steers the primary research to explore practices used by companies that are top South African brands. "In which ways" was purposely included to ensure that the research focus remains on practices – things that these companies are doing or saying to attract and retain talent through employer, internal and corporate brand building. This will ensure that, whilst global leading practices provide context to the study, the focus remains on exploring and revealing local practices in primary research.

Companies that are top South African brands were included in both the research purpose and research question 2. Literature reviewed held that companies that are top brands appear to brand consistently across employer, internal and corporate brand building platforms (Balmer 2017; Foster et al. 2010; Sharif & Islam 2017), and seem to have created a strong, trustworthy and coherent brand that resonates with talent (Balmer 2017; Charan et al. 2018; Lacroix 2013; Urde & Greyser 2016).

3.4. Research design

The research purpose and questions informed the research design, which included a consideration and selection of the most suitable ontology, epistemology, research paradigm, type of study and reasoning approach to respond to the research purpose and questions and create consistency between what the study set out to do and how it was done (Flick 2018; Newman & Covrig 2013).

3.4.1. Ontology and epistemology

Wright et al. (2016, p. 1) suggest that the researcher should commence research design by firstly defining the philosophical assumptions held by the researcher and required from the study. This will clarify the lens that the researcher will use to view reality and knowledge, which has a significant impact on the manner in which research is designed.

The researcher should first consider the philosophy that underpins reality, called ontology. Ontology asks “what can we know?”, which sees the researcher selecting a worldview which either exists outside the researcher in an objective reality, or resides in a space of subjectivity, where there are many interpretations and no one truth (Lewis 2015; Rahi 2017).

The researcher should also consider the philosophy that underpins the nature of knowledge, called epistemology. With due consideration of the ontological worldview, epistemology focuses on how we can know what we need to know. We can know either one truth through an objective view or multiple truths or insights through subjective exploration (Rahi 2017; Wright et al. 2016).

The researcher carefully considered the worldview that would inform the ontology and epistemology underpinning this study. Reality, according to this study, is a subjective concept, open to interpretation and discovery. This ontology was already evident in the research purpose and questions, which called for exploratory research that could give deeper insights around the matter being studied. This ontology aligned well with a more subjective epistemology, as knowledge gained would have to be open to interpretation and leave room for multiple truths to be discovered (Rahi 2017; Wright et al. 2016).

3.4.2. Paradigm

Research paradigms are strongly influenced by the ontology and epistemology applicable to the researcher and the study (Lewis 2015; Thanh & Thanh 2015). The study was well suited to an ontology rooted in subjective exploration or reality and an epistemology that allowed for subjective exploration and interpretation to reveal multiple truths emanating from exploring the worlds of others (Wright et al. 2016).

This ontology and epistemology best align with the interpretive paradigm (Rahi 2017). The worldview that informs this paradigm is one that sees possibilities and a rich field of insights that can be obtained from others and interpreted by the researcher in order to uncover reasons and meanings that inform the many subjective experiences of others (Flick 2018; Rahi 2017; Thanh & Thanh 2015). The interpretive paradigm would allow the personal immersion of the researcher in the research, subjectively interpreting and making meaning of the data being collected (Flick 2018; Rahi 2017; Wright et al. 2016). This study originated from a place where there was no right or wrong as no one truth was required by the research purpose or questions – instead the research purpose and questions called for insights into the reality and practices deployed by top South African brands.

Interpretive researchers are inseparable from the research itself. A high level of interaction with research participants and data is pivotal as the interpretive researcher tries to understand and experience the world of the research participants (Rahi 2017).

The interpretive researcher is required to have in-depth knowledge of the research field, obtained by a thorough review of literature and a firm theoretical foundation that underpins research. This foundation informs the interpretive researcher's ability to explain and make sense of subjective responses in order to derive meaning and find insights therein (Flick 2018; Wright et al. 2016). This interpretive paradigm was well suited to the researcher, who had studied literature in depth and synthesised findings into a set of nine global leading practices. The researcher was thus knowledgeable about the field and would be able to interpret subjective responses in a manner that could explain and make sense of data in context of the literature, in order to ascribe meaning and provide insights.

3.4.3. Type of study

The researcher selected the interpretive paradigm as the best worldview with which to approach the research study. With an ontology rooted in a subjective nature of reality with multiple truths to be explored, and an epistemology that pointed to subjective engagement with the views of others, the researcher had to select the type of study that would be most consistent with the paradigm, ontology and epistemology selected.

Babin and Zikmund (2015, p. 53) hold that there are three types of studies that make up basic research design: descriptive, explanatory (or causal) and exploratory. These study types drive the manner in which research will be conducted in order to meet the purpose and questions set. The researcher did not believe the study to be descriptive, as the research purpose and questions did not require an accurate, objective description of the matters being studied. The study was also not explanatory or causal, as the purpose of the study did not point to a need to explain anything or ascertain the direct impact of one item on another. The researcher found an exploratory study most suited to the study as this would allow investigation into a relatively unknown research field and would draw on open and flexible approaches in order to arrive at broad insights that could shed light on the matter being studied (Babin & Zikmund 2015; Lewis, 2015). Research findings from exploratory research are not final or conclusive. Instead, these findings could provide insights and possible explanations for those insights, all of which could be examined in more detail with further research (Flick 2018; Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill 2012).

The purpose of the study suggested that the focus be on discovering new insights and shedding light on the local reality in the context of the global leading practices. The purpose did not seem to indicate the requirement of conclusive findings, nor proving or disproving the relevance of the global leading practices in South Africa. Instead, the purpose pointed towards exploring and uncovering talent attraction and retention practices pertaining to brand building. The researcher noted that the exploratory study type was, in fact, a feature of both the title of the study and the research purpose, creating an alignment between the title, purpose and study approach (Newman & Covrig 2013).

3.4.4. Reasoning approach

The selection of an interpretive paradigm and exploratory study type strongly influenced the reasoning approach applicable to this study. Researchers can approach the analysis of research findings by reasoning in either a deductive or an inductive manner. Deductive reasoning is applied when there is a preconceived theory or hypotheses that is either proven or disproven conclusively in research (Flick 2018; Marczyk, De Matteo & Festinger 2017). As the researcher set out to conduct research without a theory or hypotheses, aiming to take an interpretive approach to an exploratory study and make sense of the subjective responses of participants, deductive reasoning was not suitable to this study. Inductive reasoning is well suited to the interpretive paradigm, as this allows the researcher to work with subjective responses in an inductive manner, allowing an open approach to reasoning that allows multiple themes and concepts to emerge from the data and inform the findings (Marczyk, De Matteo & Festinger 2017; Thanh & Thanh 2015).

Inductive reasoning would require the researcher to approach research without preconceived ideas and allow the data to speak for itself and provide all the answers. To do this, the researcher would collect data, become really immersed in and familiar with the data and then use inductive analysis to make sense of the data. This inductive analysis process would allow the researcher to synthesise the data interpreted so that themes or patterns can naturally emerge out of the data (Flick 2018; Percy et al. 2015). As this study aimed to explore and shed light on talent through brand building, the researcher would need to remain open to any information or opinions that emerged, and would need to approach research without preconceived ideas or theories. Using inductive reasoning was well suited to the researcher's approach of gaining a wide range of insightful data, which could then be interpreted and analysed to yield exploratory research findings.

In summary, the research design ontology and epistemology aligned well with the interpretive paradigm, using an exploratory study type and an inductive reasoning approach.

3.5. Research methodology

Research methodology outlines the practical details around how the researcher will go about doing the research and how this will help the study to uncover the truth it seeks to uncover (Flick 2018; Wright et al. 2016).

The research methodology should be logically aligned to the research design and methods should be well suited to deliver what is required by the study's purpose and questions (Babin & Zikmund 2015; Marczyk et al. 2017). Given the researcher's selection of the interpretive paradigm, an exploratory study and inductive reasoning approach, the research methodology selected should create high levels of interaction between the researcher and participants, a rich way to source subjective experiences from others, and the ability to apply inductive reasoning to make sense of data. These requirements were central to the selection of the qualitative research methodology, which is outlined next.

3.5.1. Qualitative research

Whilst quantitative research is best used to justify a narrowly defined research area, qualitative research is best suited to an exploratory approach as it allows for broad discovery and it works particularly in the research of complex, subjective social matters (Flick 2018; Percy, et al. 2015; Wright et al. 2016). The research purpose of this study indicated the need for such a broad approach of discovery and aimed to shed light on complex social matters.

Qualitative research methods were selected above quantitative methods, as this was deemed the most appropriate methodology to address the research purpose and questions. Qualitative methods allow for the exploration of subjective reality and the gaining of deeper insights into the world of others (Flick 2018; Rahi 2017). Qualitative research is conducted by the researcher typically observing or questioning others in their natural environment – as such, the researcher is highly involved in the actual research experience and data collection. This strong relationship between the researcher and the environment and data is the key differentiator between qualitative and quantitative research, which sees the researcher standing objectively outside the data being analysed (Percy et al. 2015; Wright et al. 2016). Qualitative research participant responses are likely to lend insights into real-world events and experiences as well as deeper insights into the internal, personal world of participants through

their opinions, views and experiences (Flick 2018; Percy et al. 2015). Qualitative methods also best align to the subjective ontology and epistemology, which holds that there is no one truth, as well as the interpretive paradigm, which allows a broad worldview and the interpretation of multiple realities (Rahi 2017; Wright et al. 2016).

3.5.2. Data collection

Qualitative research is conducted using methods that immerse the researcher into the reality of participants. These methods include, among others, observations, interviews or case studies (Percy et al. 2015; Thanh & Thanh 2015).

Interviewing was selected as the best method of data collection to yield such rich insights. Interviews would allow the researcher to engage with research participant responses and develop an understanding of their subjective reality through questions and deep empathetic listening. Observations would require the researcher to be more detached from the research participants and would not allow a deep level of engagement. As the research area was a relatively unexplored field, case studies were also not found to be feasible, as there were few case studies on which the researcher could draw. In this research field, preliminary explorative research was required in order to provide insights into the largely uncovered subjective reality of participants, and interviews could enable this optimally (Flick 2018; Marczyk et al. 2017).

Interviews could follow several approaches, with structured, semi-structured or narrative approaches being the most prevalent (Stuckey 2013; Thanh & Thanh 2015). Structured interviews are rigidly designed to a strict question and answer format, while narrative interviews allow participants to speak freely about a topic (Percy et al. 2015; Stuckey 2013). As the research purpose of this study was to explore the talent attraction and retention practices pertaining to brand building, the interview structure had to allow for a measure of focus on talent attraction and retention practices pertaining to brand building, whilst still allowing participants the freedom to provide rich exploratory insights. Structured interviews would allow the researcher to narrow the interview scope to talent attraction and retention practices pertaining to brand building but would not allow participants the freedom to respond with deeper insights. Narrative interviews would be too open and unstructured to hone interview questions and data collected to the talent and brand field outlined (Stuckey 2013; Thanh & Thanh 2015).

Semi-structured interviews allowed the researcher to hone the interview questions to the fields of talent attraction and retention practices pertaining to brand building, providing a partial

structure that guided the interview responses, but allowed a measure of flexibility in that participants could respond in any way they wish to the research questions (Stuckey 2013). Semi-structured interviews would also allow the researcher to ask follow-up questions to deepen her understanding or gain more insight (Percy et al. 2015; Stuckey 2013).

Expert interviews are a type of semi-structured interview that sees the researcher conducting interviews with carefully defined experts in a field. Researchers that wish to conduct expert interviews should be mindful of the valuable time provided by experts, and interviews should hold a firm, informed structure to ensure that the interview questions get straight to the point. Interview questions should also allow the expert to share their expert views in the form of insights, experiences and opinions related to each question (Flick 2018).

The literature review suggested that companies that are top South African brands are likely to be coherent, consistent brands that have seemingly aligned their employer, internal and corporate brand building initiatives (Balmer 2017; Lacroix 2013; Urde & Greyser 2016) and these companies would provide the best insights in practices to attract and retain talent through brand building. The literature reviewed also indicated that there were three strategic-level leaders in each company that could provide optimal expertise in talent attraction and retention practices pertaining to brand building (Balmer 2017; Charan et al. 2018; Venkatesh & Geetha 2015). Not only would this study therefore focus on a sample of companies that are top brands and could provide expertise, but within these companies, expert participants were selected.

The researcher noted that semi-structured interviews with experts required her to obtain a high level of understanding about the subject area before setting out to conduct primary research. When conducting expert interviews, it is essential that the researcher appears competent and knowledgeable to the experts, and that interview questions are tailored to the expert's level of expertise and seniority (Flick 2018).

A thorough literature review allowed the researcher to deepen understanding and form a theoretical framework that guided research. The researcher was comfortable that she had obtained a deep understanding of the field and was able to apply this expertise to the formulation of suitable questions that would resonate with the level of expertise held by experts, honing interview questions to the field being studied in order to optimise the interview time allocated.

The researcher thus selected a semi-structured interview format for data collection and considered how best to use this in expert interviews.

3.5.3. Research instrument – Semi-structured interview guide

With semi-structured interviews with experts selected as the most appropriate data collection method for the qualitative study, the researcher compiled the research instrument – a semi-structured interview guide, tailored to the level of expertise of research participants.

To design the questions for the research instrument, the researcher first considered scholarly literature that informed the optimal structure and style of semi-structured interview questions. The researcher then undertook a rigorous process to establish the purpose and content that should inform and guide the formulation of the interview questions. Scholarly literature reviewed suggested that the semi-structured interview guide questions should be formulated ahead of time, providing the researcher with one set of questions that are consistently used in every interview (Stuckey 2013). Interview questions should ideally be open-ended, allowing the participant to share their subjective opinions and experiences. Where relevant, questions could contain an invitation to provide deeper details with responses, such as examples or reasons (Stuckey 2013). The questions should also clearly indicate that the researcher is interested in the subjective responses of participants and encourage them to respond from their own point of view (Percy et al. 2015).

The researcher noted that the semi-structured interview guide should be particularly carefully compiled when interviewing experts. Experts are time pressured and their expertise is valuable. The researcher therefore kept the interview questions to a minimum, cutting out all superfluous questions in favour of the most pertinent questions that would address the research purpose and questions optimally (Flick 2018).

The interview questions were thus formulated before embarking on primary research, providing the researcher with a semi-structured interview guide that was consistently used in each interview. Interview questions were designed to be open-ended and invite subjective, personal responses by including terms like “in your experience” or “what would you say” (Robinson 2014; Stuckey 2015). Interview questions also included a prompt to share examples or experiences to enrich responses.

To compile the content of the interview questions in a manner that would elicit participant responses that would add value to the purpose and questions guiding the study, the researcher followed the process outlined in Figure 3.2 below.

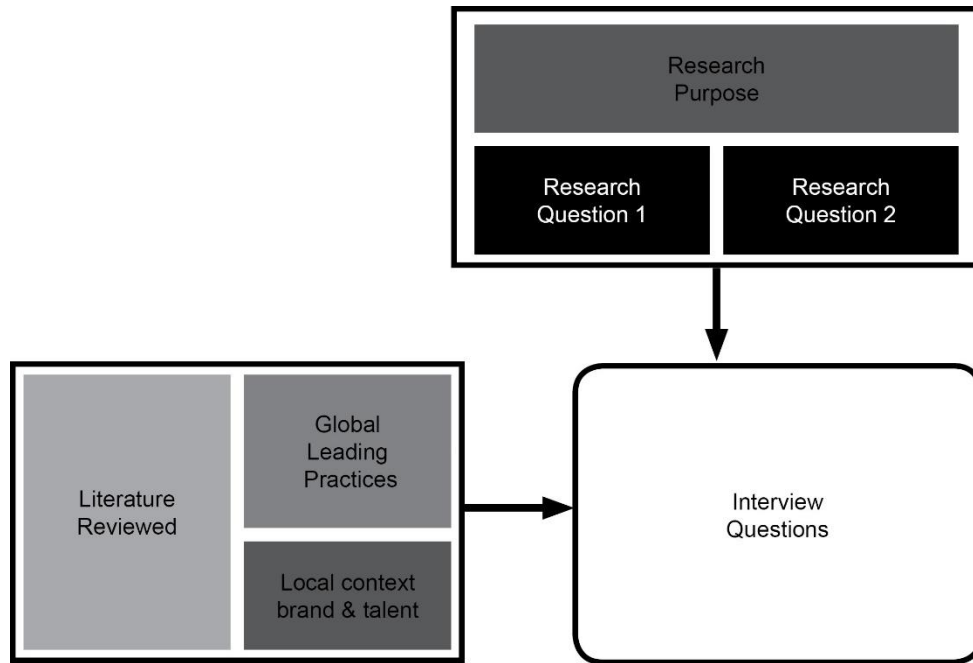


Figure 3.2: Process followed to compile the interview guide questions

The researcher first considered the research purpose and research questions, ensuring that interview questions informed the purpose and questions appropriately. The researcher consulted the nine global leading practices obtained from literature reviewed to provide content and context to interview questions, which would allow the researcher to show a high level of competence and understanding of the research field to expert participants. The factors that could impact branding in the local talent landscape, as revealed by local literature reviewed, were also considered. The researcher was mindful to ask probing questions in the context of global leading practice, whilst ensuring that the questions invited the subjective responses of participants in their local, current reality.

The seven semi-structured interview questions are outlined in Table 3.1 below, followed by an in-depth discussion that supports the interview question position, content and purpose.

Table 3.1: Semi-structured Interview Guide

Interview question 1 How would you, as a strategic leader in your company, define or identify “talent”? Which requirements should prospective or current employees meet to be labelled as “talent”? Please motivate your answer by providing practices used and/or recent examples in defining or identifying talent.
Interview question 2 As a strategic leader in your company, please share your experience of the company leadership team’s approach to talent attraction and retention practices? Please provide practical examples to support your answer.
Interview question 3 As a company that is a Top South African Brand, you have a strong corporate brand to leverage in the attraction and retention of talented employees. In your experience, how would you say that your company leverages the corporate brand to attract and retain talented employees? Please provide examples or reasons to support your answer.
Interview question 4 According to the literature review I have conducted, top brands use the brand building platforms of corporate brand building, employer brand building and internal brand building to attract and retain talent. Employer brand would encapsulate how the company is presented to prospective talented employees and internal brand contains all the internal brand building done through communication, culture and leadership that touches current talented employees. What do you believe to be the relationship between the attraction and retention of talent and your company’s corporate, employer and internal brand? Please provide practical examples and experiences to support your answer.

Interview question 5

Tell me more about the employer brand and employee value proposition that your company uses to attract talent.

What are the key features of your employer brand and employee value proposition?

What would you say are the practices that are working well for your company as this employer brand and employee value proposition is taken to market to attract talent?

Interview question 6

According to the literature review I have conducted, a company's internal brand building plays a role in retaining talent.

In your experience, what role does your company's internal brand building play in retaining talent? Please explain and provide examples.

What would you say are the internal brand building practices that are working well to retain talent at your company?

Interview question 7

What would you say are some of your biggest challenges in both attracting and keeping or retaining the services of talented South African employees?

The following discussion shows that the seven interview questions were placed in a specific order, contained specific content and fulfilled a specific purpose.

Interview question 1 explored the term "talent". Whilst the global literature review yielded a working definition of talent, the South African literature reviewed revealed several anomalies that may impact the definition of talent in South Africa. The term "talent" in South Africa could include race or gender qualifiers, with black employees and female employees more likely to be labelled as talent (Abbott et al. 2013; Coetzee & Stoltz 2015; Mazibuko & Govender 2017). With a shortage of skilled South Africans to draw from (Anand et al. 2016; Mateus et al. 2014), and an education system that does not produce sufficient employable, skilled South Africans (Anand et al. 2016; Asmal 2015), it was conceivable that South African leaders may have adapted their definition of talent to incorporate factors other than educational qualifications or

employment experience. These anomalies suggested to the researcher that the working definition of talent might be impacted by the local context. As such, this question was placed first, allowing the researcher to firstly gain an understanding of the meaning of talent through the subjective responses of participants. The way in which the participant defined talent would also have an impact on their responses to all other questions, which incorporate talent practices and experiences.

Interview question 2 aimed to gain insight into the strategic alignment of leadership in approaching talent. Global literature reviewed suggested that top global corporate brands seem to align internally first, building their corporate brand from the inside through a strategic commitment to the brand's purpose, values and promises. This strategic leadership alignment then informs all strategies, including talent and brand strategies (Balmer 2017; Barriere et al. 2018; Charan et al. 2018; Hatch & Schultz 2001; Iglesias et al. 2013). However, South African literature reviewed suggested that this strategic alignment in South Africa might be impacted by local factors. Some scholars proposed a low level of leadership commitment to talent (Barkhuizen & Schutte 2015; Mohlala et al. 2012) and felt that leadership behaviours may be more focused on compliance and dealing with high levels of diversity (Tladinyane 2016; Shrivastava et al. 2014) than strategic alignment of leadership to drive a transformation agenda and deliver optimal brand value to stakeholders (Mazibuko & Govender 2017; Tladinyane 2016). As such, it was deemed necessary to obtain insights from expert leaders in top South African brands that could provide understanding around the strategic alignment of leadership in South Africa. The question was placed second in the interview guide as global leading practices proposed that strategic alignment was the starting point of all talent strategies and practices (Charan et al. 2018; King 2015). The research purpose was to explore talent attraction and retention practices pertaining to brand building in South Africa in the context of the global leading practices – as such the application of this foundational strategic alignment proposed by global leading practices in South African companies could provide valuable insights to inform the research purpose and related research questions.

Interview question 3 set out to understand the perceived impact of the corporate brand on talent attraction and retention. Whilst global leading practices proposed that the corporate brand orientation, purpose and values inform other brand building platforms (Balmer 2017; Sharif & Islam 2017), local research findings suggest that economic stability and financial rewards would be more important to prospective talent in the South African context and that the employer brand and employee value proposition may therefore be more significant and appealing than the corporate brand (Ferriera 2016; Mazibuko & Govender 2017). Global

literature reviewed held that companies that are top brands seemed to have achieved brand coherence by aligning all brand-building platforms with consistent communication to all stakeholders. As a top South African brand, the company's corporate brand had achieved a high level of recognition, loyalty and support from stakeholders. The researcher felt that it would be valuable to explore the effect of this strong corporate brand on talent attraction and retention and gain a deeper understanding of the impact of corporate brand building in the local talent marketplace. Interview question 3 provided context to the research purpose, which was to explore talent attraction and retention practices pertaining to brand building, by particularly focusing on corporate brand building. It also provided insight into research question 1, which probed the relationship between talent attraction and retention and a company's corporate brand. Furthermore, it enabled a deeper understanding of research question 2, which questioned the ways in which South African companies that are top brands attract and retain talent through corporate brand building.

Interview question 4 was informed by research question 2, which probed the perceived relationship between talent attraction and retention and a company's employer, internal and corporate branding. Global literature suggested a strong relationship between talent attraction and retention practices and an aligned employer, internal and corporate brand (Balmer 2017; Iglesias et al. 2016), but there was a lack of empirical research confirming this in the local context.

Interview question 5 sought insights about practices pertaining to employer branding and the employee value proposition. In particular, this question was posed to obtain insights pertaining to local factors that could impact the formulation and deployment of the employer brand and the employee value proposition.

Interview question 6 explored internal brand building practices to retain talent. Global experts argued that the internal brand seemed central to employee engagement and retention (Punjaisri & Wilson 2017; Saleem & Iglesias 2016). Global leading practices revealed that internal brand building consists of an aligned approach between people practices, leadership and internal brand communications (Punjaisri & Wilson 2017; Saleem & Iglesias 2016). However, South African literature suggests that culture, diversity and leadership could adversely impact internal brand building and negatively affect retention (Mazibuko & Govender 2017; Moloi et al. 2014; Tladinyane 2016). The question was posed in order to explore internal brand building practices used to retain talent in the local context.

Interview question 7 was tailored to elicit expert views from the anticipated experts that would be interviewed. Whilst this question did not directly address the research purpose or research questions, it did provide the opportunity to deepen understanding and enrich the research purpose, gaining valuable insights into the South African talent landscape.

The seven semi-structured interview questions were designed in anticipation of interviewing experts in companies that are top South African brands. The interview questions were therefore not designed as zero-based questions but considered the context of global leading practices and were tailored and focused to the perceived level of expertise that the researcher would encounter during interviews. The questions also showed the level of understanding held by the researcher after a thorough literature review, presenting the researcher as competent and informed in the field of talent attraction and retention through brand building.

3.5.4. Sampling strategy

Having decided on the data collection method (semi-structured interviews) and having compiled the research instrument (semi-structured interview guide), the next step in the research methodology required the researcher to select a sampling strategy that would ensure the identification of a suitable research sample.

Gentles and Vilches (2017, p. 7) introduce the sampling process as a process which would inform the final selection of a research sample. Gentles, Charles, Ploeg, and Mc Kibbon (2015, p. 1777) refer to the term “sampling strategy” as the overall approach and process undertaken to establish a sample, whilst reinforcing the importance of the motivation provided by the researcher for selecting a given sampling strategy or process in the context of the research purpose.

3.5.4.1. Purposive sampling

With a qualitative study, purposive sampling is often selected (Gentles et al. 2015). According to Wright et al. (2016, p. 98), purposive sampling gives the qualitative researcher the opportunity to identify participants that can provide the richest information.

Purposive sampling also allows the targeting of participants that are knowledgeable about the field and can provide expert, rich insights during the qualitative study, providing the most effective use of resources and research interactions (Flick 2018; Palinkas, Horwitz, Green, Wisdom, Duan, & Hoagwood 2015).

A non-probability sampling approach would see the researcher applying judgement and criteria to selecting the research sample (Sharma 2017). This non-probability, purposive sampling approach allowed the researcher to employ a purposive and logical approach, making judgements in order to select a sample of research participants that would add richness to the study and provide information that would be highly relevant to the purpose of the study (Etikan, Musa & Alkassim 2016; Gentles et al. 2015).

The researcher deployed a purposive sampling strategy in distinct phases. In the first phase, which is outlined in Section 3.5.4.2. to follow, a suitable brand survey sample was selected to identify top South African brands. As explained in Section 3.5.4.3. thereafter, the purposive sampling approach applied to this selected survey reveals the list of companies that are top South African brands that were approached for research. Thereafter, in Section 3.5.4.4., the sampling approach followed to secure research participants within each company is discussed.

3.5.4.2. Purposive sampling to identify a suitable brand survey

A purposive sampling strategy was used to identify a sample of companies that are top South African brands from a wider sampling universe of all companies that could potentially be top South African brands (Sharma 2017). As discussed in the literature review overview, top brands were suggested to have achieved brand cohesion through the strategic alignment of cross-functional leadership in reinforcing the brand's purpose and values (Balmer 2017; Lacroix 2013; Li et al. 2017; Ulrich & Smallwood 2012) across employer, internal and corporate brand building platforms (Born & Kang 2015; Mosley 2015; Sharif & Islam 2017). As such, companies that are top South African brands were seen to be most likely to employ expert resources that could potentially yield the richest insights pertaining to talent attraction and retention through brand building.

To establish the sample of companies that are top South African brands, the researcher evaluated the most prominent brand surveys in South Africa to identify the brand survey that would present the most suitable sample of companies in the context of the study's purpose and research questions. Robinson (2014, p. 2) cautions the researcher to consider and apply clear inclusion and exclusion criteria to define a sampling universe, made up of the full sampling pool that the study will consider and select the research sample from. The researcher thus applied purposive sampling through the application of certain critical criteria in order to select the expert sample that would yield the most valuable sample of companies that are South Africa's top brands (Flick 2018).

The first inclusion criterion for the sampling universe related to this study was that research should be conducted in South African companies. This was informed by the research purpose, which indicated the need to conduct research in South African companies in order to shed light on the local talent attraction and retention practices pertaining to brand building.

The second inclusion criterion looked at the year of the brand survey. As this study commenced with primary research during 2018, the latest brand surveys available were 2017 surveys.

In the year 2017, the following brand surveys, listed in Table 3.2, were conducted to reveal top South African brands.

Table 3.2: South African brand surveys

#	Name of survey	Survey approach
1.	Brand Africa 100 Survey 2017	Survey of top brands across Africa, which identifies several top South African brands.
2.	Ask Africa Icon Brands survey 2017	Survey of top brands in South Africa, based on consumer loyalty measured by “solus usage” – meaning that consumers will seek out these brands and remain loyal to them.
3.	Brand Finance South Africa 50 2017	Survey that identifies the top 50 most valuable brands in South Africa by quantifying brand strength, brand loyalty, brand revenue and brand value.
4.	Sunday Times Top Brands Survey 2017	Survey that identifies top South African brands based on the support of the brands in the marketplace and the brand's perception and standing in the minds of people.

The researcher then evaluated these four South African brand surveys to establish the most suitable brand survey to use in sampling. The following criteria were applied in order to drive the purposive sampling process:

Revisiting criterion # 1: South African brands

As outlined earlier, only companies that are top South African brands were considered. Whilst the *Brand Africa 100* survey identified several top South African brands, this survey was conducted across the African continent and identified the top 100 brands in Africa (Brand

Africa 2017). This study's purpose focused on South Africa – as such a brand survey that spans outside the South African borders was not an optimal sample to consider.

Criterion # 2 Independent, impartial research

As the academic study required valid and reliable resources, the researcher only considered brand surveys that were conducted by independent, impartial research companies with a reputation for valid and reliable research. This inclusion criterion was met by the *Ask Africa Icon Brand survey*, conducted by independent research company, Ask Africa (Ask Africa 2017). The *Brand Finance South Africa 50 survey* was conducted by Brand Finance, a global company that conducts valuations and quantifies brand worth in order to assist companies with commercial transactions like tax returns, investor interest and marketing strategies (Brand Finance 2017). As such, the survey was not conducted by an independent research company in order to reveal impartial research findings, but was influenced by the strategic intent of Brand Finance, demonstrating the manner in which their company quantifies the worth of brands. Whilst their survey methodology was clearly outlined and open to peer review, the process applied to the selection of top brands was a company-specific process that mainly focused on the application of their own financial formulas and interpretations (Brand Finance 2017). The brands identified by the *Brand Finance South Africa 50 survey* were identified by using a unique, company-specific approach. The survey was neither independent nor conducted by an impartial research company and was therefore excluded from the sample.

The *Sunday Times Top Brands Survey 2017* was conducted by independent research company, Kantar TNS, a global research agency and the leading customer research agency in the marketing field in South Africa (Sunday Times 2017). As such, the *Sunday Times Top Brands Survey 2017* met the independent, impartial research company inclusion criterion.

Criterion #3 – Survey that considers a wide range of brand stakeholders

The *Ask Africa Brand Icon survey* and *Sunday Times Top Brands Survey 2017* were evaluated against the next inclusion criterion, which was the requirement for the survey to consider a wide range of brand stakeholders. This was informed by the literature review, that indicated that top brands were those brands that have a stakeholder orientation, communicating consistently to a wide range of stakeholders across the employer, internal and corporate brand platforms to attain brand coherence and build strong brands (Balmer 2017; Iglesias et al. 2013; Li et al. 2017).

The Ask Africa Brand Icon survey was found to be the largest brand survey in South Africa, surveying a broad footprint of almost 21 million adult South African consumers across the nation (Ask Africa 2017). This extensive survey had in all likelihood touched a wide range of brand stakeholders and was found to meet this inclusion criterion.

The *Sunday Times Top Brands Survey 2017* also met this inclusion criterion, despite having a much smaller sample of survey participants. The 3 500 survey participants were carefully selected to represent the South African demographic, as per Statistics South Africa, and surveys were conducted in both urban and rural areas, surveying consumers and business leaders (Sunday Times 2017).

Criterion #4 – Survey responses based on emotional response and marketplace performance

The survey was required to identify top brands by considering the way in which the brand had been cohesively communicated to all stakeholders, including not only the emotional responses to a brand, but the actual consumer support of that brand and its performance in the marketplace. This critical criterion was applied to the sampling process because literature indicated that attracting and retaining talent was concerned with prospective and current employees' emotional responses to the brand, as well as the way in which they live the brand and contribute to its success, indicating that talent could be a key driver for organisational performance (Charan et al. 2018; Iglesias et al. 2013; Li et al. 2017; Merrilees 2017).

The *Ask Africa Brand Icon* survey identified top brands based on consumer loyalty – a term called “solus usage” which only measured the emotional response of loyalty to brands. As such, the survey focused on brands that consumers would remain loyal to and seek out at all costs (Ask Africa 2017). The *Ask Africa Brand Icon* survey therefore did not meet this inclusion criterion, as the full spectrum of emotional responses to the brand had been discounted in favour of loyalty and sole use, and the survey did not give the appropriate consideration to the marketplace performance of the brand.

The *Sunday Times Top Brands Survey 2017* met this inclusion criterion, as top brands were identified by gauging the emotional response to a brand from both users of the brand and non-users of the brand, as well as the brand's marketplace performance (Sunday Times 2017).

The *Sunday Times Top Brands Survey 2017* met all of the inclusion criteria optimally. This survey is conducted annually through a partnership between the Sunday Times and

independent research company TNS South Africa and has been running for almost two decades. Top brands are annually identified by considering the brand's standing in the marketplace, as well as in people's minds. Interviews are conducted with consumers to gauge their sentiment towards the brand. The familiarity and awareness of the brand is considered, as well as perceptions about the brand and the brand's marketplace performance. Brand users and non-users are interviewed, covering a broad spectrum of potential and current brand stakeholders (Sunday Times 2017). This approach was most aligned with the literature review findings, which highlighted that top brands are identified by the subjective responses of all brand stakeholders as they experience the brand as coherent and the brand messaging as consistent (Lacroix 2013; Li, Littleton & Akhtar 2017; Urde & Greyser 2016).

3.5.4.3. Purposive sampling to obtain a sample list of companies that are top South African brands

The next step in the purposive sampling strategy aimed to narrow down the sample of top South African brands identified by the *Sunday Times Top Brands Survey 2017* to a suitable and manageable sample list of companies to approach for primary research.

The *Sunday Times Top Brands Survey 2017* yielded top brands in the consumer and business categories. In the consumer category, 157 top brands were identified across 32 product or service groups, holding first to fifth positions. In the business category, 56 top brands were identified across 12 product or service groups, holding first to fifth positions (Sunday Times 2017).

Inclusion criterion #1: Corporate brands only

A key criterion for this step of the purposive sampling strategy was the inclusion of corporate brands and the exclusion of product brands. The literature review identified corporate brands as those brands that allow the company's overall brand to speak on behalf of the company as a whole (Balmer 2017; Merrilees 2017). Product brands were excluded as one cannot assume that, should a person (such as a talented individual) have a relationship with a product brand, they would hold that same relationship with the corporate brand as a whole. Furthermore, corporate brands employ a stakeholder approach, aligning all stakeholders with a clear master plan and relying on people to bring the brand's values and promises to life (Balmer 2017; Hatch & Schultz 2001; Li et al. 2017). As such, talent attraction and retention would be central to corporate brand building. Furthermore, literature confirmed that the alignment of a corporate, employer and internal brand through consistent brand building practices to different

brand stakeholders is key to creating cohesive brands, making corporate brands central to the study (Balmer 2017; Kaufmann et al. 2016; Merrilees 2017).

The researcher thus included top corporate brands identified by the *Sunday Times Top Brands Survey 2017* and excluded product brands identified by the survey.

Inclusion criterion #2: Top Corporate Brands only, excluding top brands in Community Development and Green Awards

In both the consumer and business categories of the *Sunday Times Top Brands Survey 2017*, so-called Grand Prix winners were identified. The Grand Prix winners comprised: firstly, the five brands that emerged as overall favourite brands during the survey; secondly, the five brands that were seen to be top brands in community development; and thirdly, the five brands that were the winners of the Green Award (Sunday Times 2017).

The researcher excluded the corporate brands that were award-winners in the Community Development and Green Award groups, as these awards measure the brand's social responsibility and environmental consciousness (Sunday Times 2017). Whilst variables like social responsibility and environmental consciousness may impact the way prospective and current talent views the brand, literature reviewed suggested that the impact of these variables require further empirical research insights. Literature reviewed further suggested that South African talent may be less interested in the corporate brand of a company and more drawn to a strong employer brand with benefits (Ferreira 2016; Mazibuko & Govender 2017; Subban 2016). The Community Development and Green Awards are driven by the corporate brand and strategy. It also remained to be proven whether community development or going green would have the desired effect on the corporate brand in a developing country like South Africa – limited research findings were available in this regard, with limited studies available to confirm the importance that South African talent places on corporate social and community investments (Moloi et al. 2014). As such, brands that were Community Development or Green Awards winners were excluded from this study, as these top brands were neither the focus of this study, nor did literature provide any conclusive evidence that would support their inclusion in the study. The relationship between corporate social responsibility and corporate social investments and South African talent would be an interesting recommendation for further research.

The researcher furthermore included only corporate brands that held a Grand Prix overall favourite brand winning position and/or a first position as the top brand of a category in either

the consumer and/or business survey results. This was done as the research was focused on top brands, those that had optimally aligned their branding platforms to create coherent, strong brands that have achieved the pinnacle of trust from their stakeholders.

3.5.4.4. Sample of companies that are top South African brands

Having applied the inclusion and exclusion criteria to select top performing corporate brands from the *Sunday Times Top Brands Survey 2017*, a total of 20 corporate brands were identified as companies that were top South African corporate brands, making up the research sample.

Whilst every one of these 20 brands were seen to be suitable companies that are top South African brands, three brands received multiple top brand positions and they were put at the top of the list of brands and approached first for research participation. Their multiple top brand positions seemed to indicate that these three brands had achieved optimal brand coherence and strength, and would, as such, be likely to give optimal insight into talent attraction and retention practices through brand building, sharing their experiences in building strong brands through people.

The 20 corporate brands are presented in Appendix A to this study. Brands number one to three are purposely placed at the top of the list due to their multiple top brand positions, whilst the brands listed from four to 20 are listed with no particular ranking position significance – they are all top corporate brands as per the *Sunday Times Top Brands Survey 2017*.

The researcher approached all 20 brands. Six brands declined participation for internal policy reasons, mainly related to the company policy that prohibits participation in research studies. Six brands did not respond to a number of requests made both electronically and telephonically. One brand was willing to participate but lacked the ability to coordinate the inclusion of all three interview stakeholders. Having eliminated thirteen companies from the possible list of twenty companies, a possible seven companies remained. The rationale informing the final sample size of five companies that are top South African brands is outlined in section 3.5.4.6. to follow.

3.5.4.5. Purposive sampling of participants for research

In the next phase of the sampling strategy, the researcher set out to confirm the participant sample for primary research within a top South African brand – those people that would be interviewed within each brand (Gentles & Vilches 2017).

The number of research participants within each company was central to establishing the number of companies required for primary research. The participant sample in each company, multiplied by the number of companies, provided the researcher with a numeric research sample number which could be evaluated against the number of qualitative semi-structured interviews recommended in literature.

The researcher aimed to select a participant sample in each company that would identify experts who could add the richest insights and experience about the ways in which cohesive, strong brands attract and retain talent through brand building in the South African context (Sharma 2017). The literature review revealed that there are three equally important role-players in each company that should be aligned in their building of a brand and in their approach to talent attraction and retention.

Firstly, the human resources or talent management leaders, that traditionally owned talent attraction and retention and are central to the management of talent attraction and retention practices for companies (Born & Kang 2015; Russell & Brannan 2016; Sharif & Islam 2017). Secondly, the brand or marketing leader that has an important contribution to make to the branding practices that inform and support the attraction and retention of talent and drive the building of a leadership brand (Bali & Dixit 2016; Roberts-Lombard et al. 2016; Russell & Brannan 2016). And finally, line management across the organisation, who play a critical role in informing the strategic talent attraction needs and enabling the retention of talent by ensuring that the work experience is aligned to the promises made in the employee value proposition that attracted them (King 2015; Russell & Brannan 2016; Ulrich & Smallwood 2012).

The literature furthermore highlighted the need to consider HR/talent, brand and line leaders that are at a strategic leadership level (Balmer 2017; Merrilees 2017; Ulrich & Smallwood 2012; Ulrich 2015; Venkatesh 2013). Literature shows that coherent brands have achieved alignment between employer brand, internal brand and corporate brand – the strategic management of brand messages and experiences consistently across multiple branding platforms to different brand stakeholders would arguably require alignment between strategic-level leaders across human resources or talent, brand and line management (Balmer 2017; Lacroix 2013; Russell & Brannan 2016; Ulrich & Smallwood 2012).

As such, the researcher viewed all three role-players as essential experts within a company that is a top South African brand, and included these three experts in the purposive participant sample (Sharma 2017). The researcher therefore purposively selected each of these three

expert role-players within a top South African brand as the research participants for primary research.

3.5.4.6. Sample size

In section 3.5.4.5, the researcher outlined the rationale that informed the identification of a sample of three key participants for interviewing in each company that is a top South African brand. Section 3.5.4.4 revealed that seven companies that are top South African brands that remained, following on the exclusion of thirteen companies that had either declined, failed to respond or could not secure all the required research participants.

With the remaining seven companies, each with three participants, it seemed that the sample size could include twenty-one participants. At this stage, the researcher asked herself how many semi-structured interviews would be feasible to address the research purpose and questions?

It was important that the sample size of the study be determined in priori (before the study) for two reasons. Firstly, the researcher needed to be focused and driven in securing the required number of top brands to participate in primary research. For a company that is a top South African brand, the researcher had to actively pursue and relentlessly communicate with the company's brand or marketing leadership to build a relationship of trust and to gain their attention and interest.

Secondly, once the brand had been secured and had granted permission for research, formal requests to interview strategic-level leaders in top South African brands needed to be well planned and the time allocation per interview had to be considered. The researcher estimated that an explorative, qualitative interview guided by the seven semi-structured research questions would require roughly an hour. Securing one-hour interviews with strategic leaders would require a well-considered, targeted approach.

The researcher considered the recommendations made by scholars in literature reviewed in order to establish the number of interviews suitable to this study. Selecting the number of interviews to conduct depends on the time and depth of the interviews planned, as well as the approach to research required, with this research design requiring the research to spend quality time with fewer participants so that their subjective reality could be explored extensively (Guetterman 2015). Robinson (2014, p. 5) suggests that an interpretive qualitative research approach should consider a small research sample of between six and 16 interviews, allowing the researcher the opportunity to engage deeply with participants and have a manageable

amount of data to analyse. This smaller sample also allows each participant to have a strong voice and contribute meaningfully – this will fade away if there are too many participants and too much data to analyse. Literature also indicated that data saturation may occur if too many participants were included in a qualitative study, and recommended that the sample size consider the possibility of data saturation (Babin & Zikmund 2015; Robinson 2014).

The researcher followed the guidance provided by literature and decided to interview no more than 15 experts, given that each interview would take approximately an hour to conduct and would yield rich data in the form of content from the interview transcription. The decision to limit interviews to a maximum of 15 implied that five companies out of the possible seven would be included in primary research. The selected sample could see data saturation occurring, in which case the sample size would be adequate. If data saturation did not occur within this sample, an argument could be made to include a sixth company and increase the sample size to 18 participants. For this reason, a sixth company was identified, but kept as an optional additional sample, pending primary research data saturation.

The researcher started experiencing data saturation between interview eight and ten. It initially manifested as the realisation that the responses were starting to sound similar. By interview eleven the researcher felt comfortable to declare that data saturation was imminent – in fact, the four interviews that followed this point of data saturation revealed nothing new, only underlining opinions and views of those that had been interviewed before them. The researcher was therefore confident that the sample of fifteen research participants was sufficient.

A discussion outlining how the five companies were selected out of the possible sample of seven, is warranted at this point. The first participating company, Brand A, and second participating company, Brand B, were prioritised above the other companies in the sample of seven, as these companies were both overall top brands that had achieved not only top brand status in their industry sector, but overall top brand positions. Brand C and D, the third and fourth brands included, were included next. Each of these two brands were leaders in their particular industries. However, within the sample of three companies that remained, there were two brands that were competitors to Brands C and D respectively. As such, the one remaining top brand, a company that was an industry leader in an industry was not similar to, or in competition with, any of the included brands A to D, was selected as the final brand, Brand E. The rationale for a sample of brands that are leaders in their respective industries, with no direct competing links between Brands A to E, was this: it would provide a perspective

across five different industries, which was likely to yield broader, richer insights into the subject matter being researched.

In conclusion, a sample of five companies that are top South African brands, yielding a participant sample of 15 and requiring 15 individual interviews, was deemed to be an acceptable and manageable sample for qualitative interviews (Babin & Zikmund 2015; Robinson 2014). Furthermore, this sample obtained clear data saturation by interview 11. This suggests that sufficient data had been collected from a large enough sample, improving the trustworthiness of the study (Guetterman 2015; Vaismoradi et al. 2016).

3.5.4.7. Sampling of research participants in a participating top brand

As this was a brand study, the researcher firstly approached the head or most strategic-level leader in brand or marketing in a company that has been identified as a top South African brand and was included in the sample list of 20 possible brands within which primary research could be conducted. An introductory mail requested the brand's participation in the study and outlined the need for one-hour interviews with three strategic-level leaders. The brand or marketing leaders of these companies were instrumental in recommending the appropriate strategic-level human resources or talent management and line management leaders to interview and facilitating the researcher's correspondence with these leaders to secure interviews.

Within each of the five participating brands, three purposively sampled expert participants were interviewed between September 2018 and May 2019.

The research methodology with regards to data collection and analysis is discussed next.

3.5.5. Data collection methodology

Data was collected through semi-structured interviews with three purposively identified strategic-level leaders in five companies that were identified as top South African brands in 2017 and were willing to participate in primary research.

Each brand that consented to participation was provided with a personalised primary research information document, available as Appendix B to this study. This document introduced the study, contained the academic clearance, details about the researcher and supervisor, as well as the ethical, anonymity and confidentiality code. Following on receipt of this information document, informed consent was granted for the interview.

The researcher set up a convenient time to conduct an individual semi-structured interview with each participant in the company. Where possible, the interviews were conducted face-to-face, with four of the fifteen interviews conducted face-to-face at the participant's workplace. However, given geographical distribution of the companies and limited time constraints of participants, interviews were also conducted using internet-based telecommunications (e.g. Skype) or telephonic interviews. At the outset of each interview, the leader's role was confirmed to ensure that it met the requirements of the expert strategic-level leader in either brand/marketing, human resources/talent and line. The interviews also commenced with the researcher confirming the participant's receipt of the information document, their understanding thereof and their consent to participate. Each interview was recorded with the permission of the participant. Although one-hour time slots had been professionally booked with the research participant via Microsoft Outlook, two of the fifteen interviews had to be compressed to half an hour due to time constraints from the participants. The average interview time was 51 minutes and individual interview times were recorded on the interview transcription documents.

3.6. Ethical considerations

Whilst ethical considerations are crucial to consider for all studies, it is important to note that conducting interviews in companies that are top South African brands introduced an added ethical consideration of brand reputation and loyalty. The corporate brand of the company could be adversely affected by any negative publicity or revelations. As such, clear ethical considerations and guidelines were crucial to building a relationship of trust between the researcher and research participants.

As the research was conducted using a qualitative approach, the researcher was actively involved with the research and engaged personally with participants in interviews. This high level of interaction between the researcher and the study, as well as the study's participants, also required the researcher to set appropriate ethical guidelines to steer the study. The ethical process addressed informed consent, anonymity and confidentiality to arrive at a set of ethical guidelines (Flick 2018; Sanjari et al. 2014).

3.6.1. Informed consent

The researcher informed participants in advance about the nature of the study, the data that would be collected and how it would be used and published, the purpose and meaning of the research and the background and qualifications of the researcher. Each participant received

an email containing a document with the information about the study, as well as the requirements and purpose of their role in the study.

Each research participant was requested to scrutinise the document and every research interview commenced with the researcher confirming informed consent of the participant.

3.6.2. Anonymity

Given that companies are top South African brands and have a strong brand reputation, the anonymity of the company responses was a key ethical consideration. The researcher ensured anonymity by stating that the name of the company would not be revealed in research publications but would be replaced by a symbol.

Within each company, three different brand stakeholders were interviewed. The researcher anticipated that the responses and insights would vary between stakeholders. As such, it would be important for the researcher to protect the identity of the participant and eliminate victimisation or criticism for a high-profile strategic leader (Sanjari et al. 2014).

Considering the company and participants' need for anonymity, the researcher committed to the anonymous publishing of findings, with the company identified as Brand A, B, C, D and E and the participant identified by a generic role description (e.g. "Brand Manager").

To further protect identity, avoid victimisation and eliminate the revelation of sensitive information to competitors, participating companies were restricted from obtaining findings pertaining to their own company's research participant responses. Instead, all participating companies were granted insight into the collective responses from all companies in the study, as presented in the research findings. Individual participant responses were not released at any stage, nor were the brands selected exposed in any way.

3.6.3. Confidentiality

The researcher was interested in the insights and opinions of expert participants. To ensure that these responses would be truthful and meaningful, participants needed to be reassured that their interview responses and data obtained would remain confidential, that their identity would not be publicly revealed, neither would quoted words be attributed to a person. The researcher informed each participant of the ethical commitment to confidentiality, taking care to outline who would see the interview responses and to what end (Sanjari et al. 2014).

The written document containing the Primary Research Information guide with ethical considerations included is available in Appendix B.

3.7. Conclusion

Chapter 3 outlined the research design and methodology that guided this study and brought the research purpose to life through primary research. Two research questions were articulated and pointed the research towards the data that would need to be uncovered during primary research (Newman & Covrig 2013).

From an ontology and epistemology perspective, the study was designed to allow the exploring of reality in a subjective fashion in order to arrive at rich insights evident in multiple truths (Lewis 2015; Rahi 2017). This approach led to the selection of the interpretive paradigm, informed by a worldview that is broad and encourages exploration and interpretation of multiple realities (Rahi 2017; Wright et al. 2016).

Explorative research was selected (Babin & Zikmund 2015) as the exploration of the local context was advocated by scholars in order to add insights into the talent and brand reality in South Africa (Subban 2016; Vaiman et al. 2018). Qualitative research would best enable the researcher's involvement in the research and allow meaningful and deep engagement with the subjective reality of participants (Flick 2018; Wright et al. 2016).

Through semi-structured interviews, the questions prepared beforehand could provide a consistent structure to interviews that honed in on talent and brand building, but still allow for flexible and open responses from participants that could enrich insights (Percy et al. 2015; Stuckey 2013). Seven interview questions were compiled after consideration of the research purpose and questions, along with the literature review insights.

A non-probability, purposive sampling approach was deployed to identify the companies and participants that could offer the richest insights and expertise (Flick 2018; Sharma 2017). The sampling strategy firstly focused on inclusion and exclusion criteria to arrive at a suitable brand sample that identified top South African brands (Robinson 2014). After selecting the *Sunday Times Top Brands Survey 2017*, inclusion and exclusion criteria saw the identification of 20 top corporate brands, who were approached to participate in the research.

Five companies that are top South African brands participated in this study. Within each company three strategic-level leaders, suggested by literature to be experts in the field of

talent attraction and retention through brand building (Balmer 2017; Merrilees 2017), were interviewed between September 2018 and May 2019.

Ethical considerations were of prime importance to this study, as the reputation of companies that are top South African brands and their leaders was at stake. The researcher took care to gain informed consent from companies and their leaders and committed to anonymity and confidentiality of both the brands and leaders interviewed (Flick 2018; Sanjari et al. 2014)

Using the semi-structured interview guide's seven questions, primary research was conducted through rich engagement and discussion that elicited their subjective views and experiences and provided rich insights around talent attraction and retention through brand building in companies that are top South African brands.

The researcher was privileged to be highly involved in the research, engaging optimally with these leaders during the interviewing process and immersing herself in the data during the data analysis process, which is outlined in Chapter 4.

CHAPTER 4

DATA ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

4.1. Introduction

The researcher conducted semi-structured interviews with three expert strategic-level leaders from each of the five selected companies that are top South African corporate brands.

The exploratory research approach, using qualitative methods, allowed the researcher to become involved in the research, engaging with the research participants and seeking to deepen understanding regarding their subjective experiences and expert opinions (Percy et al. 2015; Rahi 2017). Semi-structured interviews, guided by seven open-ended questions, were conducted and recorded with permission of the research participants. It is these recordings containing the subjective responses from research participants that provide the departure point for Chapter 4, which outlines the data analysis process followed to arrive at findings.

Trustworthiness was front of mind during this qualitative data analysis process. The researcher would need to become immersed in the data and apply inductive reasoning to the interpretation of data, making sense of it and giving meaning to it (Elo et al. 2014; Nowell et al. 2017; Vaismoradi et al. 2016). With the researcher inseparable from the data analysis process, the scientific method of enquiry that requires the data to speak for itself could be compromised by the researcher's own biases and personal views. Guarding against this, a rigorously documented data analysis process was implemented, which allowed transparency and clear motivation, supported by literature reviewed, for every step and decision made (Elo et al. 2014; Nowell et al. 2017; Vaismoradi et al. 2016).

Chapter 4 shows how qualitative content analysis was conducted using thematic analysis with inductive reasoning. In Section 4.3 of the chapter, the thematic analysis steps are outlined in detail, showing how interviews were transcribed to allow for data presentation and familiarising in step 1, the coding approach in step 2, how categories emerged and were managed in step 3 and how themes were allowed to emerge in step 4. This section furthermore outlines how trustworthiness was established during the data analysis process through a transparent process and investigator triangulation (Mayer 2015).

In Section 4.4 the themes and subthemes that emerged from the thematic analysis process are introduced, showing six themes, with five of them having subthemes. One theme emerged as the primary or dominant theme as this theme contributed more than half the responses and was consistent across all five brands and 15 participants. The role of the corporate brand in talent attraction and retention through brand building appears to be significant in companies that are top South African brands, with South African talent not only lured by a commercially successful corporate brand, but also resonating with purpose-driven corporate brands. The dominance of the corporate brand is furthermore supported by the finding that corporate brand building is more evolved than employer or internal branding, and is leveraged in the place of employer and internal brand.

Research findings are presented in Section 4.5 of this chapter, with each theme and subtheme discussed in the context of literature and quotes or insights from interview responses being used to support the discussion.

The chapter concludes and Chapter 5 ensues, allowing for the discussion of themes in relation to each other and the synthesis of findings into research results.

4.2. Qualitative content analysis through thematic induction

The researcher elected qualitative research methods to yield 15 recorded semi-structured interviews with experts. The data collected from this research could therefore be labelled as qualitative content, as research interviews were transcribed to present written data in the form of words (Vaismoradi et al. 2016). Qualitative content analysis would allow the researcher to analyse the data systematically and then categorise or group data in such a manner that the data could be sorted into a presentation of meaningful findings (Elo et al. 2014).

Qualitative content analysis can be done in either an inductive or deductive manner. The researcher selected an inductive reasoning approach as this approach would best complement the exploratory, qualitative approach of the study and would allow the researcher to use the theoretical foundation obtained during the literature reviewed to interpret the rich data obtained (Elo et al. 2014).

According to Vaismoradi et al. (2016, p. 101), content analysis and thematic analysis are both suitable approaches to the analysis of qualitative data, and the two terms are often used synonymously. The similarities between them include the background from which the researcher approaches the data and the searching for meaning and themes in the data

presented (Elo et al. 2014; Vaismoradi et al. 2016). However, a researcher using a pure qualitative content analysis approach would limit themselves to either observed content data or the exploring of an underlying theme. Researchers that analyse content with thematic analysis have a wider scope and more flexible ways to work with the data (Percy et al. 2015; Vaismoradi et al. 2016). Thematic analysis would allow the researcher to work with the actual content in categories and use inductive reasoning to generate themes and look deeper than the manifested data in categories, in order to identify underlying themes (Vaismoradi et al. 2016).

Percy et al. (2015, p. 80) confirms that qualitative data collected through semi-structured interviews can be analysed effectively using thematic analysis and shed light on the types of thematic analysis from which the researcher could draw, namely inductive analysis, theoretical analysis or thematic analysis with constant comparison. In selecting the type of thematic analysis that would be best suited to the study, the researcher considered the research purpose, which was to explore, in the context of global leading practices, the talent attraction and retention practices pertaining to employer, internal and corporate brand building in companies that are top South African brands. The research purpose suggested that, at completion of the data analysis process, the study should reveal exploratory findings about these talent attraction and retention practices pertaining to brand building.

With this in mind, the researcher found that thematic analysis using theoretical analysis was not a suitable approach. Whilst the researcher did have the context of global leading practices to inform the study, no pre-existing categories were identified against which the research data would be compared (Percy et al. 2015) and the researcher was compelled to remain true to the research purpose. This study explicitly did not set out to compare South African practices with global practices and remained focused on exploring the practices of top South African brands without any pre-conceptions or theories in hand.

The thematic analysis approach also did not suit inductive analysis with constant comparison, as analysis of interviews was not done one at a time, and no comparison was required to be drawn between the data from one interview response and the next (Percy et al. 2015). In the light of the explorative nature of the research, the study would not benefit by comparing data from respondents – the focus is not on the individual participants or brands but on the collective insights gained from top brands through their research participants.

As such, an inductive approach to thematic analysis was selected. This approach required the researcher to set aside any pre-conceptions or hypotheses, allowing the data to speak for

itself. The role of the researcher applying inductive reasoning was pivotal, seeing the researcher making sense of the data, summarising it, categorising or grouping data and allowing themes or patterns to emerge from the data (Nowell et al. 2017).

4.3. Thematic analysis steps followed

To ensure a high level of trustworthiness in the inductive thematic analysis of data, the researcher developed a step-by-step data analysis process, with supporting documentation to show each step of the process (Nowell et al. 2017).

Each process step is outlined in detail hereafter, commencing with the first step of data presentation and familiarisation of transcribed interviews that yielded notes, which generated the first open codes, informing step 2 of the process. In step 3 of the process, the researcher discusses how codes were placed into categories that emerged from the coded data. Both steps 2 and 3 pauses to outline how investigator triangulation (Mayer 2015) was used to ensure high levels of trustworthiness during this process. Finally, step 4 of the data analysis process describes the emergence of themes, with subthemes.

4.3.1. Data analysis step 1: Data presentation and familiarisation

During this step of data analysis, the researcher listened to the recorded interviews several times and transcribed the interviews to yield written data. Having transcribed 15 interviews, the researcher set out to familiarise herself with the interview transcripts and commence a first analysis of the data. The researcher noted that Percy et al. (2015, p. 80) recommends that, when using thematic inductive analysis, the data of each participant be analysed individually. Once all the data from all participants have been analysed individually, all the data emerging from all the individual analyses completed can be brought together and synthesised as a whole, looking for emerging trends and patterns (Percy et al. 2015). The researcher thus worked with one interview transcript at a time, immersing herself in the data and making notes in the side column. These notes contained initial thoughts, interpretations, meaning, insights and questions that emerged from the data, creating a sort of preliminary coding through inductive analysis (Nowell et al. 2017).

It must be mentioned that, at the outset of this initial freehand coding phase, the researcher invested in a short pause to allow for investigator triangulation, learning first-hand how important this tool is in obtaining high levels of trustworthiness in data analysis (Mayer 2015). With two interview transcriptions featuring the first coding attempt in freehand notes, the

researcher requested a meeting with her study supervisor, during which she outlined her approach to the coded notes, and explained the inductive reasoning process that underpinned each summative note. In this session, the supervisor cross-checked the notes assigned to the two interview transcripts. Having immersed herself in the inductive reasoning process that informed the notes and freehand codes for these first two interview transcripts, the supervisor advised the researcher to approach inductive reasoning with higher levels of caution and rigour. The researcher had experienced quite an emotive response to the interview transcript of Brand A's Brand Manager, who appeared to glorify the role of the corporate brand in talent attraction and retention, and downplay the importance of talent management and role of talent or line leadership. As a result of her own emotive response, the researcher had used rather definitive note codes for this transcript, such as "corporate brand held to be far more superior than other branding platforms". Investigator triangulation allowed the researcher to identify her own emotive responses and the use of extreme words like "far more superior" in her notes. The word "superior" was never used by the interviewee, neither did the interviewee use comparative language like "far more" – these terms had been assigned by the researcher. Having gained this valuable insight and feedback, the researcher revisited the initial notes for the two interview transcripts, cross-checked again with the study supervisor, and emerged from this brief investigator triangulation with clarity and a deeper understanding around the importance of using the research data - as opposed to emotive, subjective intuition - in reasoning inductively to establish notes and codes. All interview transcripts were then analysed, and notes were assigned through rigorously applying a transparent inductive reasoning approach. This investigator triangulation enhanced the trustworthiness of the data analysis process as the researcher's early errors in data interpretation had been identified and addressed (Mayer 2015).

A coding system for these notes was developed next. As the researcher had committed to an ethical code of brand anonymity and confidentiality before embarking on research, codes were assigned to the companies and participants as follows: Companies that are top South African brands were labelled Brand A, Brand B, Brand C, Brand D and Brand E in order to protect their confidentiality. The brand manager of each company was given the acronym "BM", the line manager called "LM" and the human resources or talent manager was labelled "HRTM". Each note was also assigned a note number (N41) as per the screen shot example in Figure 4.1 to follow.

GI20	Just thinking about our experience here and how we <u>organise</u> ourselves. So obviously marketing is centralized as a <u>centre of excellence</u> and then we service the different business units and we sit in the holding company, and what it does is it creates a lot of <u>standardisation</u> across the brands, even though we take the different brands into consideration and it's tailored and all that stuff. But what it also means is that Internal <u>Communciation</u> from the EVP, to who does the signage, how we control	B_BM_N41 One central brand/marketing team that serves across business units B_BM_N42 Consistent branding across platforms
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Figure 4.1: Example of transcribed interview data with coded notes

The output of this first step of the data analysis process was 15 individually transcribed interviews, which the researcher had reviewed several times and familiarised herself with enough to start making notes that encapsulate the data meaning. An example of a transcribed interview with notes is available as Appendix C to this study.

4.3.2. Data analysis step 2: Coding

During the first step of the data analysis, the researcher transcribed and familiarised herself with the data. Through the notes captured, the researcher had commenced with coding, a process of organising and sorting the data so that broad masses of data could be placed into smaller segments, making the data more manageable to work with (Stuckey 2015). This first open coding process was a form of conceptual coding, according to Vaismoradi et al. (2016, p. 104), as the researcher extracted coded notes that described the data and coded it in the context of the matter being studied.

The notes made by the researcher during the review of the interview transcriptions were informed by the storyline of the narrative being reviewed. The researcher read the narrative response, considered the story that the research participant had told in context of the question, and then interpreted their responses using inductive reasoning (Stuckey 2015). A paragraph of narrative was thus reviewed, considered, and the researcher's note made next to the narrative was a note that attributed meaning, summarising what the researcher believed the participant was saying in context of the literature foundation (Stuckey 2015). The researcher was able to make these notes through inductive reasoning as the researcher had a theoretical knowledge of the subject matter area and was able to interpret the responses in the context of the literature reviewed (Stuckey 2015).

During the second step of the data analysis process, the researcher reviewed these notes, consulting Percy et al. (2015, p. 80), who cautions the researcher to retain focus on the research purpose and research questions at the initial stage of coding. The researcher revisited the initial notes made, reviewed and updated the notes, holding the research purpose and questions to all notes, and checking the relevance thereto. The researcher also cross-correlated each note with the verbatim responses from the interviewee again to ensure that she had read and understood the meaning correctly and could clearly motivate the reasoning behind the conceptual code contained in the note (Percy et al. 2015; Stuckey 2015).

The researcher observed that these codes were repetitive in some cases. The researcher had followed an initial abstraction process, taking concrete “chunks” of data from transcribed interviewed responses and abstracting them into coded notes (Vaismoradi et al. 2016). A manageable amount of content was therefore condensed into initial codes. As such, the first codes emerging acted as summaries of content. If the interview participant’s responses were repetitive or lengthy in terms of a certain code, the code may feature more than once.

The researcher experienced several of the notes and codes as “troublesome” – duplications, conflicting opinions, off topic comments that yielded notes that did not seem relevant to the research questions. The researcher was unsure of how to approach the data analysis of these troublesome codes, and thus applied investigator triangulation once again. This investigator triangulation focused on gaining a second investigator’s input (Mayer 2015) around superfluous or duplicated data – had it been noted and coded correctly and what should be done with it? This proved to be one of the most important investigator triangulation steps in the study. Had the researcher not triangulated at this point, she may have been tempted to disregard any data deemed irrelevant, repetitive or superfluous, and report only on a single occurrence of data deemed relevant and important. This would have compromised the trustworthiness of the study significantly.

The researcher found guidance in literature. Repetitiveness in initial data codes could provide insight that inform the strength of emerging themes (Vaismoradi et al. 2016). As such, the researcher did not eliminate duplicated or repetitive notes or initial codes, but rather allowed the repetition to provide insight into themes.

Vaismoradi et al. (2016, p. 104) suggest that the researcher address the most relevant or important codes at this point, but that they should withhold final decisions until later in the data analysis process. Percy et al. (2015, p. 81) suggest that the researcher should exclude initial codes that are interesting but not relevant to the research questions, but recommend that

these interesting codes be stored for later reference. As such, the researcher did not delete notes that seemed superfluous or unrelated. Instead, the most relevant or important notes were reviewed, edited and highlighted in green for extraction. This was done to highlight the relevant conceptual codes without discounting any other insights that had emerged, allowing the researcher to perhaps revisit these at a later stage of the research analysis process (Vaismoradi et al. 2016).

The highlighted green notes on the interview transcripts then became the first emerging conceptual codes.

4.3.3. Data analysis step 3: Categories

The labelled coded notes from Microsoft Word documents now needed to be organised into some sort of categorical structure.

The researcher created a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet for this step of the data analysis process. Microsoft Excel is advocated by scholars to offer an easily accessible platform to capture complex data and terminology (such as the wide range of brand and talent constructs related to this study), as opposed to a software programmes like Atlas.ti, which would require pre-programming to inform the data terminology and coding (Van Loggerenberg, Enslin & Terblanche-Smit 2019). Each of the five brands were allocated a tab and spreadsheet and the aim was to collect the first coded data from their three participants on one page. The researcher first had to allocate categories where the data belongs and fits (Elo et al. 2014).

The researcher noted that scholars warned against pre-decided categories or groupings of codes (Elo et al. 2014; Mayer 2015), advising that the categories should emerge naturally from the data represented as codes. As the researcher reviewed the first coding of the transcripts, it became apparent that the notes made were mainly summaries of or reflections on practices pertaining to the branding constructs of this study: employer brand, internal brand, corporate brand, coherent branding. There were also several notable comments that referred to interesting reflections or insights about the South African talent landscape.

The researcher thus created the coding categories per brand on the Microsoft Excel spreadsheet based on what was emerging from the data. In essence, the coding categories that emerged were: Employer Brand, Internal Brand, Corporate Brand, Coherent Brand and Notable. Each coding category had clear inclusion rationale.

Investigator triangulation was used again at this point, as the researcher consulted with her supervisor around the emerging coding categories (Mayer 2015). The supervisor cross-checked the researcher's sorting, questioned her rationale and agreed that inductive reasoning had been applied correctly, with a clear argument to support the emerging categories.

Each relevant note from the interview transcriptions were captured into one of these coding categories, resulting in a spreadsheet per brand that presented categorised, coded data for each brand across the five coding categories.

An example of this initial coded document is available as Appendix D to this study.

4.3.4. Data analysis step 4: Themes

With the relevant data sorted into coded categories, the researcher was presented with five spreadsheets (one per brand) with a rich bank of notes captured per coding category.

Nowell et al. (2017, p. 8) suggest that the researcher should, at this point, start searching for themes in the coded data. A theme could be established by linking data together into clusters, or patterns revealed by reoccurring or common notes, or some thread of thinking or reasoning (supported by literature) that joins data sensibly (Nowell et al. 2017; Vaismoradi et al. 2016).

The role of the researcher in interpreting data and relating it to the research purpose and questions in order to establish themes was pivotal at this stage. This initial theme identification from the coded data required the researcher to have a theoretical foundation to base inductive decisions on, and saw the researcher referring to the theoretical foundation and research purpose and questions in order to ensure that the themes identified were interpreted optimally (Vaismoradi et al. 2016).

Duplication plays a role in this step too. Three different stakeholders were interviewed in each company, and they could quite conceivably share similar experiences or views. Alternatively, there may be conflicting points of view in the coded notes, as the three different stakeholders may have experienced matters differently, depending on their exposure, role or function or personal views. The aim of the research study was never to compare the subjective views of the three different leaders interviewed, nor those of the brands as a whole – rather, it was to elicit all three leaders' viewpoints across all five brands on the same matter to ensure that all aspects of talent attraction and retention pertaining to brand building were uncovered. With this in mind, the researcher consulted the literature review, which held that each of these

leaders play a role in talent attraction and retention through brand building (Bafaro et al. 2017; Charan et al. 2018; Kanter 2011) and, as such, disregarded who said what, not holding any one leader's viewpoint as more valuable or categorising the three different viewpoints into different categories. However, as per Vaismoradi et al. (2016, p. 104), the researcher delayed judgement and remained open throughout the thematic analysis process. Where duplication occurred, the researcher did not eliminate or disregard data, but considered all data equally.

Whilst this step in the thematic analysis process saw the categorising of data from the three participants without comparison between participant responses, the researcher was able to return to the individual viewpoints later in the analysis process to address or explore anomalies that arose between the three participant role-player responses.

To ensure trustworthiness during this theme identification process, the researcher ensured that the process was well-documented and motivated in a control document which colour coded themes to "group" them together visually. A theoretical argument, supported by literature, was held throughout the process of interpretation and inductive reasoning that informed the theme identification (Noble & Smith 2015). An example of the theme identification control document is available as Appendix E of this study.

The emerging themes and subthemes are presented and then discussed in context of literature in the remaining sections of this chapter.

4.4. Introduction to themes and subthemes

Themes are described by Percy et al. (2015, p. 81) as "patterns of patterns", requiring the researcher to weave patterns emerging from the data analysis into themes. Each theme was anchored by a theme descriptor or theme identification title. Each theme title was carefully constructed using simple language, ensuring that the theme title clearly states what the theme is about and describes how the theme relates to the research purpose and questions (Vaismoradi et al. 2016).

The researcher noted that the theme titles should be relatable to the literature review insights and the study purpose, and research questions. Each theme title was therefore written in a manner that highlights the key construct of the theme (eg corporate brand) and provides a statement of how the key construct of the theme relates to the purpose and research questions (Percy et al. 2015).

According to Vaismoradi et al. (2016, p.107), subthemes are used to make sense of themes by offering summaries and examples of participant responses that underpin the theme. The subthemes were therefore assigned to give meaning to the theme identification descriptor.

4.4.1. Decisions guiding theme and subtheme identification

Two important decisions were made by the researcher in regards to the reporting of themes and subthemes, which should be clarified before outlining the themes.

Firstly, the researcher decided to report on themes in context of insights gained from the study of literature. The literature review allowed the researcher to form a firm theoretical foundation which was applied to both the formulation of semi-structured interview questions and the analysis of data. The researcher approached data analysis inductively and the role of literature review insights cannot be separated from the approach of the researcher to data analysis. In the discussion of themes and subthemes, the anchoring insights from literature provided context to the reporting of themes (Vaismoradi et al. 2016).

Secondly, the researcher noted that the insights gained from the three participants across five brands could be analysed in several ways. For instance, insights could be used to compare what brand managers are saying versus what human resources/talent managers or line managers are saying.

The purpose of this research was to explore, in the context of global leading practices, the talent attraction and retention practices pertaining to employer, internal and corporate brand building in companies that are top South African brands. Given this clear purpose, the focus of the study was on cumulative insights from all three key brand and talent stakeholders – the sum total of their insights would be much more valuable than the parts, being individual insights. The researcher therefore decided not to compare insights between participants or brands, nor to delve into any disjoints or apparent contradictions between participants or brands. Instead, the researcher looked for similarities, collective insights from responses, and in doing so met the research purpose of this study, as stated above.

Where the researcher found interesting anomalies around the alignment of leadership or the talent-brand relationship, this is reported on in Chapter 5 as recommendations for further research, given that this was not the primary focus of this study (Vaismoradi et al. 2016).

4.4.2. Themes and subthemes identified

Considering the contextual relevance of literature review insights and the decision made to focus on collective responses as opposed to individual responses, the results of the thematic data analysis yielded six themes, with five of these themes presenting subthemes.

Themes and subthemes are summarised in Table 4.1 to follow, and outlined in detail thereafter.

Table 4.1: Themes and subthemes delivered by the data analysis

Theme	Subthemes
1. The value of the corporate brand in talent attraction and retention	1.1. The lure of a successful corporate brand 1.2. Corporate branding appears to be more important and/or well-developed than other brand building platforms 1.3. Purposeful, values-based corporate brands resonate with talent
2. Brand-aligned practices to articulate and assess aspirational talent	2.1. A clear, brand-aligned articulation of what talent is 2.2. Assessments to identify talent 2.3. Brand-aligned aspirational element of talent
3. The employer brand, employee value proposition and internal brand: relevant but still a work in progress	3.1. Employer brand and employee value proposition are relevant to attracting talent 3.2. Internal brand is relevant to retaining talent 3.3. Employer brand, employee value proposition and internal brand are under construction
4. Strategic leadership alignment for talent and brand	4.1. Brand and talent is CEO-driven 4.2. Cross-functional leadership collaboration emerging 4.3. Line managers are taking ownership
5. Talent retention through engagement and meaningful work	5.1. Talent retained through employee engagement 5.2. Talent retained through meaningful work, allowing talent to contribute to purpose and brand
6. Talented brand ambassadors contribute to brand coherence	

4.4.3. Sliding scale applied to the discussion of theme and subtheme findings

In describing the occurrence and relevance of the themes and subthemes, the researcher refers to the terms below. To ensure clarity about the meaning of these terms, a sliding scale for the reporting of findings based on the data analysis was compiled after consulting literature guidelines (Van Loggerenberg et al. 2019) and are listed in Table 4.2.

Table 4.2: Sliding scale applied to theme discussion

Term	Sliding scale meaning
All brands	Each of the five brands that were included in the primary research. Therefore: Brand A + Brand B + Brand C + Brand D + Brand E.
All participants	Each participant interviewed. Therefore: Brand manager + human resources or talent manager + line manager in every brand
Most brands	At least four of the five brands that were included in the primary research
Most participants	At least 12 of the 15 participants that were interviewed
Some brands	At least three of the five brands that were included in the primary research
Some participants	At least nine of the 15 participants that were interviewed
A few brands	At least two of the five brands that were included in the primary research
A few participants	At least six of the 15 participants that were interviewed

4.5. Research findings

Theme 1: The value of the corporate brand in talent attraction and retention

Theme number 1 was significantly more prominent than any other themes, and should be deemed the primary theme that emerged from the data analysis. This is because this theme was common to all brands, as well as to all participants. Moreover, this theme enjoyed more than half of the cumulative responses, making it the most frequently mentioned theme of all.

Theme 1 speaks to the value of the corporate brand in talent attraction and retention.

The researcher anticipated that the strength of the corporate brand would be a valuable tool in talent attraction and retention as the literature review suggested that strong corporate brands have a stakeholder focus and build the reputation of the brand positively across stakeholders, including prospective and current talent (Balmer 2017; Erkmen et al. 2017). It seemed likely that a company with a strong corporate brand would be able to leverage it to obtain favourable responses from talent and draw them to the brand (Balmer 2017; Charan et al. 2018; Kaufmann et al. 2016).

The data analysis suggests that the corporate brand is particularly valuable in attracting and retaining South African talent. Three subthemes support theme 1, revealing that South African talent appears to be lured by successful corporate brands, that the corporate brand seems to be more important or well-developed than other brand building platforms (employer and internal branding) and that purposeful, values-based corporate brands that are unique and compelling would appear to resonate particularly well with South African talent.

Subtheme 1.1. The lure of a successful corporate brand

All brands and all participants referred to the lure of a successful corporate brand in talent attraction and retention. Literature reviewed suggested that the corporate brand is relevant to talent attraction and retention, as prospective and current employees are corporate brand stakeholders that should be positively impacted at every contact point with the corporate brand (Balmer 2017; Punjaisri & Wilson 2017). Moreover, the purpose, vision and mission of the corporate brand are instrumental in attracting and retaining talent that is aligned with and committed to what the corporate brand stands for (Balmer 2017; Erkmen et al. 2017). Over and above the confirmation of the relevance of the corporate brand in attracting and retaining South African talent, a deeper insight emerged: talented employees in South Africa are particularly interested in the commercial success of a corporate brand. The local literature

review suggested that economic uncertainty evident in widespread retrenchments and job losses would compel South African talent to look for job stability, financial compensation and benefits (Mazibuko & Govender 2017; Muleya et al. 2016). However, some scholars suggested that this economic uncertainty could see South African talent being less interested in the corporate brand and more concerned with the financial offering in the employer brand (Ferreira 2016).

The research findings suggest that South African talent see a commercially successful corporate brand as a “safe bet”, as argued by one brand manager when he said “people just want to work for companies that are doing well. People come to companies that are generating profits... companies that can secure their own commercial foundations”. This brand manager continued to say that a successful corporate brand that “does very well and has a very good reputation of being stable” offers people “safe havens” in what he terms “a world where things are quite chaotic”.

Over and above the financial security that a successful corporate brand offers, the findings show that there is also a measure of top talent wanting to be affiliated with successful corporate brands. Literature reviewed shows that corporate brand building focuses on building a positive reputation with stakeholders (Balmer 2017; Merrilees 2017). Xie, Bagozzi and Meland (2015, p. 138) hold that prospective employees identify with the projected external image of the company through corporate brand building and will be attracted to companies with a positive image and greater levels of perceived prestige.

This was confirmed by a line manager who said that talented people “want to be associated with a winning brand, with a number one, rather than be associated with a dying brand”. A human resources/talent manager reinforced this sentiment when she stated: “The best talent want to work for the best companies and being one of those organisations that have been identified and acknowledged that way, it goes a long way to attracting and retaining the best talent”.

Subtheme 1.2. Corporate branding appears to be more important and/or well-developed than other brand building platforms

The global literature review suggested that strong brands have aligned their corporate, internal and employer brand building platforms, communicating consistently and coherently across platforms (Balmer 2017; Lacroix 2013; Li et al. 2017). A triangle of strength, the three brand building platforms appear to be equally important in attracting and retaining the talent required

to build strong brands (Erkmen et al. 2017; Foster et al. 2010; Sharif & Islam 2017). South African literature reviewed showed that South African talent are navigating an economically unstable landscape (Anand et al. 2016; Muleya et al. 2016; Subban 2016) and may be more interested in financial compensation, benefits and job stability – all aspects related to the employer brand and employee value proposition.

Research findings reveal that all brands and all participants rated the corporate brand to be more important and/or more well-developed than the employer or internal branding platforms. A brand manager supported this notion of a dominant corporate brand when he said: “Our corporate brand is ja, quite a strong brand, because it’s a global brand and it’s meaningful and it attracts young people. They want to come to a brand that they know has opportunities ...they’ve watched it...”. One human resources/talent manager admitted that talent practices are leveraging off the corporate brand: “We doing well in certain areas and from an attraction perspective we are leveraging off the corporate brand... its not like we build a specific employer brand and we use it for advertising and we have a separate site”.

Companies that are top South African brands appear to have realised that their corporate brand has been dominant and has been enjoying most of the attention. They do seem to be aware of this and setting out to address it, as per this response from the one of the brand managers interviewed: “It’s great that people are coming to us because of our brand but we need to look at our employer brand in terms of what we can do in our space”.

Theme 1.3. Purposeful, values-based corporate brands resonate with talent

The global literature review suggests that purposeful corporate brands are driven by the purpose and values of the brand and allow employees to bring it to life (Balmer, 2017; Kaufmann et al. 2016; Rosethorn 2018; Urde & Greyser 2016). Purposeful, values-based brands inspire trust in all stakeholders, including talent (Balmer 2017; Mc Coy 2013; Merrilees 2017).

South African literature provided no clear answers on how important the purposeful, values-based corporate brand is for talent. South African talent’s attraction to a brand’s corporate social responsibility has not been established from literature, with some scholars suggesting that whilst leadership may find social or community investments valuable, entry level talent may deem it wasteful (Moloi et al. 2014) and others proposing that the new generation of talented South African employees are likely to care deeply about the planet and the community (Potgieter & Doubell 2018).

The findings reveal that the purpose and value of the corporate brand in giving to the community, building a better society, adding value to the lives of others and so forth play an important role in attracting and retaining talent. Purposeful, values-based corporate brands appear to resonate with South African talent. All brands confirmed that the purpose, values and corporate social responsibility resonated with talent. Most participants provided concrete examples of how talent was attracted to a brand with purpose and causes for community upliftment as it provided talent with an opportunity to give back too.

One of the participants, a brand manager, felt that their corporate brand is “a brand that provides opportunity for growth and is centred around these values.. its really meant to be aspirational and attract people to what it is we’re trying to do. So people are also attracted by the fact that we’re a purpose-driven brand”. A different brand’s human resources/talent manager confirmed that working for a purposeful corporate brand allows talent the opportunity to add to society through the brand, when she said: “working for (corporate brand) is becoming a citizen of the society you live in and a contributor to the economy that you enjoy. And I think that’s the value that we would like to promote to any employee that is not yet with us or with us. And working for (corporate brand) allows you these avenues to be a meaningful corporate citizen”. One line manager’s response further underpins the importance of the socially responsible corporate brand in attracting talent: “I think for the corporate brand its... you can’t just be in the world for making money and there is a lot of hatred towards big fat corporates that steal money. So here you can be socially responsible and make a living by also doing good – it’s a big theme around the world and I think it attracts talent when they say this company doesn’t just take away from the world, its giving actual sustainable things that can change people’s lives. And people want to be part of something like that, something that gives them that purpose, that’s bigger than me, they can contribute to this”.

Theme 1 reveals research findings that suggest that the corporate brand is valuable in talent attraction and retention in companies that are top South African brands. The lure of a successful corporate brand appears to draw interest from talent, and the corporate brand would seem to be more well-developed and/or important than other brand building platforms in talent attraction and retention. The findings also show that South African talent appears to identify positively and resonate with purposeful, unique and compelling corporate brands that live their values and give back to society.

Theme 2: Brand-aligned practices to articulate and assess aspirational talent

The global literature reviewed on talent suggested that the definition of talent has been emerging and evolving. For the purposes of this study, a working definition of talent was created. Talent was seen as prospective and current employees that offer a rare or highly desirable skill set which companies need in order to achieve their strategic objectives (Barriere et al. 2018; Keller & Meaney 2017). Talented employees also emerged as high performers with ample potential for future growth (Cappelli & Keller 2017; Gallardo-Gallardo & Thunnissen 2016), living the values of the company as they engage with the brand and bring it to life in their daily work (Charan et al. 2018; Russell & Brannan 2016). However, several scholars held that the very definition of talent has not been adequately addressed through research (Cappelli & Keller 2017; Keller & Meaney 2017) and that there is still much debate about what constitutes talent and what not. Local literature review added to the complexity when it proposed that the very term “talent” may have a race qualifier in South Africa (Abbott, Goosen & Coetzee 2013; Mazibuko & Govender 2017) and suggested that educational challenges in South Africa could see talent needing a higher educational qualification or degree to be deemed as talent (Subban 2016; Tshilongamulenzhe 2017).

Literature reviewed provided very little research findings and insights regarding the informing of the term talent, requirements of talent and approaches to talent identification in South Africa. As such, the research findings from companies that are top South African brands would be able to provide valuable insights into requirements of talent and/or the manner in which talent is articulated and identified in these top brands.

Theme 2 was placed in second position for two reasons: Firstly, it is second to Theme 1, the dominant theme, which elicited more than half of the cumulative responses from participants interviewed. Secondly, Theme 2 is placed before other themes as literature reviewed suggests that the manner in which talent is defined or identified upfront will inform talent attraction and retention practices and talent management as a whole (Cappelli & Keller 2017; Keller & Meaney 2017; Venkatesh 2013). As such, the researcher argued that insights around the construct “talent” in companies that are top South African brands would provide valuable foundational insights that could inform the subsequent themes.

All brands and all participants referred to a brand-aligned, clear articulation of talent and rigorous assessments to identify talent. In addition, all brands and all participants were quite clear that talent is the best of the best, the most qualified, those that excel and exceed expectations. The researcher noted the high bar set for talent and that research participants

reasoned that their brand is aspirational and that people aspire or compete to work for them. Subthemes 2.1. to 2.3. outline the findings in respect of talent articulation, assessment and the aspirational element.

Subtheme 2.1. A clear brand-aligned articulation of what talent is

Russell and Brannan (2016, p. 17) proposed that prospective talented employees display what they term a “brand code”, showing how their behaviours and values are aligned with the values of the brand and indicating that they would fit into the overall brand and culture. According to other scholars, corporate brands should clearly articulate what talent would look like in relation to their brand’s purpose, values and behaviours (Barriere et al. 2018; Charan et al. 2018; Punjaisri & Wilson 2017).

The research findings echo the literature reviewed, with all brands and all participants referring to the need for a clear articulation of talent in terms of the brand purpose and values. The articulation of what comprises a talented person is informed by the brand’s values and way of work, culminating in a sort of “brand code” of a talented person as put forth by Russell and Brannan (2016).

The linking of the brand to required talent values and behaviours is evident in the testimony of a line manager interviewed that stated: “Our values are directly linked to our external brand. So we’ve got a brand to market and then we say well, this is the values and the behaviours and the culture that will enable us to deliver that promise to the customer and we engaged our employees”.

This articulation of the brand-aligned values and behaviour expected of talent appears to be packaged into a type of brand code, with participants referring to a brand “person”, a person that displays the brand “DNA”, or follows the brand “way”, as motivated by the following research participant responses. A participating human resources/talent manager referred to a brand person, which informs the definition of talent, adding that: “the leadership team have helped us to configure that, together with our values and our leadership charter. So when we look for somebody, it’s with that make up that we look”. Another line manager outlined the brand DNA, adding that talent is cross-checked against this brand DNA: “do they fit against the brand DNA – we definitely look for that and we would appoint them”. The brand “way” is supported by a participating brand manager, who referred to a charter that packages the values of the organisation and the way of work. She added that their company will then set out to find talent that aligns with the values articulated in the brand way.

Research findings suggest that companies that are top South African brands articulate the talent they would require in the context of the brand values and way of work. When these top South African brands set out to attract or retain talent, they look for talent that is aligned with brand code.

Subtheme 2.2. Assessments to identify talent

The South African literature reviewed revealed that there are critical shortages of skilled employees in South Africa, partially attributed to a poor education system (Asmal 2015; Subban 2016; Tshilongamulenzhe 2017). It stands to reason that even those prospective employees who offer a high school qualification or a diploma/degree may not meet the skills requirements of companies.

Research findings show that all brands and all participants support the use of psychometric or other assessments to identify talent. It would seem that South African leaders are not taking the knowledge and skills offered by talent at face value, but are investing in assessments to establish abilities and potential in a more structured manner. It would appear that these assessments are crucial in determining talent capabilities. One participating line manager revealed that only 10% of the assessed talent make it through the assessment process. Another line manager also referred to the importance of assessment screening in yielding what he terms a strike rate as low as 10%: "For our recruitment our strike rate is 10% - so if I want to recruit an agent, I have to shortlist and go through 300 potential candidates. Only 10 or 15 of them will pass their assessment out of 100. Now, that for me talks to education". The human resources/talent manager of another brand stated that: "we try to get the best people and we put them through rigorous screening and assessments". Companies that are top South African brands are seeing the upfront assessment of the knowledge, skills and potential of talent as an important investment, as evident in this response from a participating human resources/talent manager: "if you have to spend R5000 on a psychometric prognosis to understand the potential of an individual... we don't think that's a high investment to make for the return you're going to get".

The assessment of current talent earmarked for leadership development is also important to companies that are top South African brands. One human resources/talent manager revealed that leadership assessment potential tools were used to assess the potential of future leaders, adding that "it was quite interesting what the results actually revealed...we actually found that about 70% of the people who we identified as high potential were actually not..."

Research findings suggest that that companies that are top South African brands are setting the talent bar high and investing in assessments to identify talent.

Subtheme 2.3. Brand-aligned aspirational element of talent

As discussed in Theme 1.3, corporate brands that are purpose-driven and successful are attractive to top talent, who want to work for top brands. The word “aspirational” was used by a participating brand manager to describe this lure of a successful corporate brand that all talent aspires to work for. Research findings show that there is an aspirational element attached to the talent that top South African brands attract and retain.

Literature reviewed held that talent offers rare or highly desirable attributes, knowledge, skills or experience (Barriere et al. 2018; Keller & Meaney 2017) but cautioned that talent is in high demand and short supply (Korn Ferry 2018; Manpower Group 2018; Deloitte Global 2017). With critical talent shortages and a small pool of talent in South Africa (Aucoin & Cilliers 2016; Subban 2016), as well as the added pressure of the “brain drain” (Tshilongamulenzhe 2017) and the “talent paradox” (Subban 2016), it raises the possibility that South African companies may have to make do with the available talent, setting aside any aspirational or elite requirements for talent.

According to this study, companies that are top South African brands are not making do with the available talent – on the contrary, these companies have introduced a brand-aligned aspirational element to their identification of talent. As a participating brand manager put it: “when you get a brand at the level of (corporate brand) you know, you think that actually companies like (corporate brand) on the whole can afford to get the best talent in the country”. Another participating human resources/talent manager stated that: “we want to make sure that when we go out we just attract top talent in the industry. So by virtue of you being selected and given that appointment at (corporate brand), you know, you can’t argue that this is not talent”. Another brand’s brand manager echoed this sentiment when she says: “we want the best and we don’t settle for anything less than the best”.

All brands and all participants referred to graduate programmes as a talent attraction tool, but even in selecting graduates, there appears to be an aspirational element of selecting only the top graduates. The human resources/talent manager of a participating brand confirmed that “we only take the top students from all of the universities. We have an arrangement with them, as part of our feed stream...” This aspirational graduate approach appears to be well-known in the industry, as one line manager argued: “(corporate brand) is known, our bursary

schemes, our development programmes, they know we are the best in the industry and we are able to go and we know that we even now go in at school level and we identify people who are going to get bursaries and we put them through university and all their board exams and everything”.

Within the companies that are top brands, there is a similar aspirational element to being identified as talent for accelerated development or succession. One human resources/talent manager stated that “we only allow for 15% of our population to be top talent” and describes a rigorous talent identification process: “So talent that senior or company leadership speak to is calibrated at the most senior level so if somebody is seen, especially in the leadership team, as talent or a successor, they are vetted to the point where they are vetted with the CEO”.

Research findings reveal that companies that are top South African brands are setting out to find the best prospective and current talent through targeting top graduates and applying rigorous criteria to the identification of current talent. There appears to be an aspirational element to being identified as talent in companies that are regarded as top South African brands.

Theme 3: The employer brand, employee value proposition and internal brand – relevant but still a work in progress

Theme 1 revealed that the corporate brand appears to be the most dominant tool in the attraction and retention of talent for companies that are top South African brands. The literature review suggested that the employer brand and employee value proposition are central to the attraction of talent (Bali & Dixit 2016; Mosley 2015), whilst the internal brand is central in retaining talent (Saleem & Iglesias 2016; Sharif & Islam 2017). Research question 1 probed the relationship between the three brand building platforms and the attraction and retention of talent, as the postulated relationship from the literature reviewed needed to be confirmed in primary research.

The research revealed that, whilst all five top South African brands and their research participants see the importance and relationship between the employer brand and talent attraction and the internal brand and talent retention, four of the five brands admit to these two brand building platforms as a work in progress at present.

Subtheme 3.1. Employer brand and employee value proposition are relevant to attracting talent

Literature reviewed suggested a strong relationship between talent attraction and an appealing, differentiated employer brand with a compelling employee value proposition (Bali & Dixit 2016; Keller & Meaney 2017). One of the nine global leading practices identified by the researcher after a synthesis of literature reviewed stated: Develop an employer brand with a distinctive, relevant and persuasive employee value proposition. However, several scholars cautioned against the seamless application of global leading practices to the South African reality, suggesting that there is limited research to confirm the relevance of global leading practices in emerging markets like South Africa and encouraging the consideration of contextual factors in the uniquely South African landscape (Schiemann 2014; Vaiman et al. 2012; Vaiman et al. 2018).

As such, the relationship between the employer brand and employee value proposition and the attraction of talent in the South African marketplace was not assumed, but formed part of research question 1, which probes the relationship between talent attraction and employer branding.

All brands and all participants confirmed the relationship between the employer brand and employee value proposition and talent attraction. An attractive employer brand with a compelling employee value proposition seems to be relevant in talent attraction in companies that are top South African brands.

A participating human resources/talent manager spoke about the employer brand comprising “all the awards we’ve won” from an employer perspective. She stated that “What I’ve also seen is we’ve been winning the best employer for many years but we’ve leveraged that a bit more. We’ve also leveraged the awards we’ve won in the diversity and inclusion space, for woman’s inclusion. Also the graduate awards, the awards we’ve have for the last four years. So we’re really using our brand and what people know of us and what we want them to know of us to be a tool to attract them”.

Aligning the employer brand and employee value proposition to the corporate brand is also significant in attracting talent, as another human resources/talent manager motivated when she said that they are leveraging the customer brand and “aligning that to the experience we want in a talent or candidate experience. So it’s very focused on the attraction side then on all

our platforms we've got strategic marketing that we're doing towards not just customers but also towards candidates".

The research findings show that all brands are investing in an employer brand and employee value proposition that advocates ample opportunities for learning and development, as well as a broad scope for career growth. As the human resources/talent manager of one brand said: "We look at what development you can offer people, because people will stay with you not just to do meaningful and challenging work, they also want to know what's in it for them for the future".

Subtheme 3.2. Internal brand is relevant to retaining talent

Internal brand building comprises building the brand within the company to existing employees (Punjaisri & Wilson 2017; Saleem & Iglesias 2016). The ultimate goal of internal branding is to build positive identification with the brand from within (Bali & Dixit 2016; Saleem & Iglesias 2016). As current talented employees identify positively with the brand from within, they become more engaged with the brand and less likely to leave, which positively impacts the retention of talent (Erkmen et al. 2017; Erkmen & Hancer 2015). One of the nine global leading practices identified by the researcher during a synthesis of literature succinctly presents this relationship as follows: Implement effective internal branding initiatives that reinforce the brand's purpose and values and enhance the employee's engagement with the brand.

However, as discussed in subtheme 3.1, a seamless adoption of this global leading practice in the South African context is not feasible. Instead, the researcher probed the relationship between internal brand building and talent retention through research question 1.

The research findings revealed that all brands and all participants acknowledge the relationship between internal brand building and the retention of talent. A participating line manager confirmed this clearly: "Internal brand-building in my view is critical in retaining talent". This sentiment was echoed by another brand manager: "The Employer Brand is there to know that you are out to secure the best, and then the internal brand I think that brings a way of aligning the brand and aligning behaviour and that brings a sense of security. So I think each of them has a different role to play".

Internal brand building was suggested by scholars to include the reinforcement of the brand's purpose and values, leadership that portrays the brand, human resource practices that support

the brand promises, and internal brand communication to employees (Bali & Dixit 2016; Saleem & Iglesias 2016).

Each of the internal brand building practices put forward by literature was confirmed as relevant and important by the research findings. One brand manager referred to the reinforcement of the brands purpose and brand values through internal branding: “It’s centred around what makes a star and a star would be all of those things I described previously in terms of living the values... there’s different categories... there’s one for living the values, there’s one for amazing business delivery, there’s stuff for innovation, there’s stuff for intellectual leadership, so it’s kind of all linked to that values framework. Those are really powerful internal brand-building practices”. The building of internal pride for the brand seems to contribute significantly and all brands and all participants mentioned practices that build an internal pride and positive associations with the brand as an employee. As a participating line manager said: “I think the one thing you can say is that there’s a lot of pride from an internal perspective in the brand. So people are very proud to work for (corporate brand) and they will very proudly wear their (corporate brand) clothing”.

Leadership that portrays the brand is also an internal brand building practice that retains talent in top South African brands. Leadership create a culture and way of work that aids the building of the internal brand, as per this quote from a human resources/talent manager: “And then internally as well – these are the things that we are working on to make sure that we do retain. I mean, creating the leadership, environment and collaborative, supportive culture”.

Internal brand building through solid, reputable human resources practices is seen as the most basic type of internal brand building by research participants, with one brand manager calling this “hygiene” when she said: “Beyond remuneration and all that stuff.. that stuff is actually hygiene, to tell the truth. Now we must reach that aspirational heart thing and retain our people...”

Internal brand communication is also being done, with some top brands even mentioning a dedicated internal branding team that drives it, as per this quote from a brand manager: ‘So there’s a big internal marketing team that makes sure that we have this alignment between those different platforms”.

Subtheme 3.3. Employer brand, employee value proposition and internal brand are under construction

Subtheme 3.3. presents an interesting finding that appears to contradict the findings of subthemes 3.1. and 3.2. All brands and all participants confirmed the relationship between talent attraction and employer brand, and talent retention and internal brand, and provided ample examples of how the employer branding and internal branding platforms were being leveraged in talent attraction and retention. It would therefore be reasonable to deduce that companies that are top South African brands have well-developed employer and internal branding platforms, and that they are, as mentioned in the set of global leading practices, “implementing strategically-driven initiatives” for talent attraction and retention through branding.

Research findings suggest that this is not the case, with four of five brands admitting that their employer brand and internal brand are still a work in progress. The research findings presented in theme 1 could perhaps have provided a clue to this interesting finding, as theme 1 and particularly subtheme 1.2. present research findings that reveal that companies that are top South African brands are leveraging dominant and well-developed corporate branding in talent attraction and retention.

The quoted responses from research participants outlined hereafter struck the researcher as bold, considering that they are top South African brands and that they are so readily admitting to having employer and internal branding platforms that are still a work in progress. Before attempting to shed light on this anomaly, it would be helpful to consider some of the responses of the four brands and note how revealing and interesting they are.

A participating brand manager admitted that human resources and talent come to brand for the script, but added that “I think that we’ve only now started being clear about what that script is”. Further in the interview, when discussing employer branding, he supported this work in progress when he said “I think we’re only really at the beginning of that journey. There’s a global template but I don’t think it’s been distilled for the South African context enough to be what it needs to be”. This response supports the literature review caution against global adoption in a local context.

A telling revelation from another brand manager supports subtheme 1.2. that presented the dominance of the corporate brand when he stated the following about employer and internal branding: “its not something that has been done for long because we’ve been focusing on

growing the business. It's a time when we are starting to say you know what wait a minute we actually have work to do in terms of just using the brand that we've built for customers to build it for talent". He furthermore admitted that "the honest truth is that the business puts greater emphasis on the... the retail brand because that's what attracts customers, which ultimately attracts profit. So sometimes you have to consciously say but wait a minute um, I can't just build a good brand externally and not build a good employee value proposition".

One participating human resources/talent manager made an interesting point when she said: "I mean if you had to ask everybody what our employer brand is, you're going to get 50 000 different responses because it's not well defined". Another brand manager suggested this is a work in progress for them: "I mentioned earlier that we were looking at the whole EVP (employee value proposition) strategy and that kind of stuff. Its because we've identified opportunities to take that even further and to drive greater alignment".

Most companies that are top South African brands are comfortable to admit the corporate brand dominance and the critical need for them to focus on other branding platforms now. A brand manager stated: the big challenge we're experiencing is if you look at marketing and that's our branding team, they spending 80 – 90% of their time on establishing the corporate brand, and that's cool, but I think we haven't leveraged enough of their expertise to change the mindset to say the same practices that you apply to try and entice and make a client special – you can use the same practices from an employee perspective".

There are three significant aspects to the emergence of this subtheme as a research finding. Firstly, it confirms subtheme 1.2., which held that the corporate brand is more dominant in talent attraction and retention than other branding platforms. Secondly, this subtheme appears to contradict subthemes 3.1. and 3.2., in which research findings showed that all brands and all participants confirm a strong relationship between employer branding and talent attraction, as well as internal branding and talent retention. It stands to reason that if companies that are top South African brands are supporting the relationship between these constructs, they are likely to have strong employer and internal branding platforms, but findings suggest otherwise. Thirdly, it appears to differ from literature review findings about strong, coherent brands, which are argued to have aligned employer, internal and corporate brand building platforms – three equally important parts of a triangle of brand strength (Balmer 2017; Foster et al. 2010; Sharif & Islam 2017).

These interesting findings are discussed further in Chapter 5 of this study, which presents the research results. Theme 3 confirmed the relationship between talent attraction and employer

branding, as well as talent retention and internal branding, but raised several interesting questions in subtheme 3.3., which suggested that most companies that are top South African brands and most participants see their employer brand and internal brand as a work in progress.

Theme 4: Strategic leadership alignment for talent and brand

The global literature review was synthesised into nine leading practices for talent attraction and retention through brand building, according to global top brands, experts and scholars. Global leading practice number nine was stated as: Ensure that strategic leadership, from CEO level downwards, is committed to building brand coherence and strength through people (Adrianova et al. 2018; Balmer 2017; Charan et al. 2018; Kanter 2011).

The South African literature review suggested that South African leadership may still be grappling with the diversity and cultural changes of the new South African workplace (Mazibuko & Govender 2017; Tladinyane 2016), which could impact leadership behaviour and organisational culture negatively (Mazibuko & Govender 2017; Theron, Barkhuizen & du Plessis 2014). Arguably, this may negatively impact the strategic alignment required to build brand coherence (Balmer 2017; Merrilees 2017).

Theme 1 discussed the data analysis results around the building a strong corporate brand and the importance of a strong corporate brand in talent attraction. Theme 2 described how talent is articulated and assessed to ensure that talent is aspirational and clearly targeted. Theme 3 confirmed the relevance of an employer and internal brand in talent attraction and retention, but suggested that the employer and internal branding platforms are still a work in progress.

Theme 4 is placed after theme 3, as the strategic alignment of leadership appears to be emerging as the strategic alignment of brand building platforms. Whilst the research findings did not show a definite or particularly strong agenda for leadership alignment, the results across all brands and all participants revealed an emerging theme of strategic alignment.

Talent and brand appear to be finding their way to the boardroom table, with all five brands pointing to the role of the CEO and Exco in driving talent and brand. This is discussed in subtheme 4.1. Furthermore, all brands revealed what appears to be the emerging collaboration of cross-functional leadership in talent and brand building, which is discussed in subtheme 4.2. Finally, all brands and all participants confirmed that leadership or line management have taken ownership of talent and brand, with talent and brand building

seemingly emerging as key performance indicators for leadership. This is discussed in subtheme 4.3.

Subtheme 4.1. CEO-driven talent and brand building initiatives

Charan, Barton and Carey (2018, p. 36) argue that talent is such an important matter that it deserves the attention of the CEO and strategic leadership. A literature review synthesis yielded the following global leading practice: Ensure that strategic leadership, from CEO level downwards is committed to building brand coherence and strength through people. Scholars supported this leading practice, stating that the CEO and senior leadership should take responsibility for talent (Balfaro et al. 2017; Kanter 2011; Mosley 2015). Balmer (2017, p. 1492) holds that the corporate brand identity should be owned and driven by strategic leadership from CEO level downwards (Balmer 2017; Balmer 2012).

Research findings show that all five brands and most participants mentioned the involvement of their CEO and senior leadership team in talent and brand building initiatives. One brand manager described the CEO driving the new brand narrative as follows: “by April next year we are planning for the CEO to basically launch the narrative that for us is going to be the stake in the ground in terms of his role of what the brand stands for”. Another brand manager underlined the role of the CEO in internal brand building initiatives: “I think communication is key and all the CEO’s are really amazing at communicating, including (Group CEO), so for example in the health business, every Friday (CEO of a division) sends a communication called (CEO of a division’s name) Journal to the whole health business, it’s like 3500 people. That’s him communicating with the team in a formal way”. One human resources/talent manager had the following to say about the role of the CEO in talent: “It starts right at the top. I mean if you look at our CEO, he takes talent management and people very seriously and therefore it would be very silly for any leader in our business to take a superficial approach to how they manage their people”.

Subtheme 4.2. Cross-functional leadership collaboration is happening

Literature review insights held that cross-functional leadership should collaborate and align strategically to drive talent and brand (Charan et al. 2018; Venkatesh & Geetha 2015). This cross-functional leadership collaboration and alignment was of particular interest to this study, as a cross-functional leadership sample of research participants was included in this study. The selection of a strategic-level brand manager, strategic-level human resources/talent manager and a strategic-level line manager was purposely done, as literature revealed that

each of the three role-players play an important role in talent and branding (Adrianova et al. 2018; Charan et al. 2018; Sharif & Islam 2017). The literature review synthesis also yielded a global leading practice in this regard, which was presented as follows: Ensure that cross-functional leadership across human resource management, brand management and line management strategically align to drive talent initiatives.

The research findings reveal that companies that are top South African brands are deploying cross-functional leadership collaboration in talent and brand building. All brands and all participants outlined practices that pay testimony to cross-functional alignment of leadership in talent, such as a talent forum or leadership committee that looks at talent initiatives. Some brands and some research participants discussed practices in brand building that run across functional business areas.

A brand manager states that “there’s not an exco I go to where people, talent management, these kind of things are not discussed”. Another brand manager referred to the concept of leader-led branding for talent when she said: “if you just look at the content we’ve put out specifically – it’s leader-led. Leader-led from the top, from (CEO name). And then from obviously us, but very much alignment in terms of what we stand for, our purpose, our ambition”. Cross-functional leadership collaborate in talent reviews, as per this testimony from a human resources/talent manager: “From a management of talent within the business, we have 4 meetings in place where, or talent reviews, where the business facilitates those conversations so we have standard strategic conversations in place twice a year where they have conversations with the various line managers to review their talent against certain talent criteria”. Another brand’s human resources/talent manager presented these insights about their leadership involvement in talent: “You know, the first thing that struck me when I joined this organisation is how seriously our leadership team takes their role as people managers”. She continued to say that talent forums are owned by line managers: “And when they come into that discussion it’s not even an HR session, they take complete ownership of their talent and they know their people intimately”. The cross-functional collaboration of human resources and brand or marketing is also evident in responses like the following from a line manager: “the HR team is working with the Marketing team quite closely to ensure we leverage branding platforms”.

Subtheme 4.3. Leadership takes ownership of talent and brand

The important role of leadership, in particular line management, in talent attraction and retention through brand building was highlighted in literature reviewed. Global literature review held that leaders should unite behind the overall organisational strategy and take ownership of driving the brand strategy and talent strategy (Balfaro et al. 2017; Russell & Brannan 2016). Leadership plays an important role in building consistent, coherent brands that are leader-led (Balmer 2017; Kanter 2011; Mc Coy 2013). Leaders also contribute to the building of an internal brand that supports talent retention (Bali & Dixit 2016; Saleem & Iglesias 2016).

However, South African literature reviewed suggested that South African leaders may still be grappling with cultural integration of the diverse workforce (Mazibuko & Govender 2017; Tladinyane 2016) and have been found to display leadership behaviour that negatively impacts talent retention (Mazibuko & Govender 2017; Theron, Barkhuizen & du Plessis 2014). Given the contradictions between global and local literature reviewed, insights pertaining to leadership of talent and brand in companies that are top South African brands added value to the research purpose of the study.

Research findings revealed that all five brands and most research participants mentioned leadership stepping up and being an active contributor to talent and brand initiatives.

All five brands mentioned that talent and brand building is becoming an important part of key performance indicators for line management. As one participating brand manager said: “You often find that companies do engagement surveys but nothing ever really happens with it. Throughout my years here that’s changed and it’s part of the Corporate KPIS that top management take very seriously, so they want to know what’s the feeling in the business, you know, what is the situation, if they aren’t engaged what are the reasons for it, if they are engaged the reasons why they actually are engaged”. Leaders are also acting as brand ambassadors, as per this testimony from a brand manager: “a lot of the senior leaders are leaders in their own right in the sense of that they will do lots of presentations at different industry forums or write thought leadership pieces so we very much try and position many of our own initiatives as thought leadership initiatives and I think that does a lot to improve the Corporate Brand”. This dual role of leaders in talent and branding is clearly articulated in this response from a human resources/talent manager: “we’re really talking about our leadership and how great they are. And it must be a values-based, so all our leaders, they almost become role models to model our values”.

Finally, considering the literature review suggestion that South African leaders are struggling to build a culture that retains talent and drives a diversity and inclusion agenda (Mazibuko & Govender 2017; Theron Barkhuizen & du Plessis 2014; Tladinyane 2016), research findings suggest that companies that are top South African brands have leadership in place that supports diversity and inclusion and a culture of belonging. As one human resources/talent manager said: “I think what also makes our leadership great is the fact that we really drive diversity very hard”. Another line manager stated that: “Well, for sure, the internal stuff – this is the place where I spend most of my time. Do I enjoy being here so I can stay longer, firstly, because if I don’t enjoy being here I’m going to leave. We have started on a senior management forum, we started looking at a smart organisation and a healthy organisation”. He indicated that he supports this view of leadership’s role in creating a healthy culture of diversity and inclusivity by saying: “if we don’t do it we are running an unsustainable business and talent will suffer”.

Theme 5: Talent retention through engagement and meaningful work

The *Manpower Group Talent Shortage Survey* (2018) presented a sobering view of the critical talent shortages globally, suggesting that talent shortages have reached a 12-year high. It is predicted that by the year 2030 there will be a global talent shortage of 85 million people, with the highest talent shortages in developing countries like South Africa (Manpower Group 2018). Given the high demand and low supply of talent, talented employees have ample opportunity to leave the company and join competitors if they wish to do so (Charan et al. 2018; Saleem & Iglesias 2016).

Talent retention is the set of practices that ensure that talented employees remain in the company and do not leave (Cappelli & Keller 2017; Collings 2014). Following on a synthesis of literature, the researcher identified the following global leading practice pertaining to talent retention: Implement strategically-driven talent retention initiatives that incorporate aligned human resource management practices, leadership and internal brand communication (Barriere et al. 2018; Saleem & Iglesias 2016).

Retaining the services of talented employees is of crucial importance to South African companies, with the “brain drain” resulting in many talented employees emigrating abroad (Botha & Rasool 2014; Tshilongamulenzhe 2017) and labour laws driving the appointment and development of black talent, which sees companies actively pursuing black talent employed by competitors (Mazibuko & Govender 2017; Subban 2016). The research purpose of this study was to explore, in the context of global leading practice, the talent attraction and

retention practices pertaining to employer, internal and corporate brand building in companies that are top South African brands

This theme emerged from research findings, providing some helpful insights as to how companies that are top South African brands are retaining their talent. To introduce the subthemes, this quotation from a participating human resources/talent manager provides insight into the focus on retention in companies that are top South African brands: “As a result of going through our talent management process we end up with a certain amount of people who we ringfence and we need to make sure that we retain these people. If they leave our ranks, we actually report on that as a regrettable loss and our leaders are really held accountable to explain why, what happened, so it’s in their interest to retain them”.

In companies that are top South African brands it would seem that this “ring-fencing” for retention is done through employee engagement and providing talent with meaningful work, each of which is discussed separately in the subthemes to follow.

Subtheme 5.1. Talent retained through employee engagement

Literature reviewed held that employee engagement is a key part of internal brand building and a helpful tool in retaining talent. When employees are engaged, they buy into the company’s purpose, values and goals and feel strong levels of positive association and commitment to the company – as such, they are likely to remain with the company and continue contributing positively through their work (Keller & Meaney 2017; Saleem & Iglesias 2016).

Research findings reveal that all five brands and most participants confirmed that they were driving employee engagement as an internal branding and talent retention tool and that these companies that are top South African brands regularly and pro-actively measure employee engagement through surveys. These employee engagement surveys appear to measure more than just overall well-being and satisfaction; instead, the surveys seem to have a few pointed questions, such as this description provided by a brand manager: “it’s only like four or five questions, and we ask people have you actively looked for a job in the last year, would you recommend your friend to (brand), have you done so in the last year? And another one is: why are you still here?”

The results of employee engagement surveys appear to be important as they are considered and interrogated, and employee engagement levels form part of leadership’s key performance

indicators. A participating brand manager said: “As a company we have a very very high level of employee engagement... You often find that companies do engagement surveys but nothing ever really happens with it. Throughout my years here that’s changed and it’s part of the Corporate KPIS that top management take very seriously, so they want to know what’s the feeling in the business, you know, what is the situation, if they aren’t engaged what are the reasons for it, if they are engaged the reasons why they actually are engaged”.

The important role of the line manager in employee engagement and talent retention was underlined by most participants, and presented as the “number one tool” in talent retention by this line manager: “what we see in our engagement surveys is that the Line Manager has the biggest impact on the engagement of an employee. So in fact if we’re losing people we need to look to ourselves first. This involvement of line management in employee engagement is called the number one tool in talent retention”. This sentiment was echoed by another brand’s human resources/talent manager when she said: “we want to keep a close eye on our talent to make sure that they are not under threat of being poached by our competitors and this is such a small industry...if you don’t keep an eye on, you know, what their fears and their aspirations are, you do run the risk of them being poached. That is a line management function”.

Subtheme 5.2. Talent retained through meaningful work, allowing talent to contribute to purpose and brand

Subtheme 1.3. of this study suggested that prospective South African talent resonates with purposeful, values-based corporate brands. The findings show that talent seems to be attracted to corporate brands that have a purpose, make a meaningful contribution to society and add value to the lives of stakeholders.

To retain the services of talented employees, global literature suggests that organisations should ensure that talent is aligned with the business brand and goals (Keller & Meaney 2017; Ulrich 2015) and encouraged to add value by contributing to the brand, goals and values through the work they do (Balmer 2017; Barriere et al. 2018; Cappelli & Keller 2017). Current talented employees of corporate brands are important brand stakeholders that should bring the brand to life in their interactions with others (Collings 2014; Merrilees 2017; Punjaisri & Wilson 2017; Russell & Brannan 2016).

Whilst global literature reviewed suggested a strong relationship between talent retention and this alignment to the brand purpose and values brought to life through meaningful work, South

African literature reviewed offered seemingly conflicting views in this regard. Scholars suggest that South African millennials need to experience meaning and personal fulfilment at work, and thrive when they are connected to and contributing to a higher purpose and values through their work (Potgieter & Doubell 2018). However, with the highly diverse South African workplace and rapidly changing and evolving culture at work, it is unclear whether these South African millennials and their older counterparts are experiencing meaning and personal fulfilment at work. Some scholars suggest that South African leadership are driving a legal compliance agenda and that there are still deep undercurrents of discrimination, prejudice and stereotyping at play, which has a negative impact on an inclusive culture and leadership behaviour that encourages connection, contribution and meaningful work. Leadership behaviour and culture have been found to negatively impact talent retention (Mazibuko & Govender 2017; Theron, Barkhuizen & du Plessis 2014; Tladinyane 2016).

Whilst literature did not provide any clear answers, companies that are top South African brands appear to support the relationship between talent retention and meaningful work, which allows talent to contribute to the purpose and brand. The link between the corporate brand's purpose and employee contribution was outlined by this participating line manager: "so the Corporate Brand is trying to say: force for social good, that ambition for force of social good, shared value, and then bringing that back, internally to the staff, to sort of go we are living that, and we are enabling you to live that". A brand Manager stated that employee retention is enabled by what he calls "really tangible ways that we provide opportunities for people to make a difference". Another brand Manager stressed the importance of purpose and fitting into the bigger picture: "Actually that's really really important for everyone to know why. Why are we here? What do we need to do, and where do I fit in in the bigger picture?" A human resources/talent manager explained that their company gets the employees to love the brand and live the brand by working for six months across different areas of the business, so that they can experience the creation of the product from scratch. A talented employee can then experience their contribution to the brand in the following way: "you give value by understanding that what you contributed to building here is part of the larger purpose of the brand".

When talented employees experience their work as meaningful and they can see their contribution to the larger purpose, values and goals of the business, they experience the brand as a place where they belong and they stay. A human resources/talent manager motivated this point well when he said: "So we basically start generating a love for the brand because by doing this work, you get to make realisable contribution, you get to engage with executives in

the organisation, internally and externally, you get to see the results of what you've done in the final product... You know, you basically understand where you fit into the greater scheme of things".

According to some brands and some participants, meaningful work can also be created through special projects and innovation initiatives, which sees talent rotated or exposed to a wider spectrum of work that keeps them stimulated and involved. This retains talent whilst they are waiting for opportunities to open up, according to this human resources/talent manager: "as you'd like to promote top talent, very few opportunities arise especially on the senior levels, so we do try to make sure they stay engaged. I think that's the challenge. How do you keep them interested as you're waiting for new opportunities to arise?"

Theme 6: Talented brand ambassadors contribute to brand coherence

Theme 6 is placed after the other themes, as this theme presented some interesting variations from other themes. Firstly, the concept of talent acting as brand ambassadors emerged from all brands and most participants, making it notable. Secondly, only a few participants made the link between talented brand ambassadors playing a role in brand coherence, and those that did never used the words "brand coherence" or any other related construct in their verbatim responses. The researcher therefore applied inductive reasoning to synthesise and abstract the linkages between the highly relevant and frequently mentioned concept of talent as brand ambassadors, and the behaviours that these talented brand ambassadors displayed which build brand coherence (Balmer 2017; Li, Littleton & Akhtar 2017; Merrilees 2017).

Firstly, the matter of brand ambassadorship is introduced through literature reviewed and data. The discussion then addresses the relationship between brand ambassadorship behaviours and building brand coherence, explaining the inductive reasoning and abstraction applied by the researcher.

Literature reviewed held that current talented employees that are encouraged to internalise the brand, engage with the brand and live the brand in their working experience will stay with the company (Iglesias, Ind & Alfaro 2013; Rosethorn 2018; Russell & Brannan 2016). Moreover, these talented employees can be leveraged as brand advocates that not only live the brand but act as brand evangelists (Du Preez & Bendixen 2015; Venkatesh & Geetha 2015). This opportunity for talent to become part of the brand through their work and word-of-mouth sees talent become a brand co-creator, drawn in so closely to the brand that talent and

brand become interwoven and retention ensues (Ind, Iglesias & Schultz 2013; Kauffman & Louerio 2016; Mc Coy 2013; Merrilees 2017).

The researcher was unable to find literature that confirmed or contradicted this global leading practice in the South African context. Some scholars linked talent retention to motivation and job satisfaction (Coetzee & Stoltz 2015), whilst others viewed compensation and benefits as pivotal to talent retention (Barkhuizen et al. 2017) and others suggested that high levels of psychological ownership, evident in connectedness, feelings of belonging and opportunities to share this psychological ownership with others would herald talent retention (Du Preez & Bendixen 2015). However, some authors mentioned that cultural differences, communication preferences and leadership style, amongst others, significantly influence the context within an organisation, and, as such, the talent retention factors at play (Mazibuko & Govender 2017; Tladinyane 2016).

The research findings of this study reveal that all brands and most participants support the notion of current employees being brand ambassadors, as supported by this testimony from a brand manager: “Everything we do is designed to elevate our brand but at the same time, if you talk about the focus on employees, I really believe this and I believe I’m not alone in this: our employees are our best and most important brand ambassadors. We’ve got several thousand of them and so if we have happy employees – well, that’s the real manifestation of an excellent corporate brand”.

A brand manager of a different brand shared the following: “I think generally people, especially higher levels and people who have been at the company a long time, you know, maybe a great appreciation of what the company does, what it means to work here. So I think we become ambassadors in a sort of way. So we’ll say the company has a certain set of values, we work this way and we’re not just.... It’s not just lip service, we can testify and give our own set of experiences and say, look here I had all these opportunities, I’ve got to do this that whatever. So I think that’s a strength of (brand). I think you talk to people who work here and I think they do endorse the company...”

Now to the matter of brand ambassadorship and brand coherence. Literature confirmed the important role of talent in bringing the corporate brand to life in their work (Balmer 2017; Russell & Brannan 2016). As talented employees are engaged with the brand, offer optimal performance, potential and value (Cappelli & Keller 2017; Keller & Meaney 2017) and portray the brand purpose and values in their behaviour during interactions with other brand stakeholders (Charan, Barton & Carey 2018; Russell & Brannan 2016), their contribution is

essential to building the brand. If there is a brand fit, as literature proposes, the contribution of talented employees – what they say and do – will be brand-aligned and consistent with everything the brand stands for (Balmer 2017; Russell & Brannan 2016; Saleem & Iglesias 2016). When stakeholders experience their interactions with talented employees as brand-aligned, they perceive the brand to be coherent, as the brand messages and experiences are aligned, coherent and trustworthy (Hsu 2017; Kanter 2011; Lacroix 2013; Li, Littleton & Akhtar 2017; Urde & Greyser 2016).

Data obtained from research seems to support the fact that talent live the brand and that their contribution, living the brand, being a brand ambassador is pivotal to building a coherent brand. The brand purpose, values, way of doing things is continually reinforced and checked against the work an employee does, as per this testimony from a human resources/talent manager: “whatever work you’re doing, whatever product, service, whatever work you’re coming up with, thinking about it from a purpose and ambition perspective as well as then the work that you do needs to add value in terms of the organisation. So even in the work that we do as HR, we get asked, how does this meet the (brand) way? How does it meet the (brand) way in terms of our values, our leadership? So in terms of the (brand) person, you know, you’re looking at innovation, problem-solving, all these different attributes, we look at how does this come through on the services and products”.

The researcher proposes that this participant was talking about the work and behaviour of people being checked against the brand purpose (Balmer 2017; Lacroix 2013; Rosethorn 2018). The coherence between what the brand stands for and what the behaviour and work of people reflect is being checked and reinforced and kept in focus (Balmer 2017; Merrilees 2017).

The following testimony from a human resources/talent manager provides insights about leveraging talented brand ambassadors to build brand coherence: “we’ve got very senior consultants here who are profiled on tv, the radio, business day, magazines... and we find that the brand between the person and (corporate brand) itself becomes so intertwined that you can’t separate an (employee name) from the brand – they almost become synonymous. And that for me is an excellent retention strategy, because if you actually have to go and track the retention rate of people who we’ve been using as our brand ambassadors to promote the corporate brand and the employer brand – that itself becomes a retention strategy because they become so intimately...your profession becomes joined to the hip with (corporate brand). Very difficult for someone like (competitor brand) to take that away from us”.

The quotation links brand ambassadorship to talent retention, suggesting that the higher the brand ambassadorship, the more the lines between person and brand become blurred and the higher the likelihood of talent retention. Moreover, the reference between the intertwining of the person and the brand, and using that person to tell the brand story authentically speaks directly to coherent brand building practices. Urde (2013, p. 751) states the following about coherent brands: “The content of one element echoes that of the others, with the core as the centre of the framework. In a coherent corporate brand identity, the core reflects all elements, and every element reflects the core”. The researcher believes that the leveraging of talented brand ambassadors in reflecting the core through them is indicative of building brand coherence. Kaufmann, Loureiro and Manarioti (2016, p. 6) confirm that employees that live the brand values and act as brand ambassadors create a deeper sense of connection and brand-love with stakeholders, as they experience the brand as consistent and congruent. In the examples provided, participants reflected ways in which talented employees act as brand ambassadors, and in doing so portray the brand consistently to all stakeholders, building brand congruence.

4.6. Conclusion

The research findings emerging from the thematic content analysis of data obtained from transcribed interviews yielded six themes, five of these with subthemes. These findings present rich insight into the talent attraction and retention practices pertaining to brand building in companies that are top South African brands.

The first theme, which was the most dominant theme, supported by all brands and all research participants, suggested that companies that are top South African brands are primarily leveraging their corporate brand to attract and retain talent. Whilst literature held that corporate branding is important to build relationships of trust with all stakeholders, including talent, (Balmer 2017; Merrilees 2017), the alignment of corporate branding with employer and internal branding was suggested to be a strategic alignment into a triangle of strength (Balmer 2017; Charan, Barton & Carey 2018), the alignment of brand building platforms and the relationship of South African talent to corporate branding was unclear from local literature reviewed (Coetzee & Stoltz 2015; Ferreira 2016; Mazibuko & Govender 2017).

South African talent appears to be attracted to strong corporate brands that could potentially provide stability and financial security in an otherwise economically volatile employment marketplace (Aucoin & Cilliers 2016; Subban 2016). South African talent seems to be attracted

to purposeful corporate brands that also allow talent the opportunity to contribute to something larger than themselves. In South Africa, corporate brand building seems to overshadow other branding platforms, with most of the participating brands admitting that their corporate brand is leveraged to enable employer and internal brand building.

The articulation, assessment and aspirational element of talent was presented as the second theme. Global literature provided a working definition for the identification of talent (Bali & Dixit 2016; Keller & Meaney 2017), but South African literature suggested that talent may have a race or gender qualifier (Mazibuko & Govender 2017; Tladinyane 2016). Moreover, it would seem that an acute shortage of local skilled talent exists (Subban 2016; Tshilongamulenzhe 2017), which could arguably see companies lowering their talent requirements. It would seem that companies that are top South African brands have articulated their talent requirements clearly and that these requirements are informed by the brand and values of the organisation. Prospective and current talent undergo rigorous assessments that ascertain their capability and suitability. Only the best talent make it through this assessment process, lending an aspirational element to talent. Not only do talent aspire to work for top brands, but top brands only select the best of the best.

The relationship between talent attraction and retention and a company's employer, internal and corporate brands is clear from global literature (Bali & Dixit 2016; Balmer 2017; Punjaisri & Wilson 2017), but limited research is available on this relationship in the South African context (Ferreira 2016; Muleya, Ngirande & Rachidi 2016). Research findings show that top South African brands and their leaders perceive a strong relationship between talent attraction and retention and employer, internal and corporate brand building. However, most brands admit that their employer and internal branding platforms are still being developed, suggesting that these branding platforms have taken a back seat to the corporate brand platform. Despite a lack of formal structuring around employer and internal branding, companies that are top South African brands are leading their employer brand messaging with the lure of employee development and career growth, whilst internal branding seems to be centred in great leadership, solid human resource practices and a supportive culture. These employer brand and internal brand messages align with global leading practices (Edwards 2017; Mosley 2015) and provide insight into the learning opportunities that appeal to South African talent in the employer brand.

Interestingly, the fourth theme revealed that companies that are top South African brands have leaders that are owning and driving talent, leadership from CEO level spearheading talent and

brand building strategy. This finding seems to contradict South African literature, which suggested a lack of leadership commitment to talent and a poor leadership style that negatively impacts talent retention (Mazibuko & Govender 2017; Tladinyane 2016). Furthermore, it would appear that in companies that are top South African brands, cross-functional leadership collaboration and strategic alignment of leadership are happening.

It would appear that the leadership support of talent has resulted in high levels of employee engagement in companies that are top South African brands, which enables talent retention. Brand love and commitment are pivotal to engaging and thus retaining South African talent, who also appreciate meaningful work that allows them to live the brand. These findings align with global leading practices that advocate leadership support and employee engagement in talent retention (Balmer 2017; Punjaisri & Wilson 2017).

With engaged talent that love the brand and live the brand, brand ambassadorship has emerged in companies that are top South African brands. This engagement with the brand and the reinforcing of the brand values through behaviours have been shown by literature to build brand coherence (Lacroix 2013; Merrilees 2017) and aid talent retention (Erkmen & Hancer 2015; Saleem & Iglesias 2016). However, South African studies suggest that the diversity and transformation may be overshadowing the engagement of people required to live the brand (Barkhuizen & Schutte 2015; Mazibuko & Govender 2017).

In companies that are top South African brands, talented employees reinforce the brand message through word of mouth testimonies and co-creation of brand purpose through their work. It would seem that this brand ambassadorship strengthens the corporate brand of top South African brands even further, as talented employees present the brand consistently and coherently to all stakeholders, as advocated by global scholars to be key to brand coherence (Lacroix 2013; Merrilees 2017).

The six themes, five of which were supported by subthemes, provide rich insights around talent attraction and retention practice pertaining to brand building. The value of these findings lie in the fact that they are uniquely South African and the local context that informs the talent marketplace is considered, as are the specific needs of talented employees that are targeted by brand building in South Africa.

Chapter 5 of this study presents a deeper discussion of the research findings informed by a higher abstraction of findings synthesised into research results. Chapter 5 also presents limitations to this study and recommendations for further research arising from this study.

CHAPTER 5

RESEARCH RESULTS DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1. Introduction

Following on the thematic analysis of data collected as content from the transcription of 15 semi-structured interviews, six themes, five of them with subthemes, were presented and discussed in Chapter 4 of this study. The themes and subthemes were discussed in context of literature reviewed and findings presented insights around the talent attraction and retention practices pertaining to brand building that are being used by companies that are top South African brands.

In Chapter 5 these six themes and related subthemes are discussed in relation to each other and in relation to the research purpose and questions.

The manner in which the research results discussion is executed is informed by the research design and methodology. As this was an exploratory study conducted with the purpose to explore, in the context of global leading practice, the talent attraction and retention practices pertaining to employer, internal and corporate brand building in companies that are top South African brands, the tone and presentation of the research results discussion does not present conclusive results or recommendations (Flick 2018; Rahi 2017). Instead, the discussion sheds light on the topic being studied, providing insights emerging from the themes identified and presenting insights into the South African talent and brand landscape.

The discussion commences with a presentation of the themes and subthemes in relation to each other, in context of the literature reviewed (Flick 2018; Vaismoradi et al. 2016). A synthesis of the themes and subthemes and their relationship to each other is presented visually in a framework. The results, depicted in the visual framework, are discussed in context of the study's, purpose and questions, showing how the research findings addressed the research questions and research purpose.

Feedback and comments obtained from experts in respect of the themes and subthemes is presented in section 5.4, followed by further research recommendations, with the researcher discussing and motivating insights from this research study that illuminated possible gaps in the research field. The limitations to the study is followed by an overview of the significance of the study to South African companies, their leaders and South African scholars.

5.2. Presentation of themes in relation to each other and literature

Given the exploratory nature of this study and the application of the interpretive paradigm, the researcher allowed herself to become immersed in the data, the analysis process and the findings (Nowell et al. 2017; Rahi 2017). Holding the global leading practices and literature in context, the themes are discussed in relation to each other and literature, followed by a visual depiction of the themes and subthemes in relation to each other.

Discussion of theme 1: The value of the corporate brand in talent attraction and retention

The dominant and primary theme emerging from the research was the value of the corporate brand in talent attraction and retention. It was expected that companies that are top South African brands would have a strong corporate brand that can be leveraged in talent attraction and retention. The literature review indicated that there is a positive relationship between the corporate brand and both the attraction and retention of talent (Bali & Dixit 2016; Roberts-Lombard et al. 2016; Sharif & Islam 2017). The researcher anticipated that companies that are top South African brands would have well-developed employer, internal and corporate brand building platforms and that all three these platforms would be equally important in attracting and retaining talent. Literature had indicated that top brands should have achieved brand coherence by aligning these three platforms and consistently branding across them (Balmer 2017; Kanter 2011; Lacroix 2013; Urde & Greyser 2016).

The research findings reveal that the corporate brand appears to be more important and more well-developed than other branding platforms. The lure of a successful corporate brand attracts talent, as does the purpose and values portrayed by the corporate brand. Talented South Africans appear to resonate with purpose-driven values-based corporate brands that are unique and compelling, and aspire to be part of a purpose that is larger than them.

The researcher noted that global leading practices support the notion of building the corporate brand positively through stakeholders and underline the importance of aligning employer, internal and corporate brands (Born & Kang 2015; Mosley 2015; Sharif & Islam 2017), but do not indicate that the corporate brand is in any way more or less important than other platforms.

The researcher also noted that South African literature review findings suggest that South African talent may be less interested in the corporate brand and brand purpose and are more

attracted to the compensation and benefits that form part of the employer brand (Ferreira 2016; Muleya, Ngirande & Rachidi 2016).

It would seem that companies that are top South African brands are perceived as commercially successful and stable in a turbulent economic marketplace, which could explain the lure of the successful corporate brand. The researcher was unable to find sufficient literature to either confirm or deny the attraction of South African talent to brand purpose and values. Related literature review findings suggested that there are pressing financial factors in South Africa which could result in talent seeing purpose, values and corporate social investments as negligible or wasteful (Chatjuhamard et al. 2015; Ferreira 2016).

Findings from this study seem to add a fresh perspective, with companies that are top South African brands paying testimony to the fact that talent is attracted to their brand purpose and the value they can add to the brand and society.

Discussion of theme 2 (Talent articulated, assessed and aspirational) in relation to theme 1

Theme 2 provided interesting insights into the articulation and assessment of talent, and added an aspirational element to talent requirements. Held in context of global leading practices, this theme supports the first global leading practice, which held that companies should identify the specific talent needed to enable organisational success (Barriere et al. 2018; King 2015; Venkatesh 2013).

The significance of this theme is in the measure of identification applied by companies that are top South African brands. Given the small talent pool and ample educational and economic challenges revealed by South African literature (Subban 2016; Tshilongamulenzhe 2017), it could stand to reason that South African companies and their leaders need to attract and retain any talent available. With the added pressure of BBBEE requirements that could force a race qualifier to the already small pool of talent (Abbott, Goosen & Coetzee 2013; Mazibuko & Govender 2017), the options available to South African companies in articulating their talent needs appear to shrink even further (Subban 2016).

However, companies that are top South African brands seem to have applied strict articulation criteria to their talent needs and appear to be interested in top talent. Moreover, talent is rigorously assessed and only the best of the best make it through these assessments. As

such, it is understandable that there is an aspirational element attached to talent – top brands only want top talent, and top talent aspire to work for these top brands.

The rigorous assessments could be as a result of the educational challenges presented by the South African schooling and university system. Poor quality education results in a talent paradox, with high levels of unemployment and low levels of skills (Mazibuko & Govender 2017; Muleya, Ngirande & Rachidi 2016). Companies that are top South African brands appear to be factoring the poor education of prospective South African employees into their outlook on talent – as such, they do not accept that matriculants or even graduates offer the required skill set and invest considerably in what one of the participants called “a battery of assessments”.

South African companies and their leaders who wish to attract and retain the talent required to build strong brands can benefit from this insight and apply similar assessment protocols before recruiting what appears to be talent. It would seem that companies that are top South African brands are attracting and retaining the talent required to build strong brands because they are very clear about the skill level, attributes and other qualities that talent should offer. This becomes a cycle of reciprocity as top talent aspires to be part of top brands and attribute stature and prestige to being part of such a top brand.

The talent that pass assessments and become part of companies that are top South African brands are therefore clearly articulated by the corporate brand’s needs, and in turn it would seem that this talent is attracted by the strong corporate brand.

A synthesis between themes 1 and 2 emerges. Coherent, strong brands in South Africa articulate their talent needs clearly, assess talent rigorously and add an aspirational element to their talent. In turn, this aspirational talent is attracted to the lure of a commercially successful corporate brand that has a clear purpose and values that they resonate with. The primary relationship here appears to be that of top talent with top corporate brands, as illustrated in the first phase of the framework presented at the end of this discussion.

Discussion of theme 3 (The employer brand, employee value proposition and internal brand: relevant but still a work in progress) in relation to themes 1 and 2

With theme 1 and 2 presented in relation to each other and literature, the relationship of these two themes to theme 3 starts emerging. Theme 3 held that companies that are top South African brands do see the relationship between talent attraction and employer branding, as

well as talent retention and internal branding. Furthermore, it was revealed that most companies that are top South African brands are leading with the corporate brand and working on their employer and internal brand.

This finding confirms the literature review insights, which suggested a relationship between talent attraction and retention and the employer and internal brand respectively (Saleem & Iglesias 2016; Sharif & Islam 2017). However, the finding that employer and internal branding platforms are a work in progress in most companies that are top South African brands was particularly interesting. Global leading practices suggest that these branding platforms should be well-developed in order to attract and retain talent (Balmer 2017; Erkmen, Hancer & Leong 2017; Mosley 2015), in fact, the alignment of all three platforms provides the theoretical foundation from which the researcher reasoned her research sample. Literature held that strong brands are created by consistent communication across branding platforms, which enables the establishment of brand coherence (Bafaro, Ellsworth & Ghandi 2017; Balmer 2017; Lacroix 2013; Urde 2013). As such, the researcher argued that companies that are top South African brands would provide insightful talent attraction and retention practices, given that literature proposed a well-developed employer and internal brand that aligns with the corporate brand (Balmer 2017; Charan, Barton & Carey 2018).

The finding that four of the five brands admitted openly and honestly to the neglect of employer and internal branding platforms in favour of corporate brand building was revealing. It stands to reason that, if companies that are top South African brands are not in fact the expert sources of employer and internal branding practices and admit to focusing on corporate brand building, the South African talent landscape may differ from the global landscape, and the contextual considerations advocated by scholars (Schiemann 2014; Vaiman, Sparrow, Schuler & Collings 2018) have merit. Whilst global leading practices underline the triad of brand strength across employer, internal and corporate brands, South African practices suggest that local companies and their leaders are able to attract and retain talent by optimal leveraging of a strong corporate brand.

It must be clarified that, although companies that are top South African brands admit that their employer and internal branding platforms are a work in progress, there is sufficient data that supports application of some global leading practices in their employer brand and internal branding attempts (Bali & Dixit 2016; Sharif & Islam 2017). Companies that are top South African brands all agreed to learning and development as well as career opportunities being a cornerstone of what appears to be an emerging employer brand and employee value

proposition (Edwards 2017; Mosley 2015). Interestingly, none of these companies lead with compensation or benefits in their employer branding attempts as suggested by literature (Aucoin & Cilliers 2016; Muleya, Ngirande & Rachidi 2016); rather, they seem to lead with the opportunities provided for development and career progression.

This focus on learning and development and career may have found its way into the emerging employer branding of companies that are top South African brands for two reasons: firstly, South Africa's education system appears to be failing to produce highly skilled workers (Mazibuko & Govender 2017; Subban 2016; Thilongamulenzhe 2017) and the development of employee skills in the workplace is a pivotal part of the transformation and equity agenda (Mazibuko & Govender 2017; Subban 2016). As such, South African talent may be looking to their future employer to develop their knowledge and skills instead of the secondary and tertiary education system. Secondly, companies that are top South African brands are attracting, by their own admission, top talent only. It seems likely that top talent would desire optimal career advancement opportunities in the face of a critical skills shortage locally (Coetzee & Stoltz 2015; Subban 2016; Tladinyane 2016). In turn, it seems likely that accelerated development of top talent could benefit companies as they fill succession pipelines whilst simultaneously providing top talent with the opportunity to grow and develop within the company, which has been cited as a significant talent retention tool.

Whilst the employer brand seems to be a work in progress, there appears to be an insight around the employer brand and employee value proposition from companies that are top South African brands: lead with learning and development and career opportunities as this will attract the interest of top South African talent.

Whilst the internal branding platform is also a work in progress according to most companies that are top South African brands, there also appears to be emerging internal branding practices that are consistently applied by companies that are top South African brands, albeit not as part of a formal, structured internal branding strategy. Global literature review suggested that internal branding is best executed through four important enablers. Fair and rewarding human resource management practices, ranging from employment contracts to compensation and rewards (Bali & Dixit 2016; Saleem & Iglesias 2016). Secondly, internal brand communication that reinforces the brand purpose and values to current employees (Punjaisri & Wilson 2017; Rosethorn 2018; Saleem & Iglesias 2016). Thirdly, the support of line management, who act in accordance with the values of the brand and build employee engagement with employees (Balmer 2017; Keller & Meaney 2017). And finally, a culture that

the talented employee resonates with and fits into (Charan, Barton & Carey 2018; Russell & Brannan 2016).

Interestingly, companies that are top South African brands echoed the application of those four global leading practices in their internal brand building efforts. Although the internal brand may not be established or formalised yet in four of the five participating brands, all companies that are top South African brands are driving these pillars of internal brand building. Some of these findings appear to be different from insights obtained from South African literature reviewed. Scholars suggest that South African companies are still struggling to adapt to the highly diverse workplace and that South African leaders may still be displaying behaviours that are not conducive to cultural integration and transformation but come from a place of latent racial bias, discrimination and stereotyping (Mazibuko & Govender 2017; Theron, Barkhuizen & du Plessis 2014; Tladinyane 2016). This does not appear to be a challenge in companies that are top South African brands. Not only are leadership and culture the cornerstones of the internal branding efforts, but leadership also emerges as a strength in theme 4, which is discussed next.

Discussion of theme 4 (Strategic leadership alignment for talent and brand) in relation to other themes

Companies that are top South African brands all indicate that leadership is taking ownership of talent, aligning to drive talent and brand and that this leadership is being driven from CEO level. Global literature reviewed suggests that the CEO is the custodian of both corporate brand building and talent initiatives (Andrianova, Maor & Schaninger 2018; Balmer 2012; Charan, Barton & Carey 2018). South African literature reviewed suggested that there may be low levels of commitment from leaders in respect of talent, with leaders often executing against legal compliance and likely to leave the rest to human resources (Mazibuko & Govender 2017; Tladinyane 2016; Theron, Barkhuizen & du Plessis 2014).

The findings of theme 4 suggest a transformed leadership agenda, which sees the CEO driving talent and talent becoming a key part of the agenda around the boardroom table. South African line managers are also taking ownership and being held accountable for talent attraction and retention, with companies that are top South African brands revealing that their line managers have key performance indicators related to talent. Cross-functional collaboration of leadership is also happening, according to companies that are top South African brands. Talent forums see leaders across functional areas working together to drive the talent agenda.

The findings from theme 4 present interesting insights that inform the research purpose, which was to explore the talent attraction and retention practices pertaining to brand building in companies that are top South African brands. The key insight would appear to be to drive a leader-led talent and brand strategy, starting at the very top with the CEO and senior leadership. It would also suggest that line managers should be taking ownership of talent and the attraction and retention of talented employees should be a key performance indicator of line management. Furthermore, cross-functional collaboration of leaders should be encouraged through talent forums and integrated talent discussions across functional business areas.

Theme 3, which sees the employer and internal brand presented as a work in progress but nevertheless incorporating some valuable practices, appears to flow into theme 4, which highlights the role of leadership in driving talent and brand. Whilst internal brand building may not be as structured and formalised as their global counterparts, companies that are top South African brands have leaders at the helm that drive, own and lead talent initiatives.

Discussion of theme 5 (Talent retention through engagement and meaningful work) in relation to other themes

This accountability and ownership of leaders in attracting and retaining talent appears to be confirmed by the findings of Theme 5, which highlights two important practices that companies that are top South African brands are leveraging to retain talent.

Global literature reviewed indicated that talented employees should be highly engaged with the brand (Erkmen, Hancer & Leong 2017; Saleem & Iglesias 2016), suggesting that employee engagement is central to talent retention (Russell & Brannan, 2016; Sharif & Islam 2017). South African literature reviewed did not provide any conclusive findings to confirm this, but some scholars suggested that low levels of employee engagement resulted from poor leadership practices locally, which in turn impacted the retention of talent negatively (Barkhuizen & Schutte 2015; Mazibuko & Govender 2017; Tlandinyane 2016).

Companies that are top South African brands seem to be keeping their finger on the pulse of employee engagement, measuring employee engagement levels with surveys and holding line managers accountable for engaging and locking in their talented employees. It would seem that the employee engagement survey results provide valuable information that informs the key performance indicators of leadership in talent retention, as per theme 3. By conducting and analysing these employee engagement surveys, low engagement levels can be traced

back to leaders and addressed immediately, circumventing what one participant called a “regrettable loss” when talent leaves.

The second interesting insight from theme 5 was the importance of providing talented employees with meaningful work. When talent is attracted to the purpose and values of the brand and resonates with it, it is likely that they would want opportunities to contribute to this purpose and values through the work they do (Merrilees 2017; Rosethorn 2018). Companies that are top South African brands are mindful of this, providing talented employees with ample opportunities to contribute the brand purpose with their work, and reinforcing this purpose regularly in employee communication sessions.

Another interesting insight emerged from this subtheme which could provide a helpful practice in talent retention to South African companies and their leaders: to retain talent that is waiting for a succession position to open up, to keep the interest and engagement levels high with this talented employee, the company could allow talent to participate in special projects that allow them to do meaningful and challenging work.

Discussion of theme 6 (Talented brand ambassadors contribute to brand coherence) in relation to other themes

The final theme that emerged from the presentation of research findings was interesting because it was mentioned in the global literature review, but was not pervasive enough to be added into the nine global leading practices compiled from literature. Whilst literature supported the engagement and positive stakeholder experiences that retains talent (Balmer 2017; Erkmen, Hancer & Leong 2017; Russell & Brannan 2016), and brand advocacy had been presented a possible outcome of high levels of employee engagement (Erkmen, Hancer & Leong 2017; Merrilees 2017; Rosethorn 2018), the concept of brand advocacy was not well explored in literature and not held as a global leading practice.

South African literature reviewed provided a rather dim view of talent retention in South Africa, indicating that there are leadership and cultural factors at play that could negatively impact talent retention (Aucoin & Cilliers 2016; Mazibuko & Govender 2017; Tladinyane 2016). Brand advocacy and word of mouth evangelism were not mentioned in any of the South African literature reviewed; on the contrary, it appeared that South African companies were grappling to engage talent sufficiently to retain them (Mazibuko & Govender 2017; Tladinyane 2016).

As such, the revelation that all companies that are top South African brands support and encourage current talented employees to not only live the brand but represent the brand as ambassadors or through positive word-of-mouth to other stakeholders, appeared significant. Some companies that are top South African brands even seemed to link this brand advocacy by talent as a mechanism to build coherent brands. With the current talent speaking on behalf of the brand and representing the brand consistently to stakeholders, trust in the brand is built and coherent branding seems to follow (Balmer 2017; Lacroix 2013).

Themes 5 and 6 seem to be related, as talent retention initiatives through employee engagement and meaningful work appears to result in a brand ambassador that actively lives and advocates the brand, positively impacting brand coherence. It would appear that companies that are top South African brands see the value of, as one research participant put it, ring-fencing their talent and keeping them close, so close that talent becomes interwoven with the brand. This advocacy is, according to one research participant's testimony, the ultimate talent retention tool. One could argue that it is not only the ultimate talent retention tool, but a vital part of building coherent, strong brands, as talent reinforces the brand purpose and values in everything they do and say (Balmer 2017; Lacroix 2013; Merrilees 2017).

Themes presented visually in relationship to each other

The discussion of the themes in relation to literature and each other is visually represented in Figure 5.1 to follow.

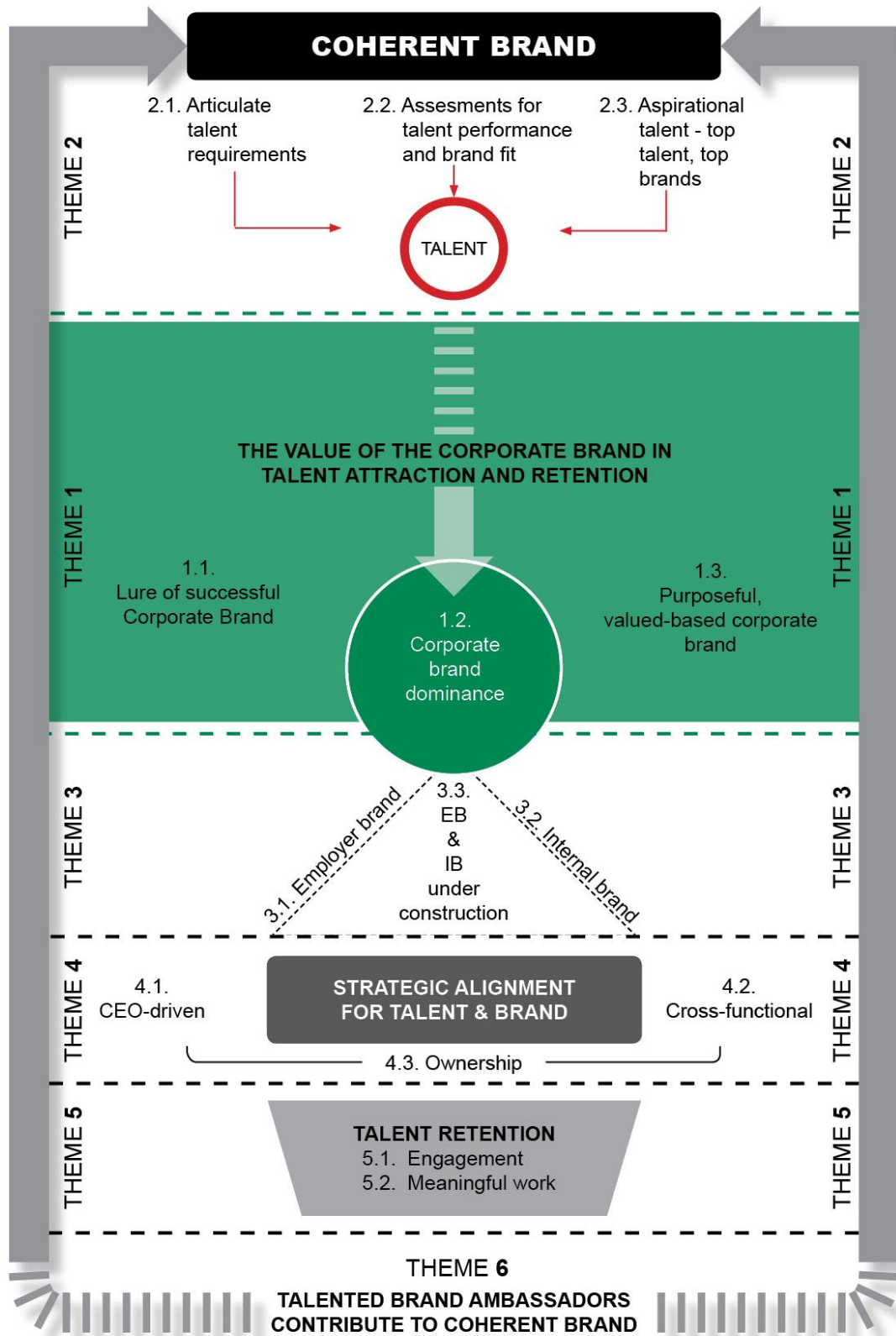


Figure 5.1: Visual representation of themes and subthemes in relation to each other

5.3. Discussion of research findings in context of the research purpose and questions

The research findings were discussed in context of literature, showing how the themes and subthemes emerged during a process of thematic analysis with inductive reasoning. The relationships between the themes were also discussed and visually represented.

This section deepens the discussion of the research findings in context of the research questions and purpose that guided the research.

Research question 1

Research question 1 probed the perceived relationship between talent attraction and retention and a company's employer, internal and corporate brands. Literature reviewed had suggested a strong relationship between talent attraction and employer branding (Bali & Dixit 2016; Mosley 2016), talent retention and internal branding (Barriere, Owens & Pobereskin 2018; Balmer 2017; Saleem & Iglesias 2016), and both talent attraction and retention and corporate branding (Balmer 2017; Merrilees 2017). Literature had also indicated that companies that are top brands have achieved brand strength and coherence by aligning their employer, internal and corporate branding platforms (Balmer 2017; Lacroix 2013; Li, Littleton & Akhtar 2017), suggesting that top brands would apply optimal practices in talent attraction and retention through brand building (Charan, Barton & Carey 2018; Lacroix 2013). However, this relationship could not be assumed in the South African context, as literature cautioned against applying global solutions to a local context (Subban 2016; Vaismoradi et al. 2016), and furthermore revealed a number of socio-economic factors that could impact talent attraction and retention practices in South Africa (Mazibuko & Govender 2017; Subban 2016). As such, this research question needed to be explored in primary research.

The research findings presented in the six themes and related subthemes provided insights that address research question 1. Themes 1 and 3 were particularly relevant to research question 1. Theme 1, the primary theme that emerged from data analysis, held that the corporate brand is valuable in talent attraction and retention. Talent is lured by a successful corporate brand (subtheme 1.1.) and the corporate brand seems to be more important and/or well-developed than other brand building platforms (subtheme 1.2.). This sentiment is echoed by theme 3 that revealed the relevance of the employer brand and employee value proposition, as well as the internal brand, but found that the employer brand and internal brand are still being developed in most companies that are top South African brands. Subtheme 3.1

confirmed that the employer brand is perceived to be relevant to talent attraction, whilst subtheme 3.2 indicated that the internal brand is perceived to be relevant to talent retention. However, subtheme 3.3 held that the employer and internal brand platforms are still under construction and the corporate brand is being leveraged in the place of these brand building platforms.

The research findings presented in themes 1 and 3 appear to provide this response to research question 1: Companies that are top South African brands perceive a strong relationship between talent attraction and retention and a company's employer, internal and corporate brands. However, the corporate brand appears to be more significant in attracting and retaining talent and the perceived relationship between talent attraction and retention and the corporate brand seems to be the strongest.

Research question 2

Research question 2 queried the ways in which companies that are top South African brands are attracting and retaining talent through employer, internal and corporate brand building. The words "in which ways" were purposefully chosen to navigate the attention of the research to practices. The focus on practices emanates from the research purpose, which stated that the research would be conducted "in context of global leading practices". Nine global leading practices in talent attraction and retention were compiled following on a synthesis of literature, but further exploration was required to inform the local context and the practices applied locally (Subban 2016; Vaismoradi et al. 2016). As such, the global leading practices provided a theoretical foundation grounded in literature, which aided the researcher in primary research design, methods and data analysis.

The presentation of the themes and subthemes partially addressed research question 2, as the themes and subthemes provide insights around the ways in which companies that are top South African brands are going about talent attraction and retention through brand building. However, the researcher felt that research question 2 required a deeper synthesis of the themes and subthemes so that it may be addressed with a clearly articulated set of practices, such as the global leading practices that provided context.

A synthesis of the themes and subthemes ensued, allowing a set of local leading practices in talent attraction and retention through brand building to emerge from companies that are top African brands. The purpose of the study focused on providing exploratory insights, and research question 2 guided the research data towards a view of practices. The research

design and methodology applied an exploratory, wide approach, aiming to collect rich insights (Flick 2018; Rahi 2017). As such, the researcher allowed the local practices to emerge from the data collected as insights (Nowell et al. 2017; Rahi 2017) without holding any pre-conceptions rooted in the global leading practices or comparing local with global practices (Nowell et al. 2017; Thanh & Thanh 2015).

The practices that companies that are top South African brands use to attract and retain talent through brand building are presented hereafter. Although the list is sequenced from 1 to 10, there is no ranking of importance according to numbers. Rather, the local leading practices build on each other, with the first practice focused on talent articulation.

The practices are presented one by one, followed by a brief discussion about the practice in the context of literature and, where relevant, the research purpose and questions. Each leading practice concludes with one or more suggestion/s for practical implementation. It must be noted that these suggestions are just that: suggestions. The researcher bases these suggestions on data and research findings, obtained from companies that are top South African brands; the suggestions should be both relevant and insightful. However, the successful implementation of these practices have not been established, neither have the practices been cross-checked by leaders, or confirmed as accurate and/or approved by organisational leadership or operational management. The practical implementation suggestions are therefore pointers or ideas, which can be further explored in empirical research.

Local leading practice 1: In companies that are top South African brands, human resource/talent management and leadership **co-create and articulate the specific talent requirements** to enable brand building and organisational success. This articulation includes performance and potential requirements, as well as personal attributes that will ensure the optimal brand fit.

Local leading practice 1 is aligned with global leading practices and the working definition of talent compiled from global literature, which held that talent should be articulated in terms of performance, potential and brand fit (Charan et al. 2018; Merrilees 2017; Russell & Brannan 2016). However, South African literature suggested that local talent qualifiers may be rooted in race or gender (Mazibuko & Govender 2017; Subban 2016) and a talent paradox, with high unemployment levels in contrast with low levels of skilled workers (Aucoin & Cilliers 2016; Tshilongamulenzhe 2017), which could arguably lead to the relaxing of talent requirements to adapt to the low levels of skill available locally. Local leading practice 1 holds that companies

that are top South African brands have well articulated and brand-aligned talent requirements, which they do not appear to be compromising on.

A practical suggestion for implementation is a formal bi-annual talent workshop, with leaders across functional departments working together on talent requirements. A further suggestion would be for talent and brand to collaborate and create a persona of the ideal talented employee. Most participants interviewed in companies that are top South African brands referred to the “(Brand name) person” as the ideal brand aligned talented person.

Local leading practice 2: In companies that are top South African brands, prospective and current talent undergo psychometric **assessments to evaluate their suitability in terms of performance, potential and brand alignment.**

The articulation of talent presented in local leading practice 1 is underlined by local leading practice 2, which emerged so strongly from research that it deserved to be presented individually as a unique and insightful finding from this study. All brands and all participants confirmed the rigorous assessment of talent – not only prospective talent but even current talent that had been earmarked for succession. Considering that psychometric assessments are costly and that the “battery of assessments”, as one research participant called it, could require a significant financial investment, this practice was particularly interesting. Why would companies that are top South African brands invest so heavily in assessments? The answer seems to lie in literature, both global and local. Global literature holds that employing talented employees that are skilled and fit with the brand values, adds value to the brand and positively impacts all aspects of organisational performance (Charan et al. 2018; Lacroix 2013; Merrilees 2017). Local literature suggests that the South African employment marketplace is crowded with unemployed job-seekers offering low levels of skills as a result of the poor education system (Bhorat et al, 2014; Mazibuko & Govender 2017; Subban 2016). It would appear that companies that are top South African brands are not accepting the qualifications and experience offered by prospective or current employees at face value, preferring to evaluate their suitability and skills through assessments instead. This appears to be a focused response to the poor education and skill set delivered by the education system (Badat & Sayed 2014; Muleya et al. 2016; Subban 2016). It could also be a calculated approach by companies that are top South African brands to protect the reputation of their corporate brand and ensure that brand coherency prevails by only allowing the best talent with the optimal brand fit through the door (Balmer 2017; Merrilees 2017; Urde & Greyser 2016).

A practical suggestion for implementation would be to agree on the requirements in terms of performance, potential and brand alignment and to identify the psychometric, numeracy and literacy assessments that would serve optimally in evaluating the skill set and behavioural attributes of talent. A further suggestion from one of the companies that are top South African brands would be to uniformly and consistently apply talent screening tests across the organisation as a sort of “gate” to entry, and to ensure that all line management are upskilled in the importance of these assessments and know when and how to use them during the recruitment and selection process.

Local leading practice 3: In companies that are top South African brands, prospective talented employees are viewed as an **important corporate brand stakeholder** that should be positively influenced by the corporate brand.

Global leading practices suggest that prospective employees are an important corporate brand stakeholder that should be positively influenced by the brand at every touchpoint (Balmer 2017; Punjaisri & Wilson 2017). Corporate brands are built from the inside and portrayed outwards to stakeholders (Merrilees 2017; Sharif & Islam 2017) through aligned branding and experiences across brand touchpoints (Balmer 2017; Li et al. 2017; Merrilees 2017). The significance of this leading practice in context of literature is that companies that are top South African brands appear to be leveraging the corporate brand as a brand building tool in the space of employer branding, which would typically be well developed and tailored to attracting and appealing to talent (Bali & Dixit 2016; Russell & Brannan 2016). Furthermore, this leading practice appears to contradict South African literature that suggested that prospective talent would be attracted to financial compensation as part of the employer brand and are likely to be less influenced by the corporate brand (Ferreira 2016; Mazibuko & Govender 2017).

A practical suggestion for implementation would be to allow ample engagement with the corporate brand at work, providing employees with branded clothing, as recommended by one participant. Furthermore, several participants suggested that companies pay as much attention to launching corporate brand initiatives to internal stakeholders as they would to launching to external stakeholders.

Local leading practice 4: In companies that are top South African brands, the corporate brand is positioned as **commercially successful, as well as purposeful and values-based**, which attracts talent.

This local leading practice stems from theme 1, which held that the corporate brand is valuable in attracting and retaining talent, supported by the subthemes which pointed to the commercial success of the brand and the purposeful, values-based appeal of the brand. With a volatile economy and widespread job losses and retrenchments, it is conceivable that talent is lured by commercially successful brands that can offer financial stability (Aucoin & Cilliers 2016; Muleya et al. 2016). What is particularly interesting about this practice is the insight gained about the combination between commercial success and purposeful, values-based corporate brands. Whilst global literature supports the appeal of purposeful, values-based brands to talent (Merrilees 2017; Rosethorn 2018; Sharif & Islam 2017), local literature did not offer any firm insights in this regard. In fact, local literature suggested that economic stability and financial benefits would be more appealing than any corporate branding (Ferreira 2016; Muleya et al. 2016). This local leading practice provides an interesting insight which South African companies can use to attract and retain talent through brand building. The corporate brand positioning should include commercial success and provide the purpose and underpinning values of the company.

A practical suggestion for implementation would be to follow in the footsteps of companies that are top South African brands and build a corporate brand that celebrates its commercial success widely. Most brands indicated that they boldly position their corporate brand as the best, or as market leaders, reinforcing achievements and growth wherever possible. Furthermore, corporate brands should position themselves as purpose-driven, aiming to add value to all stakeholders. All companies included in this study could clearly articulate the company's purpose and values, and mention ways in which the corporate brand mobilised the purpose and vision tangibly.

Local leading practice 5: In companies that are top South African brands, **employer branding** and employee value proposition leads with opportunities for learning and **development and career growth**.

This local leading practice provides insight into the employee value proposition and employer brand features that appeal to South African talent. The employer brand and employee value proposition is used to differentiate the employer in the marketplace and present an offering that will optimally appeal to talent (Edwards 2017; Keller & Meaney 2017; Mosley 2016). However, the local talented employee is likely to have needs and desires related to the local context, and further exploration of the talented employee's needs and desires will inform the tailoring of branding to appeal to local talent (Aaker & Joachimsthaler 2012; Enslin & Kloppe

2011; Vaiman et al. 2018). This leading practice provides insight into what appeals to prospective talent as part of the employee value proposition – learning and development and career growth. This may be as a result of the high unemployment rate and low levels of skilled workers, which could see talented employees looking to companies to develop their skills and aid their learning journey (Mazibuko & Govender 2017; Muleya et al. 2016; Subban 2016).

A practical suggestion for employer branding would be to develop a unique and compelling value proposition in terms of learning and development. In a marketplace where arguably all South African companies are pressed to develop skills at work, what makes an individual brand more appealing in terms of the learning and development offered to talent?

Local leading practice 6: In companies that are top South African brands, **internal branding** initiatives are enabled by regular leader-led brand communication, reputable human resource practices and a culture of belonging driven by supportive leadership.

This local leading practice appears to support global leading practice in internal branding through communication, leadership, people practices and culture (Punjaisri & Wilson 2017; Saleem & Iglesias 2016). What makes this practice significant in the local context is the emergence thereof in context of South African literature review, that described how poor leadership behaviours negatively impact talent retention (Mazibuko & Govender 2017; Theron, Barkhuizen & du Plessis 2014; Tladinyane 2016) and suggested that company culture and leadership behaviours have not yet adapted to the rapid increase of workplace diversity (Mazibuko & Govender 2017; Tladinyane 2016). In fact, this local leading practice provides the first unique insight into South African companies' internal branding practices that reveals leadership as supportive, leading brand communication and people practices.

A practical suggestion for implementation would be to develop an internal brand-building strategy that involves leaders, Human Resources and brand communications in an integrated manner, ensuring that the behaviours and outputs required from each party is clearly articulated. All companies included in the study indicated that employee engagement surveys were regularly done to keep a finger on the pulse of the internal brand building efforts – another helpful practical suggestion.

Local leading practice 7: In companies that are top South African brands, **leadership** owns and drives **employee engagement**, ensuring that current talented employees are viewed as an important brand stakeholder that should be positively influenced by the internal brand to ensure brand coherence and talent **retention**.

Another unique insight from this study that holds against global best practices in leading talent through employee engagement (Punjaisri & Wilson 2017; Saleem & Iglesias 2016) but appears to contradict local literature that describes poor leadership behaviours and low levels of ownership of talent (Ferreira 2016; Mazibuko & Govender 2017; Tladinyane 2016). The high level of ownership and commitment from South African leaders is evident in research findings that suggested that employee engagement and talent retention have become key performance indicators for leaders in companies that are top South African brands.

A practical suggestion for implementation would be to review the job profiles and performance indicators for all leaders, ensuring that employee engagement becomes a central part of their role and deliverables. Most participants suggest that a clear, rigorously followed measurement system should be followed, with leaders being held accountable for results.

Leading local practice 8: In companies that are top South African brands, talented employees are provided with **meaningful work** that gives them the opportunity to **contribute to the brand purpose and values**.

Whilst this leading practice aligns with global leading practices (Balmer 2017; Merrilees 2017), it was not featured in South African literature reviewed in talent through brand building. Arguably, South African talent would be influenced by the high unemployment rates and volatile economic climate and would be drawn to job security (Muleya et al. 2016; Subban 2016; Tshilongamulenzhe 2017). The high levels of diversity in companies may also negatively impact the articulation of a single brand purpose or values that can appeal to such a diverse workforce (Tladinyane 2016; Vaiman et al. 2018). Despite these literature review insights, this local leading practice encourages purposive, values-based branding, and suggests that talent should be allowed to contribute to the brand purpose and values.

Most participants described a practical application of this practice in interview questions. A human resources/talent manager stated that it works to ask the employee to discuss ways in which he/she can personally contribute to the brand purpose. Not only does this show the level of familiarity with the brand purpose, but it reveals personal alignment to it.

Leading local practice 9: In companies that are top South African brands, engaged current talented employees are deployed as **brand ambassadors**, providing them with opportunities to spread word-of-mouth messages that **reinforce the brand's purpose and values and build coherent brands**.

This local leading practice is a unique insight and is highly significant for two reasons. Firstly, it did not feature in the nine global leading practices. Whilst literature supported the engagement and positive stakeholder experiences that retains talent (Balmer 2017; Erkmen, Hancer & Leong 2017; Russell & Brannan 2016), and brand advocacy was presented as a possible outcome of high levels of employee engagement (Erkmen, Hancer & Leong 2017; Merrilees 2017; Rosethorn 2018), the concept of brand advocacy was not well explored in literature and not held as a global leading practice. South African literature reviewed provided a rather dim view of talent retention in South Africa, indicating that there are leadership and cultural factors at play that could negatively impact talent retention (Aucoin & Cilliers 2016; Mazibuko & Govender 2017; Tladinyane 2016). Brand advocacy and word of mouth evangelism were not mentioned in any of the South African literature reviewed; on the contrary, it appeared that South African companies were grappling to engage talent sufficiently to retain them (Mazibuko & Govender 2017; Tladinyane 2016). This local leading practice thus emerged against a backdrop of literature that appeared to contradict it, and emerged more prominently in the local landscape than the global literature reviewed. Some companies that are top South African brands even seemed to link this brand advocacy by talent as a mechanism to build coherent brands. With the current talent speaking on behalf of the brand and representing the brand consistently to stakeholders, trust in the brand is built and coherent branding seems to follow (Balmer 2017; Lacroix 2013). Coherent branding seems to be front of mind for companies that are top South African brands, which places their talent attraction and retention practices through brand building at a level that is equal to or possibly better than global leading practices in this regard.

A practical suggestion for implementation would be to provide opportunities for employees to engage in word-of-mouth testimony or represent the brand. Some participants outline how their brand selects an employee “spokesperson” for a particular business area, or a particular benefit or aspect of the work experience, and then allow them to share their authentic views. This allows, as one brand manager stated “thousands of brand ambassadors” as multiple employees lend their support publically and build brand coherence.

Leading local practice 10: In companies that are top South African brands, cross-functional leadership alignment is driven from the CEO downwards, encouraging collaboration and leader-led initiatives for talent and branding.

Whilst local practice mirrors global leading practice (Balmer 2017; Charan et al. 2018), it does also provide unique insights into the South African talent and brand landscape that appears

to differ from literature reviewed in this regard (Mazibuko & Govender 2017; Subban 2016; Tladinyane 2016). One research participant stated that talent is one of the CEO's "battlegrounds", confirming that the war for talent has moved to the top of the boardroom table agenda locally as it has globally (Charan et al. 2018; Merrilees 2017; Sharif & Islam 2017).

All participants across all brands paid testimony to the prominence and importance of talent discussions in leadership meetings. A practical suggestion stemming from this is that, in as much as financials, operations and marketing are key to all board meetings and leadership sessions, talent should feature too. Furthermore, two of the human resources/talent leaders outlined the focus of their people discussions being on talent and not on what one leader referred to as "people administration". A suggestion would be to focus the people aspect of leadership discussions on talent, and not on administrative human resources matters. Keeping the focus on talent and linking talent to value will allow a direct association between strategy, goals and talented employees.

In closing the presentation and discussion of the local leading practices in talent attraction and retention through brand building, a quick revisiting of the research purpose and questions.

The research purpose was to explore, in the context of global leading practice, the talent attraction and retention practices pertaining to employer, internal and corporate brand building in companies that are top South African brands. The synthesised research findings stemming from the themes and subthemes, presented in local leading practices, informed the research purpose, as well as research question 2, which pointed research towards uncovering the practices being used to attract and retain talent through brand building.

5.4. Feedback from experts in respect of the themes

The researcher invited feedback from research participants on the themes and subthemes identified. Each of the fifteen participants received an email communication which featured a brief summary of research findings and the visual depiction of themes in relation to each other (as presented in Figure 5.1). Given their expertise in the field of branding for talent, the researcher invited all participants to comment on the themes. This step was taken to add to the trustworthiness of the study, as expert input would enrich the value of the study and add credibility to the findings of the researcher (Nowell et al. 2017).

Three of fifteen participants provided feedback in the form of support for the findings and other insightful comments. This included the line manager of brand A, the brand manager of brand B and the human resources talent manager of brand E.

The line manager commented that it was “heartening to see that all the top brands are taking talent assessments seriously”, adding that her leadership team had been concerned that they may be “too hard” on talent with “impossibly difficult” assessments. Having noted that the rigorous assessment of talent appears to be a consistent theme across top brands, this line manager stated that this insight provided her leadership team with the motivation to formalise their assessment approach and agree on minimum standards without the “normal debate about whether we’re assessing ourselves out of the talent marketplace”.

A brand manager provided support for the themes identified, stating that the themes “certainly reflect the reality” in their company. This brand manager commented that the development of an employer and internal brand strategy was now “more important than ever”, adding that “we really need to get this right in South Africa and top brands should be leading the way”.

The human resources talent manager found it “interesting” that the themes did not show a “greater disjoint between the talent and marketing functions”, citing that his experience had certainly been that each business function “follows their own course”. The researcher pointed out to this leader that one of the research recommendations emerged from this study is deeper exploration into the collaboration between talent and brand leadership. He asked that he be “kept in the loop” as he would like to “charter a new working relationship with the marketing and brand team”.

Given the feedback and comment from experts, it would seem that the themes and subthemes identified were supported by these expert strategic leaders in principle, and that it provided them with interesting insights for future endeavours.

5.5. Recommendations for further research

This study shed light on talent attraction and retention practices pertaining to employer, internal and corporate brand building in companies that are top South African brands. Considering the socio-economic factors that are held to impact the South African talent landscape (Mazibuko & Govender 2017; Subban 2016), the exploratory research findings added new and unique insights into the talent and brand building field.

During the primary research data analysis several interesting insights arose that could be explored by scholars in further research. Given the exploratory nature of this study, the study did not aim to arrive at any conclusive findings, but set out to shed light on a relatively unexplored field of study. Exploratory research findings typically provide rich insights that make for interesting recommendations for further research (Thanh & Thanh 2015; Wright et al. 2016).

Five recommendations for future research are highlighted next, along with the supporting data that emerged during the analysis process.

5.5.1. Collaboration between South African brand and human resources/talent management in employer and internal brand building

Global leading practices in talent attraction and retention through brand building highlighted the need for brand management and human resources/talent management to work together as they create the employer brand and internal brand required to attract and retain talent (Cappelli & Keller 2017; Erkman, Hancer & Leong 2017; Sharif & Islam 2017; Ulrich 2015).

This study purposefully selected the brand manager and human resources/talent manager for the study, as literature suggested that brand management and human resources/talent management, along with line management, are key role-players in talent attraction and retention (Balmer 2017; Charan et al. 2018; Lacroix 2013; Merrilees 2017).

A strong theme was that of the dominance of the corporate brand in talent attraction and retention. Four out of five brands admitted that their employer and internal brand building platforms were still being developed. Furthermore, this study's findings suggest that there is a

measure of cross-functional leadership collaboration happening through talent forums where leadership unite behind talent strategies and operationalisation.

Three factors are thus to be considered when contemplating the motivation and recommendation for further research to follow: firstly, brand and human resources/talent management should be aligned to drive employer and internal brand; secondly, the study's findings suggest that there is a measure of cross-functional alignment happening between strategic leadership functions as they approach talent and brand building in companies that are top South African brands. Finally, this study's findings suggest that the corporate branding platform may be dominant, with employer and internal brand building platforms still under development in most brands.

The recommendation for further research presented is: the collaboration between South African brand and human resources/talent management in employer and internal brand building.

How well are these two functions collaborating? One could argue that this could only be explored once the employer and internal brand building platforms have enjoyed the same focus as the corporate brand in South Africa.

Whilst the following examples were not included in the findings as they were isolated examples that emerged during discussions around the lack of focus on employer and internal brand, they may provide insights for scholars who wish to pursue this research recommendation.

One participating brand's brand manager stated that human resources/talent management "come to us for the script". He was referring to the script or the content for advertising or marketing to prospective talent. This same brand manager, when asked about the brand's involvement in formulating the employer brand, responded: "I'm not involved. I'm involved in the story and how that story is relayed. People come to me in talent saying ok so can you help us with some marketing ideas..." This brand manager appears to be disconnected from the employer brand or employee value proposition, and does not seem to be working with human resources/talent management in crafting an internal branding strategy or approach. The same brand's participating human resources/talent manager spoke about internal branding being a work in progress, and revealed that brand or marketing run ahead with advertising campaigns without sharing it internally first. She told the story: "So we are realising that we've focused very much on the outside, what people are thinking. Very often people inside don't know very

much about what is happening until they see it on tv. So we are wanting to change that and have a better employee value proposition”.

It would be valuable to embark on further exploratory research that focuses on the collaboration between brand and human resources/talent management in the uniquely South African context, in order to uncover the deeper meaning behind these insights.

5.5.2. The impact of millennials on the South African employer brand and internal brands

The literature suggested that companies that are top South African brands would be dealing with the legislative compliance challenge of attracting and retaining black African talent, proposing that talent in South Africa would have a race or gender qualifier (Barkhuizen & Schutte 2015; Mazibuko & Govender 2017; Tladinyane 2016). As such, the final semi-structured interview question provided an opportunity for research participants to talk about these challenges. Whilst most research participants referred to black talent as a challenge, another challenge arose more prominently: attracting and retaining millennial talent in South Africa. This also featured often in discussions around the employer and internal brand.

Some participants spoke at length about how difficult it is to integrate millennials into the company culture, whilst some other participants expressed ways in which the brand is adapting its employer brand and employee value proposition to appeal to millennials. As millennials were not the focus of the study, the researcher's literature review did not delve into this generation. However, two studies by Potgieter and Doubell (2018, p. 2) shed light on the matter and suggest that South African companies should be adapting their employer brand and internal brand to deal with the rapid introduction of millennials into the South African workforce of the future, as millennials are likely to comprise two thirds of the South African workforce in the next decade. Their studies also suggest that millennials would be drawn to a corporate brand that is purposeful and values-based, which resonates with the findings of this study (Potgieter & Doubell 2018).

Further research into this field is recommended, especially as companies that are top South African brands still appear to be working on their employer brand and internal brand, and research could assist these companies in formulating compelling employer, internal and corporate brands to attract and retain talent.

5.5.3. Global brands in the local context

Two of the five brands that participated in the study are part of a larger global brand. Whilst these two brands and their participants suggested that this global footprint is appealing to talent, all participants from these two brands disclosed information that seemed to indicate tension points between the global brand's way of work or approach and the execution of global practices in the uniquely South African talent and brand context.

One brand discussed a talent identification approach emanating from the global brand which the South African brand has to apply locally. The human resources/talent manager of this brand felt that the approach was not feasible in South Africa but that the company was obliged to apply it, whether or not it fits the local context. Another brand's brand manager spoke about the global brand having a certain way of doing things and conducting oneself, referring to the global brand's requirements for respect and conduct that is seen as culturally acceptable to the global brand. This brand manager felt that the cultural approach emanating from the global brand is not the cultural approach of South Africans and indicated that young talented employees struggle to learn the global cultural behaviours at first.

Scholars are in support of exploring the local context into which brand building is done for talent, instead of accepting global practices and applying global thinking locally (Enslin & Klopper 2011; Subban 2016; Vaiman et al. 2018). The researcher recommends that further research be done into companies that are global brands operating in South Africa, in order to establish how the global brand's employer, internal and corporate brands could be adapted to fit optimally in the uniquely South African talent landscape. This could assist these local brands stemming from global brands to motivate for the tailoring of the global brand identity to the local context.

5.5.4. Employer brand and employee value propositions without compensation or benefits

Literature reviewed from South Africa suggested that South African talented employees are particularly interested in the financial aspects of employment, suggesting that the employer brand and employee value proposition that feature competitive compensation and comprehensive benefits would appeal to talent (Ferreira 2016; Muleya et al. 2016; Tladinyane 2016).

The researcher was unable to confirm whether the employer brand and employee value proposition of companies that are top South African brands feature compensation and benefits

prevalently, as four of the five brands indicated that their employer brand and employee value proposition are still work in progress. However, all brands and most participants mentioned that talent knows that the salaries and benefits associated with their top brand will be competitive.

Interestingly, several participants admitted that salary and benefits are not disclosed in the employer brand or employee value proposition. When asked how talent will know they offer great salaries and benefits, several participants answered that it is known in the marketplace and that people talk. It may be that salaries and benefits are not yet part of the employer brand as this is still being finalised. It may also be that companies that are top South African brands are not expressly luring talent with salary and benefits, but relying on word-of-mouth to relay what appears to be highly competitive compensation packages.

Whatever the reason may be, it seems that companies that are top South African brands are not leading with compensation packages and that this approach is different from the limited South African literature reviewed, which was available in this regard. Further research to clarify the employer brand and employee value proposition's leveraging of compensation to attract talent would lend deeper insight into this area.

5.5.5. Talent gaps in the middle layers

The findings of this study show that all participating brands are building their entry-level talent pipelines by attracting graduates into the company. Furthermore, all brands and most participants discussed how succession planning was effectively used to engage and prepare talent to succeed senior leaders.

Talent attraction and retention practices in companies that are top South African brands seem to be focused on the entry level and the senior leadership level, with several participants admitting that the talent strategy and approach does not address the middle layers of employment. However, the data collected from this research does not provide sufficient information to confirm this or lend insight about it.

Further research into talent attraction and retention practices could explore the levels at which talent approaches are deployed and investigate what appears to be talent gaps in the middle layers of employment.

5.6. Limitations and delimitations

One overarching limitation to this study was the limited literature review findings in the study field of talent and brand building in the uniquely South African context. The researcher was able to find 30 relevant scholarly articles that pertain to the field of study, but it must be noted that almost a third of this literature informed the socio-economic challenges that could affect talent and brand building, and did not address the relationship between talent attraction and retention and brand building directly. Moreover, several of the studies that addressed talent through brand building directly were dated, some spanning a decade (Botha, Bussin & de Swart 2011; Mohlala, Goldman & Goosen 2012; Theron, Barkhuizen & du Plessis 2014). It can be argued that, given the workforce diversity in South Africa (Mazibuko & Govender 2017) and the introduction of legislation that drives the upliftment of previously disadvantaged groups (Bhorat et al. 2014; Horwitz 2013), the talent and brand building landscape in South Africa would be evolving. Perhaps this is why this study's findings contradict the literature review findings that poor leadership behaviours are negatively impacting talent retention (Barkhuizen et al. 2014; Mohlala, Goldman & Goosen 2012).

A further potential limitation to this study is the qualitative approach through thematic analysis, which leaned heavily on gaining insights from the research participants. Every effort was made to firstly select a purposive sample of research participants that would provide expert views in the field of talent attraction and retention through brand building, and secondly ensure a trustworthy data analysis process through reporting data in context of literature and carefully documenting the analysis process. However, the sample of three research participants were encouraged to share their subjective views and experiences, which would make the research findings less objective in reporting of talent and brand building practices. As such, the research findings are informed by the views of a relatively small group of research participants and would be entirely subjective. The qualitative interviewing process could also contribute to the subjectivity, as the researcher was personally involved in the interviews and delved deeply into the reality of participants – through their worldview. Furthermore, inductive reasoning was applied to thematic analysis, which requires the interpretation of data through the researcher, drawing on a theoretical foundation of knowledge gained by literature. This may have impacted the data analysis process, as the researcher was ascribing codes to the responses of participants that encapsulated “so this is what they were saying” – much of this coding was informed by the researcher's interpretation of data.

The largest delimitation to the study is the sample of companies that are top South African brands that were selected for this study, as well as the sample of research participants from these companies. The researcher leaned on literature that held that top, strong brands are those brands that have achieved brand coherence by aligning all their brand building platforms (Balmer 2017; Foster et al. 2010; Li et al. 2017), and therefore holds that these top, strong brands are the most suitable sample of brands to provide expert views into employer and internal brand building. The researcher furthermore leaned on literature to inform the sample of participants in each company, which saw the study focus on brand management, human resources/talent management and line management at strategic level (Balmer 2017; Charan et al. 2018; Erkman, Hancer & Leong 2017; Lacroix 2013).

A further delimitation of this study is the exclusion of input or testimony from talented employees themselves – whether South African talent, or talent from other countries working in South Africa, or even South African talent working abroad. Talented employees' subjective opinions or experiences were neither elicited, nor considered in this study. This delimitation was purposeful: the study aimed to uncover insights pertaining to practices in talent through brand building, placing the focus on strategic leadership, who shared their subjective experiences and opinions as experts, providing insight into the practices used by their companies.

One of the delimitations of this study emerged from the ethical considerations and the promise of anonymity and confidentiality of participants. It is regrettable that the participating brands cannot be disclosed, as the five participating brands are top brands that have clearly built a strong reputation with the South African public and mentioning these brand names could motivate the importance or significance of this study. However, the ethical code has been honoured above all else and neither the brand names nor the participant names will ever be disclosed.

5.7. Significance of the study

This study was conducted in five companies that are top South African brands, and provides insights obtained from interviewing three strategic-level leaders in each of these companies. The level of expertise accessed by this study is unprecedented, given that the five brands are top South African brands in their fields and the 15 research participants are strategic-level leaders in their respective functions within these brands.

The study provides significant insights that can add value to the field of brand and human resources/talent management in South Africa. As branding and talent become interwoven, brand building relies on talented employees to help build the brand. In a country where there are critical talent shortages, brand leaders can benefit from a deeper understanding of how to attract and retain the talent their company requires to build strong brands, and how to leverage that talent to add to the brand's strength. Human resources or talent managers can benefit from the application of brand building practices in their talent attraction and retention initiatives.

The study adds to the body of South African literature around talent attraction and retention through brand building. It provides exploratory findings that can deepen the understanding of the local context in which talent is attracted and retained through branding, as recommended by scholars.

5.8. Conclusion

The research purpose that fuelled this study was the need to explore, in the context of global leading practice, the talent attraction and retention practices pertaining to employer, internal and corporate brand building in companies that are top South African brands. The richest source of insights was held to be companies that are top South African brands. Literature held that these brands have achieved consistency across their employer, internal and corporate brand building platforms, resulting in trustworthy, coherent branding that resonates positively with all brand stakeholders. These brands had also managed to attract and retain the talent required to build such a strong brand, as literature held that corporate brands are built through talented employees that bring the brand's purpose and values to life in their work and contact with stakeholders.

The explorative study was conducted using qualitative research methods, enabled by semi-structured interviews in a purposive sample of five companies that are top South African brands, with research participants being three strategic-level leaders in each company. Research data obtained from interview transcriptions was analysed thematically through the application of inductive reasoning supported by literature.

Six themes were identified, five of them underpinned by subthemes. The dominant theme was the lure of a successful, purposeful corporate brand in attracting and retaining talent. In response to the research purpose and related research questions, the practices employed by companies that are top South African brands were abstracted from themes, synthesised and presented as research results in the form of ten practices.

This study is significant and valuable in that it is the first study of its kind in South Africa and presents findings obtained from an unprecedented sample of top South African brands, brands that have built such strong reputations with South African brand stakeholders that they are top brands, rising above their local competitors to be awarded a first place or number one brand position. It stands to reason that the practices applied by these top brands would present the local leading practices in talent attraction and retention through brand building, and other South African companies and their leaders can benefit significantly from these insights.

The research results are applicable to a wide range of cross-functional leaders, ranging from leaders in human resources or talent management to brand leaders and strategic-level line managers. As the research results were obtained from research conducted in South Africa, the results consider the local talent landscape and the socio-economic factors that appear to have a pervasive impact on local talent practices and the needs of the local talented individual.

The insights provide brand builders with unique insights into the target customer of employer, internal and corporate brand building, namely that talented employee. With talent in high demand and short supply, employer, internal and corporate brand building initiatives can be tailored to appeal optimally to the needs of South African talent, resulting in talent attraction and retention practices that are enabled by clear, well targeted and differentiated brand building approaches.

Given the limited studies available in the field of talent and brand building in South Africa, this study contributes to the local literature and provides rich insights and further recommendations for research stemming from the exploratory findings.

Ultimately, this study suggests that brand building is not just a helpful tool in attracting and retaining talent – it is the central point of departure for talent attraction and retention. Brands that have a clear purpose portrayed through coherent branding build trust. This trust appeals to customers and talent alike. The perplexing question of whether the chicken or the egg came first comes to mind. Do strong brands come first and then attract and retain talent, or does the attraction and retention of the right talent build strong brands? A virtuous cycle of interdependence seems to arise from the research results of this study. Perhaps that in itself is the most significant insight. In South Africa, talent and brand would appear to be inextricable. In this light, South African leaders should unite across business functions, aligning strategically behind talent and brand building initiatives.

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APPENDIX A

SAMPLE OF TOP SOUTH AFRICAN CORPORATE BRANDS FROM THE SUNDAY TIMES TOP BRANDS SURVEY 2017

Please note that primary research was conducted in five of the companies listed herein. The ethical code followed by the researcher prohibits the disclosure of the companies that are top South African brands that participated in primary research.

#	Corporate Brand
1	Vodacom
2	Shoprite
3	Samsung
4	Discovery
5	Capitec
6	Old Mutual
7	Toyota
8	British Airways
9	KFC
10	Mercedes Benz
11	Pick 'n Pay
12	Engen
13	OUTsurance
14	Spur
15	Sunday Times
16	Avis
17	FNB
18	Allan Gray
19	Santam
20	SAA

APPENDIX B

EXAMPLE OF A RESEARCH INFORMATION DOCUMENT SENT TO TOP BRANDS



Master of Arts in Creative Brand Leadership

VEGA School of Brand Leadership

The Independent Institute of Education (Pty) Ltd

Primary research information document for Brand E

Student: Michelle Wolfswinkel – 14011704

Supervisor: Dr Carla Enslin

May 2019

Outline of document

This document provides important information for research participants.

It includes the following:

1. Letter of approval for Masters Proposal Defense from the IIE, which provides approval for primary research and ethics clearance from the IIE. This would be required by companies before approving primary research activities.
2. Introduction mail that was sent to all participants in primary research, providing information about the study and a request for an interview.
3. Details about the study, the student and supervisor, as well as the research methodology.
4. Ethical Considerations that the student and tertiary institute commit to.

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LETTER OF APPROVAL FOR MASTERS PROPOSAL DEFENCE

Date: 20 September 2016

Student number: 14011704

Institution where registered: VEGA School of Brand Leadership

Qualification: Master of Arts

Dear Ms Michelle Beatrice Wolfswinkel

Thank you for the defence of your proposal entitled:

“An exploration of talent attraction and retention practices in companies that are identified as South Africa’s top brands”.

I am pleased to inform you that the Research and Postgraduate Committee considered and **has approved your research proposal**. Ethics clearance has also been granted.

The Research and Postgraduate Committee raised a number of questions and made suggestions which can assist you with your study. These should be attended to under the guidance of your supervisor.

The Committee confirms that Dr Carla Enslin has been appointed as your supervisor.

All the best with your research.

Yours sincerely,



Dr Zakhele Mbokazi

Acting Academic Manager

INTRODUCTION REGARDING M.A. INTERVIEW WITH TOP BRAND STAKEHOLDERS

I am a lecturer at the University of the Witwatersrand and I am completing my M.A. degree in Creative Brand Leadership with the IIE Vega School. My study explores talent attraction and retention practices in companies that are top South African brands.

Your company has emerged as a top brand from the Sunday Times 2017 survey, showing a strong Corporate Brand that received top brand awards.

Six companies were selected for primary research, of which your company is one. Three role-players were purposely selected in each company as they were identified by literature reviewed as important talent and brand role-players: Strategic level Brand Management, Strategic level Human Resource/Talent Management and Strategic level Line Management.

As you are one of these important role-players in a company that is a top South African brand, I would like to conduct an interview with you at a date and time that is convenient for you during May 2019.

I include below the details about my study, supervisor and research methodology, as well as the ethical considerations I have committed to following during this research.

Your time and insight will add great value to empirical, scientific research into the fields of brand and talent in South Africa. Kindly peruse the attached information and feel free to enquire about anything you still feel unsure about.

I look forward to securing a one-hour time slot to conduct an interview with you. Please inform me of suitable dates and times in May 2019 at your earliest convenience.

Regards

Michelle Wolfswinkel

0791140397

mewolf155@gmail.com

michellew@gameonperform.com

Details about the study:

Title: An exploration into talent attraction and retention practices in companies that are top South African brands

Purpose: To explore, in the context of global best practice, the talent attraction and retention practices pertaining to employer, internal and corporate brand building in companies that are top South African brands.

Details about the researcher:

Michelle Wolfswinkel holds a B.A. in Communication, B.A. in Psychology and B.A. Hons in Clinical Psychology. She is a consultant and university lecturer in the field of Organisational Psychology. Please find out more about the researcher here:

<https://www.linkedin.com/in/michellewolfswinkel/>

Details about the supervisor:

Dr. Carla Enslin of The IIE Vega School is the supervisor of this study. Dr Enslin is Head of Strategy and New Business Development at Vega, a lecturing fellow at the University of Cape Town's Graduate School of Business (UCTGSB) and a research associate at the University of Stellenbosch Business School (USB).

Details about the primary research:

Research will be conducted in 5 companies that are top South African brands. Within these companies, three interviews will be conducted separately with three identified strategic-level stakeholders.

The interviews will be semi-structured, with the researcher asking seven primary questions, which could be explored further. Interviews will be one hour long and conducted in the participant's place of work or a convenient location.

Interviews will be recorded with the permission of participants and transcribed for data analysis.

The research is exploratory, qualitative research. As such, the researcher is interested in the subjective responses of participants and insights that can add richness to the findings.

Ethical commitments:

1. Academic Ethical Clearance:

The study is done with permission of the Independent Institute of Education Vega School. Ethical clearance has been provided by the institution after a carefully considered research proposal defense.

2. Informed Consent:

Informed consent will be honoured for all participants. Participants will be informed as to the nature and purpose of the study, the collection and interpretation of data, the background of the researcher and the publication of the study. Participants will be required to agree on record (during opening of interviews), indicating their willingness to participate and their understanding and approval of information provided.

3. Anonymity of companies and participants:

Given the status of the company as a top brand, the identification and disclosure of sensitive or confidential information about the company could potentially damage or impact the brand. As such, anonymity is a key consideration for this study. The company-specific results will be seen by the supervisor of the study and the panel that approves the study. These parties commit to ensuring anonymity.

The study also commits to anonymity of all participants. As such, the data and findings will not reveal the identity of the participant or the name of the company. Data will be presented as Brand A and participants will be presented as Brand Manager Brand A.

4. Confidentiality:

The study commits to confidentiality of all information. Whilst interviews will be recorded and transcribed, the data interpretation process will ensure that all responses are coded and categorized. As such, no participant will be exposed with a verbatim quote, neither will any participant's responses (whether recorded or transcribed) be released or published.

5. Reporting of findings:

The findings of the study will be available to the participating companies and research participants. However, the findings will not be presented as company-specific but will show the company anonymously between other companies and participants. This anonymity commitment has been implemented to eliminate competitiveness between top brands or the victimisation of individual participants inside a company.

APPENDIX C

EXAMPLE OF TRANSCRIBED INTERVIEW WITH NOTES CODES

(Please note this is just an example of a small portion of the interview. Please note the name of the brand has been blacked out to ensure confidentiality and anonymity as per the ethical code.)

Person	Narrative	Researcher comments
MW8	My next question is about your Corporate Brand. Now [REDACTED] obviously has a very strong Corporate Brand and as the Brand Manager you are aware just how strong it is. So you can use that Corporate Brand to leverage in the attraction and retention of talented employees. Can you tell me a little bit more about how you leverage that Corporate Brand to attract and retain talented people? What are some of the practices that are working well for you with the [REDACTED] Corporate Brand to get the services of talented employees out there?	Interview question 3
LL8	I think again, I'm not really directly involved in that but what I do is talk to the candidates that get through that first step of the talent identification process.	E_BM_N16
	Our Corporate Brand is ja, quite a strong brand, because it's a global brand and it's meaningful and it attracts young people. They want to come to a brand that they know has opportunities...they've watched it...	CB strong, global E_BM_N1

APPENDIX D

EXAMPLE OF DATA CODING INTO CATEGORIES

(Please note that this is an example of the categories, namely employer brand, internal brand, corporate brand, coherent branding and notable, within which the notes or emerging codes from the interview transcripts were captured per brand. The tabs at the bottom shows how Brand A, B, C, D and E were captured this way. The full document is private and confidential to ensure anonymity of brands and participants, as per the ethical code. However, it will be made available for academic review and approval purposes if requested.)

Data Coding Appendix F v 22 June 2019 - Excel						
File Home Insert Page Layout Formulas Data Review View Tell me what you want to do...						
Wolfswinkel, MB, Ms [michellew@usb-ed.com] Share						
Clipboard Font Alignment Number Conditional Formatting Styles Cells Editing						
A6	Attraction – talent wants to learn and get something from a brand					
	A	B	C	D	E	F
	DATA CODING BRAND A					
	EMPLOYER BRAND	INTERNAL BRAND	CORPORATE BRAND	COHERENT BRANDING	NOTABLE	
5	A_BM_N10	A_BM_N29	A_BM_N12	A_BM_N13	A_BM_N42	
6	Attraction – talent wants to learn and get something from a brand	Attraction – leadership that are following the law, not corrupt	Corporate Brand is prime	Sees EB & IB as parts or segments of CB	Brand not involved in saying this is the talent we need	
7	A_BM_N11	A_BM_N28	A_LM_N23	A_BM_N40	A_BM_N30	
8	Talent is attracted to learning, but not necessarily going to stay (retaining)	IB being done with internal comms	Attract CB CSR as responsible company	If you can define CB, then you can pull that across to EB and IB	Small pool of talent and outbidding in terms of money	
9	A_BM_N15	A_BM_N23	A_LM_N25	A_BM_N44	A_BM_N38	
10	EB comes to CB for the script	CEO leadership top down brand custodians	Attract CB you can be part of a brand that gives back to the society, purpose, change lives	Consistent strong communication of CB and essence of CB across stakeholder experiences	Bread and butter issues in SA. Must get money right before higher order.	
11	A_BM_N16	A_BM_N27	A_BM_N7	A_BM_N41	A_BM_N37	
12	Brand is not involved in EB compilation but provides the script	Feels that IB shows a lot of brand love, but not necessarily because of IB initiatives, more about CB strength	Attraction – clearly communicated brand, successful, with purpose	Reference to a playbook – a way of portraying the brand across platforms	Top brand A can afford the best talent in SA	
13	A_LM_N4	A_LM_N12	Attraction – brand that are commercially successful	A_BM_N19	A_LM_N51	
14	Talent picked for Vodacom are those that are adaptable and have ability to learn	AIR driven by massive L&D budget, personal development plan	A_BM_N8	Brand looks at CB only, not EB or IB – other functions	Top brand can afford the best talent	
15	A_LM_N5	A_LM_N13	Attraction – brands that make money Purpose is added bonus.	A_BM_N35	A_LM_N49	
16	Collaboration and team skills important for talent in context of the working environment	L&D resources also optimized by global Vodafone	A_BM_N39	You must work for a company that you're proud to work for, coherent narrative, purpose-driven	Education levels are a major problem in SA, too few educated people in talent pools	
17	A_LM_N6	A_LM_N14	Talent attraction and retention role to brand is primarily vert CB	A_LM_N26	A_HRTM_N37	
18	Attract – Graduate Programme, applications in 4-part assessment process	Specific leadership development programmes at each level to fuel leadership pipeline	A_BM_N14	All 3 branding platforms come together very nicely, are not distinctly split	BBBEE agenda means small talent pool for certain demographics in high demand	
19	A_LM_N8	A_LM_N15	Brand reputation should stay positive as people will work for brands with positive reputation		A_HRTM_N38	
20	Attract the right talent by doing assessments, psych eval, case studies and group interview	Leadership development programmes are focused on the needs of leadership at each level	A_BM_N20		Challenge of SA socio-economic conditions means internal talent are leaving, sometimes even within the company	
21	A_LM_N9	A_LM_N27	Brand narrative CB is brand job. That tells people how to live the brand.			
22	Attract – Line Management are involved in talent attraction process and score talent	Pride internally for brand, proud to say I work for the brand, wear the brand clothing	A_BM_N25			

APPENDIX E

EXAMPLE OF DATA CODING CATEGORIES INTO THEMES

(Please note that this an example of the colour-coding process undertaken to sort categories and codes into themes. The tabs at the bottom shows the brands that were analysed one by one and then an overall theme page which collated all the colour codes into themes and subthemes. The full document is private and confidential to ensure anonymity of brands and participants, as per the ethical code. However, it will be made available for academic review and approval purposes if requested.)

[illegible]