THE MISSING LINK?
Corporate Branding and its influence on the Employer Branding process at DONG Energy

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Summary

Purpose – This thesis is based on an interest and curiosity of studying the interrelationship between corporate branding and employer branding. Through an empirical case study it is investigated how DONG Energy’s corporate brand ‘Moving Energy Forward’ influences the employer branding process of attracting and retaining talented employees at DONG Energy, Exploration and Production.

Design/methodology – The empirical foundation of the thesis is based on a single-case study concerning DONG Energy, and is built on qualitative in-depth interviews with representatives from the business unit Exploration and Production (E&P) and background interviews with an Employer branding manager and a HR partner at DONG Energy.

Findings – The thesis’ findings indicate that the members at E&P, who works in the oil and gas industry, seem to have difficulties identifying with DONG Energy’s green branding universe. This vision-identity gap indicates that the respondents’ low degree of identification seem to weaken their role as effective employer brand ambassadors as well as the consistency and ethos of the corporate brand. Conversely, a tendency is implied of the employees identifying strongly with the E&P-unit, indicating that they have a strong affiliation to the unit. In this respect, it is implied that the respondents perceive the unit as portrayed as scapegoat in relation to the internal and external green brand communication, which create a feeling of ‘us against them’ between the E&P-unit and the rest of the organisation. Further, the findings indicate that some of the employees express a frustration of the corporate brand’s tendency to gloss-over their storytelling of the internal reality in E&P. Combined with the fact that E&P is the only unit, which is not included in the green strategy, this seems to suggest an uncertainty among the current and prospective employees regarding whether E&P will potentially be sold off.

Based on the respondents’ experiences and on an external workplace image measurement, it is implied that the green branding in relation to prospective specialised employees does not seem to work as a competitive advantage, since CSR seems to be more of a hygiene factor of companies’ activities.
Thus, the uncertainty of E&P and the lacking relevance of the green branding indicates that it has a negative influence on the employer branding process of recruiting and retaining employees to E&P.

Finally, it is suggested that DONG Energy needs to consider the external stakeholder’s requirements and expectations of its green strategy and branding in order to avoid damaging its legitimacy and brand equity – although the E&P-unit seems not to identify with *Moving Energy Forward*. Hence, it is implied that the green universe possibly forms an umbrella of trust, meaning that E&P and its increasing oil and gas activities seem to be allowed to live their own silent life in the shadow of *Moving Energy Forward*, and thus being protected against great negative media attention.

Independent of whether DONG Energy changes its branding in order to embrace the storytelling told by the E&P-members in the future, the thesis’ findings imply that the equity of the brand seems in large part to be depended on whether it grasps the complexity of dealing with its various stakeholder relations and whether it takes account of the interrelationship among its brands and their different objectives.

**Originality/value** – This thesis emerges as a present contribution to the lacking academic research on brands’ interdependency. This case study induces that DONG Energy’s corporate brand seems to affect the employer branding process – including the employees’ level of identification, their role as ambassadors and the equity of the brand viewed from a broad stakeholder perspective. Thus, based on our inductive reasoning the main academic contribution seem to be that corporate- and employer branding should not be analysed in isolation, since this provides a simplistic account of the complex reality existing in the branded organisation.

The findings of this thesis could serve as inspiration for further research about the interdependency between corporate and employer branding within an organisation.

**Keywords** – Employer branding, corporate branding, organisational identification, employee engagement, living the brand, stakeholder pressure & brand equity.
# Table of contents

## Chapter 1 - Introduction
Why employer branding? ................................................................. 7
The fight for talents – the importance of image .................................. 8
Identification of problem area .......................................................... 9
Research question ........................................................................... 14
Sub-questions .................................................................................. 14
Thesis outline ................................................................................... 15

## Chapter 2 – Company Presentation
DONG Energy in brief ....................................................................... 16

## Chapter 3 - Methodology
The scientific approach .................................................................... 59
The ontological stance ...................................................................... 19
The epistemological stance ................................................................ 21
The methodological stance - the empirical foundation ..................... 23
Case study research ......................................................................... 23
Data Collection: Qualitative Interviews ............................................. 23
Selection of respondents ................................................................... 25
Interview techniques and design ......................................................... 28
Secondary sources of data ................................................................ 29
Methodological reflections: Generalisability, validity and reliability .... 30
Delimitations ..................................................................................... 31

## Chapter 4 – Theory
The theoretical foundation ................................................................. 33
The influential concept of brand equity .............................................. 33
Brand equity through a resource-based perspective ......................... 35
Critique and limitations of the resource-based perspective ............... 37
The institutional perspective ............................................................. 38
Critique and limitations of the institutional perspective ................. 38
The field of corporate branding ........................................................ 39
The main concepts of corporate branding ........................................ 39
Stakeholder orientation ................................................................... 40
Corporate credibility ....................................................................... 40
Gap-analysis .......................................................................................................................... 41
Critique and limitations of the gap-analysis ......................................................................... 43
Organisation-wide philosophy and employees as brand ambassadors .............................. 43
The field of employer branding ............................................................................................. 45
The main concepts of employer branding ........................................................................... 46
Employee engagement & empowerment .............................................................................. 46
Person-organisation fit ........................................................................................................... 47
Employee value proposition ................................................................................................. 47
Employer branding framework ............................................................................................ 48
Critique and limitations of the employer branding framework ........................................... 49
Social identity theory’s focus on organisational identification ............................................. 50
Critique and limitations of social identity and organisational identification ...................... 53
Living the brand theory ......................................................................................................... 53
Living by the brand ................................................................................................................ 53
Living the brand .................................................................................................................... 54
Hybrid models ........................................................................................................................ 54
Critique of living the brand theory ......................................................................................... 55
Theoretical discussion – synergies/distinctions & strengths/weakness ................................. 56

**Chapter 5 - Framework of the thesis**

Deploying interdisciplinary concepts ...................................................................................... 59
Conceptual framework for the analysis and discussion ........................................................... 61

**Chapter 6 – Analysis**

Part 1: Organisational legitimacy and brand equity ........................................................... 62
  Stakeholder pressure and corporate social responsibility .................................................... 62
    Shareholders’ expectations to economic and legal responsibilities ................................. 64
    Stakeholders’ expectations to ethical behaviour ................................................................. 67
  Brand associations – the uniqueness of DONG Energy’s branding .................................. 69
    The value of trustworthiness ............................................................................................. 69
  Ambitious People – Moving Energy Forward ..................................................................... 72
  The value of a combined branding platform ...................................................................... 73
  ‘Ambitious People - Moving Energy Forward’ when recruiting personnel ....................... 75
Part 2: Identification & brand loyalty ....................................................................................... 77
  The construed external image ............................................................................................. 77
    The construed external image of *Moving Energy Forward* ............................................. 78
    The construed external image of the E&P-unit and the oil industry ................................. 80
The construed external image and its perceived effect on recruitment ........................................... 82
Perceived organisational identity .................................................................................................. 83
The E&P-members’ perceived identity of DONG Energy ................................................................. 84
The E&P-members’ perceived identity of the E&P-unit ................................................................. 88
The E&P-members’ perceived identity of their professions ........................................................ 93
Construed internal image ............................................................................................................. 94
Putting our assumptions at risk .................................................................................................. 96
Identification and its consequences on retention and recruitment ............................................... 96
The employees’ level of identification and its consequence on retention ..................................... 97
The employees’ level of identification and its consequence on recruitment ................................. 99
The E&P-members as effective employer brand ambassadors? ............................................... 101

Chapter 7 – Discussion
Part 3: Is it possible to create a communicative link? ................................................................. 107
Stretching DONG Energy’s branding – challenges and opportunities? ...................................... 108
Would changes damage the equity of the branding platform? ..................................................... 112
Branding as an organisation-wide philosophy – Is it a theoretical ideal? .................................. 114

Chapter 8 – Conclusion & further research
Conclusion .................................................................................................................................. 116
Further research .......................................................................................................................... 120
Educating employees into living the brand .................................................................................. 120
Comparative analysis of sub-units’ different perceptions and realities ...................................... 121
Crisis communication and brand rebuilding ............................................................................. 121
The CEO’s support of the brand .................................................................................................. 121
Viewing the case through the eyes of another theory of science .............................................. 122
Validating the findings of this thesis .......................................................................................... 122

References
Theoretical references .................................................................................................................. 124
Newspaper and web articles .......................................................................................................... 136
Websites .................................................................................................................................... 139

Appendix
Appendix A: DONG Energy PowerPoint Presentation 1............................................................... 144
Appendix B: DONG Energy PowerPoint Presentation 2............................................................... 147
Appendix C: DONG Energy PowerPoint Presentation 3............................................................... 150
Appendix D: Hatch & Schultz’ Corporate Branding Tool-kit ......................................................... 151
Appendix E: Backhaus & Tikoo’s Employer Branding Framework .............................................. 152
Appendix F: Types of interview questions ................................................................. 153
Appendix G: Interview guide, Employer Branding Manager, Gry Egstrup ...................... 154
Appendix H: Interview guide, HR partner, Susanne Andersen ..................................... 156
Appendix I: Interview guide, Managers and employees at E&P .................................... 158
Appendix J: Audio-file of interviews (enclosed CD)...................................................... 159
Chapter 1 – Introduction

Why employer branding?

With the entrance into the year 2012 the unemployment rate seems to cause concern throughout the Danish society. The Danes expect that the unemployment will continue to increase during 2012 (DST)\(^1\). However, statistics show that the unemployment rate has been at a somewhat stable level of 6,0-6,4% of the total labour force in the last few years (DST)\(^2\), but the job reality that career openings no longer grow on trees seems to have taken hold on the Danish labour market.

Before the financial crisis stroke the labour situation was far more optimistic. The labour market was facing a shortage of labour force causing more and more organisations to face the reality that traditional recruiting methods was no longer sufficient in attracting employees. As a result of this realisation a new theoretical as well practical phenomenon emerged in the late 1990\(^{th}\) (Ambler & Barrow 1996). This was the phenomenon of *employer branding*, which balances between the fields of HR, marketing, communications and leadership. The aim of employer branding is to ensure that talented candidates want to be employed by the organisation in question, while at the same time retaining its already employed talented work force.

In today’s reality the obvious question rises of whether employer branding no longer is a requisite? – Whether the phenomenon has become redundant when employment rates continue to awake concern? However, the answer to the question seems to be rejecting, since the labour market still is striving for talented employees. A large recruitment research made in 8 European countries by Stepstone in 2011 revealed that despite the high levels of unemployment throughout Europe, organisations are still struggling to find the right and most talented candidates to their job openings (Stepstone)\(^3\). It seems that the fight for talents is driven by great demand of candidates that have the skills qualifying them for job openings where massive talent is needed. This has not become easier, since talent is always sought-after and there is always shortage of it, due to its crucial importance to the continuous growth of organisations (Ibid.).

The double-egged challenge of on the one hand retaining the talents you already employ and on the other hand attracting new ones, means that organisations have to develop thought-out recruitment and retention activities built up of good communication and branding.
Thus, the answer to the above question seems to be that in today’s labour market employer branding is needed to make these activities become strategic - employer branding is deployed in order for the organisation to continuously keep up its growth and increasing its market shares (Barrow & Mosley 2005).

**The fight for talents – the importance of image**

The striving for talents means that organisations must relate to how their images are being viewed by both current and prospective employees (Balmer & Greyser et al. 2006: 734). The image and reputation both internally and externally preferably leave a positive impression making the organisation appear as a great place to work. As such the organisation has to focus on its surroundings and their demands, in order to meet the expectations required to gain the positive image. As emphasised by Larsen (2005: 137), organisations today more than ever before are dependent on their image and reputation when recruiting work force. As he further argues, organisations caring a bad reputation are facing far greater challenges when aiming at attracting qualified and talented employees than organisations with the privilege of a good image, since potential employees are critical towards organisations carrying a bad image and thus it can be fatal for an organisation. This is due to two consequences - the consequence of employees seeking employment elsewhere or the consequence of employees losing their emotional commitment to the organisation (Ibid.).

Despite the increased focus on employer branding and the fact that many organisations are now dealing strategically with their employer image, an open question still seems to be left unanswered – that is the question of how to balance the organisations corporate image with the employer image – or written differently, the balance between the corporate and employer brand. Much of the employer branding literature emerge from the corporate branding literature, and among theorists it is widely recognised that an organisation’s corporate brand affects the ability to attract and retain employees (Balmer & Greyser 2006; Balmer & Gray 2003; Hatch & Schultz 2000, 2001, 2003), but at the same time it is emphasised that it is challenging to explain the interrelation between the fields of corporate and employer branding (Foster et al. 2010: 405). This struggle might be caused by the fact that there still does not exist in-depth theoretical or empirical findings that provide adequate answers into how the two branding fields affect one another (Ibid). It leaves an interesting opportunity to dig into a rather uncharted field of research by being engaged in a case where the branding challenge facing an organisation seems to be
caused by exactly the interrelationship between corporate- and employer branding. Thus, in the following we will present a case providing the opportunity to examine how a corporate brand influences on the employer branding process of retaining and attracting talented employees.

**Identification of problem area**

The publicly owned Danish energy supplier DONG Energy is an organisation widely known throughout the Danish society both as a pride as well as a scoundrel. DONG Energy’s branding platform rests on two integral parts: The corporate brand *Moving Energy Forward* and the employer brand *Ambitious People*. Both brands are developed simultaneously in 2006 as a way of answering some of the image and reputation challenges facing DONG Energy (DONG E. Appendix A). Due to its size and public role, the media attention towards the organisation seems to be ever increasing, and thus the organisation from the beginning has been subject to negative attention putting the image and reputation under great pressure (Ibid.). Among the negative topics throughout the late 2000’s and the earlier 2010’s are the economical spending vs. the economical performance, corporate governance and last but not least pollution (Ibid.). In the process of writing this thesis, DONG Energy was again subject to negative media coverage, concerning the dismissal of the former CEO, Anders Eldrup. A description of this situation will be given in the following company presentation in chapter 2.

That last few years great public attention seems to have consequences for the various stakeholders’ trust in DONG Energy, thus in order to avoid the bad publicity to hurt its business performance, a controlled brand management process was launched. DONG Energy’s corporate brand *Moving Energy Forward* is built upon the somewhat ambitious 85/15-strategy of having 85% of DONG Energy’s power production come from renewable sources within a 30 year period (DONG E.). The corporate brand has to some extent succeeded in changing the reputation of the organisation from one of being very polluting into an environmentally friendly image. Thus, the image of DONG Energy has been considerably improved, because of the green framing of the corporate brand (DONG E. Appendix B). In relation to this, the role of the employer brand *Ambitious People* has been to secure internal organisational commitment to the green branding as well as putting an employee and recruiting angle on the green transformation: “*We want to deliver clean and reliable energy entirely without emitting CO2. That is why we need ambitious colleagues, who are dedicated and can turn ideas into action*” (DONG
Energy). However, while the green platform has delivered fast results in changing the image of the organisation for the better, some difficulties seem to arise in the wake of the weighty branding activities. The 85/15-strategy and *Moving Energy Forward* seem to paint a black & white picture of energy supply - either the energy is being delivered from renewable sources or from fossil fuels (DONG E. Appendix B). Such illustration both communicatively as well as figuratively can provide connotations to a traditional division between the good and the bad, leaving the part of the organisation that is engaged in business areas concerning fossil fuels to be portrayed as bad.

Among the business units that seem to be portrayed as bad is the unit Exploration & Production (E&P) – a unit that is engaged in exploring for and producing oil and gas (DONG E.)\(^2\). Despite focusing on non-environmentally friendly business activities, E&P has got an important role to play within DONG Energy. The financial contribution of the unit adds up 41% of DONG Energy’s total earnings before interest, taxes, depreciation and amortization in 2011 (DONG E.)\(^3\). Thus, as emphasised by Employer branding manager at DONG Energy, Gry Egstrup, E&P is a cash cow that contributes with finances to the renewable energy projects (Gry, Employer branding manager: Appendix J). Further, E&P along with the business unit Wind Power are emphasised as the main growth areas within DONG Energy. The goal is that E&P has doubled its activities within 2022.

Despite E&P’s financial strength and its anticipated future growth the unit lives a quit unspoken life away from the public eye. DONG Energy infrequently communicates about the activities and profits of the unit resulting in the unit standing in the shadow of the green corporate brand *Moving Energy Forward*. Returning to the before-mentioned portrayal of good vs. bad, the resources that E&P delivers are exactly what is being referred to as bad, since it has to do with fossil fuels. Thus, a clash seems to exist between the green storytelling being told in the corporate branding and the reality that DONG Energy is increasing its business activities within fossil fuels. Further, an inconsistency between the green 85/15-vision and the growth strategy at E&P seems to reveal itself.

Returning to the earlier interest in the interrelationship between corporate- and employer branding a remarkable theme seems to show its face. As emphasised by Employer branding manager Gry, there might be a problem in the relationship between the green branding and the level of identification of employees within E&P (Ibid.). Theoretically the alignment between corporate brand values and employees’ values are crucial to the success of the branding:
“In fact it has been argued that successful enactment of the corporate brand will only happen if corporate brand values are in harmony with employee values.”

(de Chernatony/Morsing 2006: 104)

Further, a great strategic concern of the employer branding field is the retention of qualified personnel. It is recognised that employees show greater loyalty towards organisations where they can identify themselves with the corporate values (Engelund & Buchhave 2009; Harris & de Charnatony 2001: 449). In this regard and in relation to the above discussion of the importance of image in attracting personnel one might reflect on how great an impact the corporate brand Moving Energy Forward has got on the employer branding theme of member identification in E&P. Thus, we make the following assumption to put at risk during the analysis:

**A1**: Employees at DONG Energy, Exploration & Production do seem to have difficulty recognising their business area in the corporate brand Moving Energy Forward and as consequence do not seem to identify with the green branding.

Following from such a reflection another interesting theme reveals itself, which is the question of whether the green branding also will affect the external aim of employer branding – that is the aim of recruiting qualified personnel. As shown above the relevancy of employer branding in today’s job reality is argued in the constant fight for the most talented employees to move your organisation ahead, which also applies for E&P. The complexity of the oil and gas exploration industry requires a highly skilled work force of specialised employees often educated within geology, engineering and geophysics.

According to HR partner at E&P Susanne Andersen these specialised profiles are a much-needed resource within E&P and they are difficult to attract for several reason (Susanne, HR partner: Appendix J). Due to their level of specialisation there are not many profiles throughout Europe that has got the competences needed to meet the requirements of the job position:

“It’s like looking for a needle in a haystack. It is a very inaccessible resource. Sometimes we have an opening, where there might be three persons in the world, perhaps exaggerated a bit, that we believe truly matches the competences needed
Thus, recruiting at Exploration and Production is a very challenging process, which requires more than just ordinary methods. There has to be an extra amount of focus on employer branding."

(Susanne, HR partner: Appendix J)

In relation to this, another reason for the difficulty of attracting these profiles seems to be that they primarily are driven by their interest in the field and many of them are employed by great players within the oil industry, such as Shell, Maersk and Statoil. Returning to our above reflection on the green corporate brand’s influences on the employer branding process it also awakes an interest into whether the green image of DONG Energy seems to hinder the recruitment situation at E&P. If the personnel that the unit is seeking are driven more by their specific assignments and less by a positive image, it can be questioned whether the green branding may led to the interpretation that DONG Energy do not engage in activities of their interest. This reflection leads to our second assumption that also will be put at risk during the analysis:

**A2: The corporate brand ‘Moving Energy Forward’ seems to cause negative consequences for the recruitment of personnel to DONG Energy, Exploration & Production.**

In both the employer- and corporate branding literature it is highly emphasised that the role of employees have changed from a strictly internal perspective into an integrated internal as well as external perspective. Employees are now recognised as a brand’s ambassador, since they constitute the interface between a brand’s internal and external environments having a powerful impact on stakeholders’ perception of both the brand and the organisation (Harris & de Charnatony 2001: 441). In the recruitment of personnel to E&P the employees at the unit can be seen as ambassadors towards both the corporate brand Moving Energy Forward as well as the employer brand Ambitious People. DONG Energy aims at employing all organisational members as brand ambassadors of both the corporate- and employer brand with the aim of creating an organisational culture that “lives the brand” (DONG E. Appendix B). Theoretically it is argued that employees are central to brand building and that their behaviour can either reinforce a brand’s communicated values or, if inconsistent with these values, can undermine the credibility of the external messages.
In relation to the above mentioned assumptions that employees at E&P might have difficulty identifying with the green branding and further that the corporate brand might have negative consequences for the recruitment of personnel, a last reflection awakes of whether DONG Energy’s intention of making all employees become employer brand ambassadors is at all possible. This is based on us questioning whether the storytelling told by employees at E&P will be aligned with that told in the green corporate branding if they do not sympathise with the brand values of changing energy composition. Seen from a theoretical point of view, if such assumptions seem to hold true it would suggest that the strength of the corporate brand would be tarnished. Further, it would suggest that DONG Energy might not succeed in employing all employees as effective employer brand ambassadors. Thus, we make a final assumption to be put at risk:

A3: The storytelling of employees at Exploration & Production does not seem to be aligned with the corporate brand ‘Moving Energy Forward’ resulting in them not being effective employer brand ambassadors.

The presented assumptions illustrate how we from the beginning perceive the present situation at DONG Energy and its corporate brand’s influences on the recruitment and retention of employees at E&P. We have chosen to build our field of research around these assumptions, as we believe that these are the main influencers that cause the current challenge at DONG Energy. Therefore they have guided us into developing a research area of interest. We are fully aware that they do not represent the final truth - making it even more motivating to investigate the potential problem. We further discuss this methodological choice in relation to our scientific stance in chapter 3.

In the following we present our research question, which is build-up of a main question and four sub-questions. It is a conscious choice to deploy both assumptions and sub-questions, because the sub-questions are used to structure our research and are formulated more nuanced than the assumptions. By deploying sub-questions, we aim at questioning our assumptions and attempt to grasp the complexity of the research question. Thus, the sub-questions help to answer our research question, while the assumptions help to reflect on our own knowledge process and make it visible for the reader.
Research question

Based on the above reflections and problem identification of the challenges that DONG Energy’s corporate brand might cause to the employer branding process of retaining and attracting talented personnel at E&P, we present the research question:

*Based on a theoretical discussion of the interrelationship between the theoretical fields of Corporate Branding and Employer Branding, we wish to investigate how DONG Energy’s corporate brand ‘Moving Energy Forward’ influences the employer branding process of attracting and retaining talented employees at DONG Energy, Exploration & Production.*

Sub-questions

To answer our research question we have defined four sub-questions that aim to guide our study:

I. Which synergies and distinctions seem to exist between the theoretical fields of employer branding and corporate branding? Which explanatory challenges and possibilities do each theoretical field meet in answering the above research question?

II. Which potential expectations from various stakeholder groups seem to determine DONG Energy’s branding when aiming at being perceived as legitimate and attractive?

III. Which level of identification do members at Exploration and Production seem to hold towards the corporate brand combined with the employer brand, and how does it affect the employees’ role as employer brand ambassadors?

IV. Does a reliable communicative link between the green brand platform and the storytelling told by employees at Exploration and Production exist? Does it seem possible to maintain or secure such a synergy while still meeting the expectations from the various stakeholder groups?
**Thesis outline**

Having presented the research question to be investigated, we will now briefly illustrate the thesis outline.

**Chapter 1.** During the first chapter we have defined our interest and problem area, assumptions and research question.

**Chapter 2.** A brief company presentation of DONG Energy will be presented contributing with the most necessary background information of the organisation.

**Chapter 3.** This chapter presents our methodology used to tackle our thesis. Our methodological choices will be presented and reflected upon.

**Chapter 4.** We introduce and discuss our theoretical foundation. We conceptualise the strength and limitations of the central aspects of corporate branding, employer branding, social identity theory and living the brand theory. We end the chapter by deploying a theoretical discussion thereby answering sub-question 1.

**Chapter 5.** Based on the theoretical review, we will present our own framework that aims to address the thesis theoretical approach and give a brief description of the objectives of the different parts of our analysis and discussion.

**Chapter 6.** This chapter holds the analysis of the thesis, which should provide answers to sub-question 2 and 3.

**Chapter 7.** In this chapter a closing discussion will be made and sub-question 4 will be answered.

**Chapter 8.** Based on our overall findings from the previous chapters, we will present our conclusion through answering the research question. Finally, recommendations for further research are made.
Chapter 2 – Company Presentation

DONG Energy in brief

Having introduced DONG Energy’s corporate brand, employer brand and its green 85/15-strategy, the company presentation of DONG Energy will briefly contribute with background information about the company. Further, we will shortly address the current situation in DONG Energy concerning the former CEO Anders Eldrup’s departure.

DONG Energy was founded in 2006 as a result of the merger of six Danish energy companies. Its roots go back to 1972, when the organisation was known as Dansk Naturgas A/S (DONG E.)⁴. Today, the energy supplier has activities throughout the value chain - including procuring, producing, distributing and trading in energy products (Jobbank.au)¹. DONG Energy is one of the leading energy groups in Northern Europe with approximately 6,000 employees and revenue of DKK 56.8 billion in 2011 (ibid.). The majority of DONG Energy is owned by the Danish state holding a share of 76.49% (DONG E.)⁵, however, during the last years, it has continually been economically analysed whether it is profitable to list the company’s shares (Business)¹. Besides a possible high economic gain, according to board member at DONG Energy and CEO at Novo Nordisk, Lars Rebien Sørensen, it might be beneficial to admit the organisation to listing, since it would loosen the strict requirements resulting of being a publicly held organisation - thereby resulting in an improved competitiveness (DR)¹. Thus, the argument for listing the company possibly stems from the fact that DONG Energy operates in a highly competitive market, as it no longer has monopoly, because of the political initiative of liberalising the markets of electricity and gas respectively in 2003 and 2004 (Energi Styrelsen)⁵. This has increased the competition since competing corporations now have access to the Danish market. Further, it has given DONG Energy the opportunity to enter markets that previously was unattainable.

The widely known and state-owned organisation is currently involved in a dispute that addresses the debate about how a publicly held organisation is allowed to act on a private market compared to privately held companies (Information)¹. This debate is raised from the negative publicity concerning DONG Energy’s former CEO’s dismissal in March 2012. The former CEO, Anders Eldrup, was accused of exploiting his position by giving extraordinary salaries to a handful of employees without the permission of the organisation’s board (JP)¹.
The chairman of Dong Energy, Fritz Schur, told the public that he had received a tip from a so-called ‘whistleblower’ about the towering salaries and severance packages. Additionally, the board ordered a legal investigation, which concluded that Eldrup had neglected his duties. However, Eldrup declined this accuse and stressed that the conflict stemmed from a disagreement between him and the board revolving around DONG Energy’s strategy and ambition. He said that he was prepared to invest heavily in offshore wind, but the chairman and CFO did not support this venture (Information)². Eldrup has now taken the dispute to a court of arbitration (DR.dk)³.

The dispute has got a lot of media coverage - a search in Danish newspapers using Infomedia yield approximately 2,600 hits for the name ‘DONG’ through the period 11.11.11-10.02.12 making the same search in the period 11.02.12-10.05.12 yield over 9,700 hits. According to the Danish newspaper Børsen, a study has shown that Dong Energy’s image has declined dramatically because of the huge media attention (Børsen)¹.

Since the dispute is not the main research topic of this thesis, we will not perform a thorough analysis of its consequences. However, through the chapter of methodology, we will elaborate on the impact it has had on our collaboration with the organisation. Additionally, the dispute and DONG Energy’s decline in image might as well have an influence on our research, which will have in mind during the study, and if we find indications of this, we will reflect on it in the closing section of Further research.
Chapter 3 - Methodology

The scientific approach

In this chapter the aim is to discuss the method and the premises under which we will answer our research question. At first, the thesis’ theory of science will be discussed by reflecting on our understanding of branding as a socially constructed and changeable phenomenon and by discussing the delimitations and possibilities of our scientific position. Furthermore, the object is to argue for the empirical foundation of the thesis and to discuss the method used to collect the empirical data. In closing, we will take a critical view on our choices and usage of a qualitative in-depth single-case study.

The aim of discussing the thesis’ theory of science is to clarify the scientific ground rules and verification objectives that affect our view on the world and on the creation of knowledge. Since our scientific position will affect how we interpret the two phenomena employer- and corporate branding, it is crucial to determine under what premises the interpretations are made. As a first reflection, we understand employer- and corporate branding as fields, where meaning exist through social practice and interactions that unfolds between internal and external stakeholders of DONG Energy. E.g. the brand exists in the continuing interactions between internal and external stakeholders as well as units responsible for branding. The brands is not to be understood as physical objects but rather as changeable phenomena that reflects the corporate identity, as it is experienced by the people interacting with it.

Inspired by Guba (1990: 18), we will reflect on our scientific position in relation to three fundamental questions, which can be characterised as ontological, epistemological, and methodological questions.

1. On the ontological level one asks: “What is the nature of the “knowable”? Or, what is the nature of reality?” (ibid.)
2. On the epistemological level one asks: “What is the nature of the relationship between the knower (the inquirer) and the known (or knowable)?” (ibid.)
3. Finally on the methodological level one asks: “How should the inquirer go about finding out knowledge?” (ibid.)
The importance of reflecting on what answers should be given to the above questions, builds on an argument that they reveal the basic beliefs that is adopted in the analysis. They determine the methodology and conclusions made:

“They are the starting points or givens that determine what inquiry is and how it is to be practiced.”

(ibid.)

The ontological stance

Ontology can be explained as the accusative case as it is conceived under a certain theoretical field (Fuglsang & Olsen 2007: 578). Ontology is the lesson about the existence’s universal principals. On the ontological level the scientist declares one’s understanding of reality and how one relate to it. Science is value-added and characterised by an on-going discussion of verification in different paradigms: “They cannot be proven or disproven in any fundamental sense; if that were possible there would be no doubt about how to practice inquiry” (Guba 1990: 18).

In this thesis a branch of social constructivism motivates the ontological view. Within this field knowledge is understood as socially constructed and changeable. As a science, social constructivism holds a change perspective were societal phenomena are seen as historically and socially created, and thus historically changeable (Rasborg/Fuglsang & Olsen 2007: 16). Hence, in our ontological view DONG Energy’s branding is socially constructed, suggesting that it’s meaning is changeable.

In it most radical form social constructivism establish a contrast to more realistic paradigms such as positivism and critical realism, were an objective and final truth is aspired through verification or falsification (Wenneberg 2000: 16).

According to Wenneberg (2000) and Collin (2003) several different positions within social constructivism exist. Thus, scientifically one must make a distinction between these different positions. The most radical positions argue that humans construct reality while functioning in it and observing it. On the ontological level the physical reality is a construction of our scientific knowledge of it and thus only exists because of humans’ mental construction (Collin 2003: 23).
The more moderate positions within social constructivism acknowledge that a psychical world does exist, but emphasise that human access to the world only exists through interpretation and social construction:

“It is through the daily interactions between people in the course of social life that our versions of knowledge become fabricated.”

(Burr 2003: 4)

Thus, for moderate social constructivists the epistemological level dominates since the perception of the world and knowledge is the construction.

We affiliate the ontology of the moderate social constructivism, as we accept that there must be a real physical world beyond human interpretation. In line with Andersen (2003: 35) we presume that the world exists independent of our own or others’ sensation of it. As emphasised by Andersen, if we do not make this acceptance of a real world it would mean that natural science is an illusion, which we as Andersen will not accept. From such an ontological stance the branding of DONG Energy exist both tangibly and intangibly, but will appear differently depending on the context in which it is placed. Thus, it becomes our task to keep questioning the ways in which the green branding is presented by the People and Development staff and by E&P-employees, since as argued by Burr (2003: 3) we need:

“…to be ever suspicious of our assumptions about how the world appears to be. This means that the categories with which we as human beings apprehend the world do not necessarily refer to real divisions.”

As we concur the moderate constructivist ontology, we imply that interpretation is the only approach to the research area. What we investigate is affected by the context in which we interact. Thus, because of our interpretations the epistemological level will dominate.
The epistemological stance

Epistemology is the study of the nature of knowledge and how we come to know the world of things (Burr 2003: 92). As a scientific approach it is the basic axiom of how a domain can be studied (Fuglsang & Olsen 2007: 568).

In line with the change perspective of social constructivism, Guba (1990) emphasises that knowledge is the outcome of human activity. It is:

“...a human construction, never certifiable as ultimately true but problematic and ever changing.”

(ibid.: 26)

As a consequence of this realisation the scientist takes a subjectivist position, since this is the only means of unlocking the constructions held by individuals (Ibid.). Our subjectivist position means that we fade into the research area, since the insights that we seek to contribute with will be created through the interaction between the research area and us. Hence, we are aware that our findings become subjective and one out of many possible interpretations: “It is the mind that is to be transformed, not the “real” world” (ibid.: 27). The approach can be understood as a philosophical hermeneutic mind-set, where prejudices and pre-understandings take active part in the creation of meaningful formation. The philosophical hermeneutic is a discipline that makes a framework of our understanding. Human beings never expound the world unconditionally, but are already embedded in prejudices, which is why we must accept these as productive premises for our knowledge of the world (Hojbjerg/Fuglsang & Olsen 2007: 322). Since the thesis is built on interpretations, a hermeneutical method of analysis is practiced. Our empirical material, in form of qualitative interviews can be suggested as our interpretation-object. Even though, prejudices and pre-understandings are inevitable it does not mean that we should not challenge them as we make our analysis. What we need to aim at is to make hermeneutic experiences (Gadamer 1989: 299), where we through susceptibility and ability to ask questions make our comprehensions become mobile, impressionable and changeable. It is by exceeding our former understanding that the horizon changes, and it is the exceeding itself that happens when we put our prejudices at risk:
"In fact our own prejudice is properly brought into play by being out at risk."

(ibid.: 299)

Thus, throughout the process of gathering, analysing and interpreting the qualitative data we as interpreters must be as open and susceptible as possible.

Our methodological choice of deploying three assumptions in the introduction can exactly be seen as an attempt to expose the prejudices we had when first entering the research field. The assumptions have emerged in our introductory conversations with Employer branding manager at DONG Energy Gry, and by clearly exposing them we gain the possibility to constantly question them during the knowledge process of the study. We argue for the relevance of this choice since these shared prejudices might not represent the belief of the E&P-employees when entering a dialogue with them. We are aware that despite putting our prejudice at risk through dialogue we cannot reach the truth, however we believe that such dialogue can give indications of whether our assumptions seem to hold true.

In line with this, the knowledge process throughout the thesis is to be understood as a hermeneutical circle – without a beginning and an end, but as continuing processes of understanding and interpretation (Højbjerg/Fuglsang & Olsen 2007: 338). This can be seen as a progressive dialog consisting of; understanding – dialog – interpretation – new frame of understanding – new interpretation – etc. (Andersen 2003: 254). As interpreters we continually work our way through the circle as the interpretation process progresses. Thus, the results of the analysis should be understood as provisional, which especially holds true when analysing employees’ experience and opinions of the green branding at DONG Energy, since experiences and opinions are ever changing.

Having stated our ontological and epistemological stance as moderate social constructivist we can now present the empirical foundation and reflect on the method utilised to search out knowledge.
The methodological stance – the empirical foundation

Case study research
At the methodological level we aim to present and discuss the empirical foundation and the underlying assumptions about the knowledge production of this thesis. As emphasised by Guba (1990: 18), at the methodological level the scientist should thus argue for the methods used to acquire knowledge.

We have chosen to build our thesis around a single-case study regarding DONG Energy. To explore the relationship between employer- and corporate branding in an organisational context, we find a single-case design combined with the qualitative approach useful, as it allows us:

“...to explore or describe the data in real-life environment, but also help to explain the complexities of real-life situations which may not be captured through experimental or survey research.”

(Zaidah 2007: 4)

The case study method responds to our interest in conducting an in-depth analysis of how DONG Energy’s green branding affects the E&P-employees as employer brand ambassadors. Through our literary review, we could not identify previous empirical studies of the interrelationship between employer- and corporate branding. Thus, the opportunity to reveal a possible novel phenomenon through an explorative study becomes possible. In this respect, Yin argues that a single-case study can be useful in testing the effectiveness of current theories and models to investigate whether the existing knowledge is usable (Yin, 2002/Andersen, 1990: 123). Since we hope to provide indications of how a corporate brand can affect an employer branding process, we believe that the single-case study supports this purpose.

Data Collection: Qualitative Interviews
In relation to our social constructivist stance, we argue for the relevancy of employing qualitative interviews to represent our primary empirical data.
Qualitative interview is a science method that aims to give privileged access to our elementary experience with the world that surrounds us (Kvale 2002: 63). In addition, Yin states that:

“Human affairs should be reported an interpreted through the eyes of specific interviewees, and well-informed respondents can provide important insights into a situation.”

(Yin 1994: 85)

Since our project seeks to explore whether E&P-employees can relate to the green branding, gaining insights into their thoughts of the branding is necessary. The advantage of deploying qualitative interview is its openness (Kvale 2002: 92), providing the opportunity of letting the respondents elaborate on their opinion of the green branding in relation to their daily work experiences. Thus, conducting in-depth qualitative interviews with E&P-representatives are needed.

As we also wish to examine the interdependency between the corporate- and employer branding, interviews with representatives of the key strategic functions are chosen to get insights into how they interpret this interrelationship and perhaps take account of it.

Quantitative questionnaires would have been another option in order to investigate a broader range of E&P-member’s experience of the corporate brand. However, the lack of flexibility, due to the closed and predetermined questions, makes the quantitative form inappropriate to answer our research question. Only, by using a method that provides the opportunity to ask elaborating questions about the underlying reasons behind the answers, we are able to conduct analysis as required by the social constructivism and hermeneutism. Thus, the qualitative method is preferred because of its focus on quality through in-depth knowledge in contrast to the quantitative methods emphasis on statistical generalisability. Moreover, the qualitative method primarily has an interpretive rather than an explanatory purpose (Andersen 1990: 14; Saunders et al. 2009: 323), which is consistent with our moderate social constructivist stance’s focus on social interactions and thereby our aim of gaining a deep understanding of what we study. Hence, we find the qualitative approach consisting of individual in-depth interviews most relevant to deploy in this thesis.
In order to understand the construction of social identity within E&P, we could have deployed focus group interviews with E&P-representatives. However, we have chosen only to conduct individual based interviews for several reasons. In relation to our hermeneutically oriented epistemology, we believe that an individuals’ understanding always will be determined by the situation through preconceptions and contextual embedding. If we conducted focus group interviews with the E&P-members, they would be affected by colleges, and thus (un-) consciously be influenced to speak and think in a certain way, because of historical interactions within the group. Since we particularly want to understand their individual perception and understanding, we find it appropriate to interview them individually in order to avoid influencing stimulus, like ‘group pressure’.

Theoretical support of this stance can be found in Goffman’s concept *Impression Management* – which is a way of self-presentation, in which a person tries to influence the perception of their desired image (Fuglsang & Olsen 2007: 365). Based on a theatre-metaphor he describes the modern society as a fragmented series of ‘scenes’ in which our lives unfold i.e. front stage and back stage. As the term implies, front stage behaviours are visible to the public and are part of the performance of the professional life. When individuals engage in back stage behaviours it primarily occurs with no audience present (ibid.). Applying this metaphor on focus group interviews, there would be a high risk of merely getting an understanding of the respondent’s professional front stage attitude. Since we aim to study the respondents’ emotional attachment and identification with the green branding, we aim at getting a glimpse of the respondents’ back stage attitude via individual interviews.

**Selection of respondents**

According to Kvale (2002: 109) the amount of respondents needed is dependent on the purpose of the study. He states that the number of respondents in qualitative interviews should be 5 to 25 interviews. We would have conducted nine interviews in DONG Energy, as we argue that approximately ten interviews will allow us to devote sufficient time to carry out the in-depth interviews while being able to gain a possibly nuanced picture. Having more time to each interview creates a greater confidence between the respondents and us as interpreters. Thereby, it also acquires a deeper knowledge as well as time-consummation consisting of thorough preparation and analysis of the interviews (ibid: 110).
However, due to the current situation in DONG Energy we were only allowed to get access to six respondents, because of the concern that we would disturb the organisation too much by asking question regarding DONG Energy’s image. In agreement with DONG Energy we settled on conducting six interviews.

We have chosen not to conduct in-depth interviews with representatives from the group of prospective employees despite the fact that our research question also revolves around attraction of employees. We will argue for this choice in the delimitation, which ends this methodology chapter.

Our in-depth interviews are divided into three main categories:

I. Informant interviews with managers of the key strategic functions – HR, Employer Branding and Corporate Branding
II. Interviews with managers at E&P
III. Interviews with employees at E&P

In the first category, we wanted to conduct three informant interviews with managers responsible for the strategic functions Employer Branding, HR and Corporate Branding within Dong Energy. These three respondents would have the ability to provide the needed information about the strategic mind-set and decisions forming the overall approach to Corporate Branding, HR and Employer Branding. Thus, the interviewees are selected due to their ‘expert knowledge’ – making them ‘informants’. According to Andersen (1990: 142), informant interviews can be useful to gain first-hand knowledge about a specific phenomenon and social systems. Another argument of interviewing the “senders” of the corporate- and employer branding is based on us wanting to examine how they experience the possibilities and challenges that occur when aiming at embracing E&P in the green communication. However, our bias for interviewing the corporate brand manager did not succeed, because the manager refused to participate in the interview due to her being held up by the heavy attention in the wake of the media crisis.
Thus, the respondents in this category are:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Department</th>
<th>Seniority</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Susanne Brandi Andersen</td>
<td>HR Business partner (Responsible for Exploration &amp; Production)</td>
<td>People &amp; Development</td>
<td>6 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gry Egstrup</td>
<td>Employer branding manager</td>
<td>People &amp; Development</td>
<td>12 years</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Gry Egstrup has both been involved in formulating the company’s employer- and corporate brand, thus, despite the corporate brand manager’s unwillingness to participate, we still hope to gain the needed knowledge. However, it is impossible to gain insight about whether Gry and the corporate brand manager would have different experience of our research area.

In the second category, we will conduct two interviews with managers at E&P. The objective of these manager interviews is to explore whether they identify with the green corporate brand. Further we wish to gain insights of how they perceive and feel informed about their own role as employer brand ambassadors and whether they actively work with making the green universe relevant for their employees.

The two respondents representing the E&P-managers are:

**OBS: In this electronic version, we have chosen to make the respondents anonymous.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Department</th>
<th>Seniority</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Manager 1</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>Exploration &amp; Production</td>
<td>1,5 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manager 2</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>Exploration &amp; Production</td>
<td>7 years</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Given that employees are one of the most important employer branding ambassadors (Engelund & Buchhave 2009: 49) we finally conduct two interviews with employees at E&P. First and foremost, the interviews should give an indication of whether they feel that the green strategy matches their perceived work reality. Moreover, our aim is to investigate whether the employees and managers at E&P may have varying perceptions of the green branding universe, and whether this may affect their identity work differently depending on their hierarchical position.
The respondents representing the employees at E&P are:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Department</th>
<th>Seniority</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Geophysicist</td>
<td>Geophysicist (Despite his title, he is not manager)</td>
<td>Exploration &amp; Production</td>
<td>17 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Geologist</td>
<td>Geologist</td>
<td>Exploration &amp; Production</td>
<td>8 years</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

We wanted to interview a blend of Danish and international employees and managers from E&P, as the unit consist of multinational profiles. However, as argued above, the current situation in DONG Energy has affected our collaboration with the organisation in the sense that they did not priorities to find respondents with varying nationality - resulting in Danish respondents only.

The interview sessions will be carried out in the mother tongue of the respondents, because we want the Danish native speakers not to fell inhibited by speaking in a foreign language. Therefore, the quotations used in this thesis will be carefully translated to English despite the risk of losing the linguistic nuances. Each interview will be recorded on digitally recording devices and enclosed as CD (Appendix J).

**Interview techniques and design**

All interviews are based on a semi-structured approach, since on the one side there are specific topics that we wish to explore based on our theoretical inquiry, but on the other side we want to leave room for new questions to be brought up during the interviews. A semi-structured interview is flexible and provides the respondents with the opportunity to highlight information they find especially important, while we can guide the interview through specific topics needed to be uncovered (Kvale 1997: 107). Additionally, Taylor & Bogdan (1998:107) state that qualitative interviewers have the advantage of constantly asking the respondents to elaborate on their sayings. Hence, our interview guide is constructed of interplay between open and closed questions, while also providing the opportunity to ask new questions. This flexibility can help tailor our questions to the interview context and make us open towards new point of views offered by the respondents, as inspired by our philosophical hermeneutic approach.
“The in-depth interview is modelled after a conversation between equals rather than a formal question-and-answer exchange.”

(Taylor & Bogdan 1998: 88)

Thus, another advantage of this method is the reduced risk of asking leading questions, because the interviews allow the respondents to proceed at their own pace.

Our first category of informant interviews are all individually formed depending on the respondents’ business area and based on the specialised insights we wish to gain from them. The interview guides concerning the employees and managers are almost identically formed, but slightly diverse compared to the two categories. Hence, they will get the same questions about their experience of the green branding in order for us to draw some common indications about the way the E&P-members identify with the green universe. For further information about the criteria for building our interview questions see Appendix F.

**Secondary sources of data**

In addition to in-depth-interviews, our thesis builds on a variety of secondary material in order to gain knowledge about DONG Energy’s current corporate- and employer brand communication as well as the external publicity.

The material conducted and produced by DONG Energy is based on internal and external corporate communication composed for different purposes. The internal material consists of three PowerPoint presentations about DONG Energy’s employer brand strategy (Appendix A, B, C). This material is deployed as documentation of their previous and current strategic work.

Despite numerous emails and phone calls to our contact person at DONG Energy, Gry Egstrup we did not manage to gain insight into internal surveys of the overall job satisfaction within DONG Energy and separately for E&P. We wanted this in order to support our analysis with quantitative material of whether the employees at E&P are less satisfied than other business units at DONG Energy.
Additionally, we wanted insights into the internal quantitative measurements of the employees’ perception of *Moving Energy Forward*, which could have provided a comprehensive understanding of the employees’ overall evaluation.

To further investigate the employer- and corporate brand, external material is examined. This is communication such as texts on the corporate website and annual reports. Moreover, an external employer image measurement, *Profilanalysen 2011/2012* (ING)\(^3\) is deployed to give indications of DONG Energy’s image as workplace. Finally, through a review on Danish newspaper articles concerning DONG Energy’s green vision and its current situation, we have gained knowledge about the media coverage that the organisation has been exposed to.

Hence, the collected secondary data combined with our primary data will serve as the empirical foundation of this thesis.

**Methodological reflections: Generalisability, validity and reliability**

The purpose of this section is to reflect on the strengths and weaknesses that derive from our chosen methodological approach. To do so, we use Kvale’s (2002: 225) approach to *generalisability, validity and reliability*.

The chosen qualitative single-case study method and the amount of interviews imply that our findings are classified as an *inductive reasoning*. This means that we are concluding from specific examples to broader generalisations and theories, contrary to a *deductive reasoning* where a conclusion is made from a general principle (Fuglsang & Olsen 2007: 30). Due to our inductive reasoning, the findings cannot be statistically generalised, but only provide indications of how the corporate brand influences the employer branding process of retaining and recruiting E&P-members. In this respect, Flyvberg (2001: 75) argues:

"...more discoveries have arisen from intense observation of very limited material than from statistics applied to large groups".
Through our methodological approach and interview technique we have attempted to hold strong reliability and validity. Reliability covers the importance of the transparency and repeatability of our findings (ibid.: 231) where validity concerns whether the research clearly gains access to the experiences of those in the research setting (ibid.).

To gain high reliability we have attempted to set aside our own prejudices by constantly putting our proposed assumptions out at risk, as emphasised in a hermeneutical mind-set. In relation to our interviews, we tried not to ask leading questions by primarily using open-ended questions. We have sought to establish inter-subjectivity between the respondents and us as interviewers by constantly checking whether we understood the respondents’ sayings correctly. Nevertheless, it should be noted, that we are relatively inexperienced interviewers. However, to avoid letting the lack of experience influence the conclusion, we have thoroughly prepared the interview guides (Appendix G, H, I), studied and reflected upon the different use of interview techniques and attempted to prepare as many interview-scenarios as possible. The enclosed CD with all interviews should further contribute to transparency (Appendix J).

Finally, we have attempted to gain strong validity through the open-ended questions in relation to provide the respondents with the opportunity to elaborate and add new perspectives on the questions asked. All interviews were conducted at DONG Energy to keep the respondents in their familiar environment to make them feel as comfortable with the situation as possible. Hence, our empirical foundation consists of multiple sources, such as the primary interviews combined with the secondary material, to seek valid in-depth insights.

**Delimitations**

As a final paragraph in this chapter, we will present some of the delimitations we have made as a result of the thesis main focus.

Our research question concentrates on current E&P-members’ perception of DONG Energy’s corporate brand and additionally how this affect the retention and recruitment-process of employees to E&P. In this respect, we will not conduct interviews with potential employees concerning their attitude towards the green branding. Instead we will rely on the external image measurement *Profilanalysen 2011/2012*, which measures the workplace image of DONG
Energy and several other Danish companies. The measurement is made among specialised profiles, which are profiles that potentially could be employed at E&P.
We regard our focus on current E&P-employees to be a necessary first step, as we believe that internal commitment and brand loyalty can lead to retention and strong employer brand ambassadors, which then may contribute with employer attractiveness among potential employees. Further, the HR partner at E&P emphasis that a great part of E&P’s recruitments are made on behalf of networking activities between current employees and their acquaintances (Susanne, HR partner). Hence, a second study could make in-depth interviews with prospective employees about how Moving Energy Forward affects their wish to be employed at E&P. This could either support or contradict our findings thereby potentially strengthening our findings. Thus, the study of the prospective employees’ attitude would form the second step.

In our choice of analysing the E&P-members’ perception, we further delimit the study from exploring the additional units’ experiences of Moving Energy Forward. We have made this choice based on Employer branding manager Gry’s reasoning of the E&P-unit’s difficulty recognising itself in the company’s corporate branding. In the ending chapter 8, will return to this related research area.

While the thesis analyse the corporate brand’s influence on the employer branding process, it is examined from a communication-related perspective and not from a practical-organisational perspective (Engelund & Buchhave 2009: 10). In this respect, our study does not explore the underlying organisational processes concerning whether the organisational placement of the corporate- and employer brand as well as the collaboration between the responsible entities might cause possible challenges regarding the corporate brand and its influence on the employer branding process. However, to give an in-depth insight into how the E&P-members identify with the corporate brand and the challenges DONG Energy may be facing, we argue for the maintenance of a communicative focus.
As the hermeneutical circle prescribes, we will during the analysis and discussion encounter new topics of interest, which will be elaborated upon in chapter 8.

Having argued for the method and premises under which we will answer the research question, we will now move on to our theoretical foundation.
Chapter 4 – Theory

The theoretical foundation

This chapter presents and discusses the theories that will be deployed when answering the research question. We begin by introducing the concept of brand equity and argue for our choice of taking an original approach to analysing the concept through the economic theory known as the resource-based perspective. Subsequently, we introduce some influential concepts, theories and authors from both the corporate branding and employer branding field. We argue for the appropriateness of our theoretical choices under each field and emphasise critique and limitations that need to be taken into consideration. We further argue for the necessity of drawing on concepts from both Living the brand-literature as well from Social identity theory, more specifically organisational identification.

Finally, on the basis of the argued appropriateness and limitations of the theories, we employ a theoretical discussion of the fields of corporate branding and employer branding with the aim of identifying the analytical strengths and weaknesses of each field and the synergies and distinctions between the two – thus answering the thesis’ theoretical sub-question.

The influential concept of brand equity

Since the purpose of this thesis is to investigate whether DONG Energy’s corporate brand seems to influence on the attractiveness to and brand loyalty of employees at E&P, one of the main objects is to give indications of the strength of the green branding based on four interviews with E&P-members and two informant interviews supplemented with secondary data. An influential concept used to analyse a brand’s strength is brand equity, which is a set of brand assets and liabilities linked to the brand’s name and symbol that provides value to customers as well as to a firm (Aaker 1993: 30). Brand equity originates from the branding literature where the concept of branding can be defined as:

“...a name, term, sign, symbol or design, or a combination of them, intended to identify the goods and services of one seller group or groups of sellers and to differentiate them from those of competition.”

(Keller 2008: 2)
The original branding literature is consumer oriented, where a product or organisation is attached to a consumer’s subjective opinion of the promises that follows from the branding. Therefore, the management imperative in branding is to deliver on that promise by simplifying consumers decision-making, reducing risk and set expectations (ibid.: 2). Brand equity conceptualises that brand assets can enhance customer recognition and retrieval of brand information, that it can affect customers’ confidence in the purchase decision, and lastly that it may enhance the perceived quality and provide value in the usage situation (Aaker 1993: 30). Following from this, Aaker’s brand equity model is built around five main categories of brand assets and liabilities which put together creates brand equity: brand loyalty, brand awareness, perceived quality, brand associations and other proprietary brand assets (Keller 2008: 670). The wide recognition of the brand equity concept is due to its explanatory value of the beneficial effect that branding might contribute with to the customer as well as to the organisation. 

Of relevance for the following study is that the brand equity concept has been stretched into embracing corporate brand equity as well as employer brand equity where the deterministic product orientation attached to the original concept becomes less significant. With the deployment of these concepts it is recognised that there are several factors influencing a brand’s equity. Rather than focusing narrowly on customer response, corporate brand equity proposes a broader definition, which reflects contemporary concerns with firms’ stakeholder relations as a source of brand equity (Jones 2003: 1). Corporate brand equity then becomes:

“...the differential response by consumers, customers, employees, other firms, or any relevant constituency to the words, actions, communications, products or services provided by an identified corporate brand entity.”

(Keller/Hatch et al. 2000: 115)

The concept of employer brand equity recognises how current and future employees are important stakeholders and organisations should therefore make positive impressions as workplace:

“In terms of employer branding, brand equity is a strategic asset that can be leveraged on the basis of competitive advantage in the firm’s ability to attract, engage and retain talent. It is the desired outcome of the collective impact of employer branding initiatives.”

(Brettmichington)
On the basis of this, a presentation of how the concept of brand equity would be conceptualised through Aaker’s brand equity model would be expected. However, we have chosen to take another approach into analysing DONG Energy’s brand equity by deploying the resource-based perspective. In the following section we argue for the appropriateness of this choice.

Brand equity through a resource-based perspective

As argued earlier, the theory of science to be followed in this thesis is a social constructivist stance, where the findings of our analysis will appear in the interaction between us as interpreters and the text taking form as interviews. Aaker is known for taking a structuralistic stance, and therefore we find Aaker’s model to have too much of a structural-linear approach to brand building. The object in the model is to construct and communicate a consistent and meaningful identity that defines the associations and meanings that consumers should attach to the brand (Keller 2008: 672). Aaker takes a sender-oriented perspective where the interpretations attached to the brand is defined by the branded organisation with only limited consideration to external stakeholders’ perception of the brand (Ibid.). Since the object of this thesis is to cross the boarders between the traditional division of corporate and employer branding, we argue that Aaker’s sender-oriented and linear approach to analysing brand equity would be unable to grasp the complexity of the present case. Moreover, with us relying on the interactions between the complex social reality and our own interpretations, we argue that a linear model would not be able to explain the complexity of analysing DONG Energy’s many interactions. Thus, when analysing and discussing what seems to be the equity of DONG Energy’s branding we will take a somewhat original approach by applying the resource-based perspective. By applying this perspective we see the possibility of being able to find indications of brand value and equity based on our assumption that brands’ strength appears through its distinction of and interplay with its surroundings - thereby being socially construed and constantly changing.

The resource-based perspective focuses on competitiveness and the fundamental premise is that the basis for competitive advantage lies in the application of the valuable resources that the organisation has at its disposal (Lorenzen et al. 2008: 195). However, not all resources that an organisation possesses are valuable. The most important resources are those that keep their value for a long period of time without other resources substituting them, e.g. by taking over
their functions. Thus, when analysing competitiveness this perspective focuses on competition
for the best resources rather than product-competition, which is the main focus of most other
economic theories (Ibid.: 198).
Another important concept is *capabilities*, which can be referred to as the ability to combine
resources and create new combination opportunities of existing resources. A capability can exist
on all organisational levels, e.g. de-centrally among the employees through organisational
identity and culture. A true capability is not only valuable but also rare and inimitable, and in
phase with many resources being freely available on a competitive market, holding capabilities
is of increasing importance for organisations’ competitiveness (Ibid. 205).

Inspiration to analyse brand equity through the resource-based perspective is found in the
corporate branding theorists Balmer & Gray (2003: 972), who argue that a brand is a valuable
resource, which has the potential to become a sustainable competitive advantage. In
continuation of the above, organisations are seen as heterogeneous in terms of their resources
and internal capabilities and these capabilities can provide the basis for superior performance
(Ibid.: 983). As argued by Barmer & Gray, one of the great strength of corporate branding is its
effect on non-product market areas, such as its role on recruitment and retention of valuable
employees. Thus, by applying concepts from the resource-based perspective in relation to
DONG Energy’s green branding, we get the opportunity to analyse the brand’s equity in
relation to the job market and the brand’s many other activities besides the product market.
Balmer & Gray (2003: 972) argue that in order for a brand to work as a capability, it among
other factors has to be rare, inappropriable and imperfect imitable.
A corporate brand can be rare since it is the result of a unique historical pattern of development
consisting of both functional elements such as familiarity, logo and performance but also
delicate characteristics like values, culture and identity that are rich in symbolic terms.
Inappropriability implies that the organisation that owns the resources can capture the major
share of the profits that flow from it. Finally, imperfect imitability denotes that it is extremely
difficult for a competitor to internally recreate the resource since the underlying substance of the
corporate brand is intangible and consequently difficult to replicate (Ibid.).

The relevancy of analysing whether DONG Energy’s green branding could be suggested as a
capability is inspired by Balmer & Gray (2003: 979) emphasising that personnel have a crucial
importance in transmitting the brand’s values - bringing them to the heart of the corporate branding process:

“They provide the interface between the internal and external environments and help build and maintain the corporate brand. This has a particular significance for recruitment of personnel and the development of human resources.”

Hence, considering the cooperativeness of employees at E&P as crucial for DONG Energy’s opportunity to take advantage of the corporate brand as a competitive advantage when recruiting and retaining talents, can indicate what potential misalignments that might exist between the corporate brand and the word-of-mouth spread by these employees. The motive for conducting this analysis is to gain an understanding of whether DONG Energy’s brand can be suggested to work as a capability. This provides the opportunity to suggest which particular parts of the corporate branding strategy that would be difficult to change without damaging its overall equity despite the respondents’ potential disagreement.

Critique and limitations of the resource-based perspective

The resource-based perspective has been criticised for having too narrow a focus (Foss 1997). It is argued that when analysing so intensely on a single resource, the values in the organisation’s many processes are overlooked. This is argued as unfavourable, since it is the cluster of resources and capabilities that truly creates value (ibid.). Thus, in the following analysis we will keep this potential obstacle in mind by as argued earlier constantly considering whether other interpretation of what is a resource at DONG Energy can be made.

Another point of criticism, which is often accentuated, is its lack of focus on exogenous value processes. Foss (1997) criticises the perspective for neglecting the environment, as its fails to specify the context within which the organisation operates. In that account, it has the same limitation as Aaker’s brand equity model in its lack of external considerations. However, while the perspective has an inside-out approach, we will, when analysing the brand equity of the green branding, try to avoid being too internally oriented, by analysing the equity of the brand in relation to both internal and external stakeholder relations. Moreover, in advance of the analysis of DONG Energy’s branding as a capability we will take an outside-in perspective by deploying the institutional perspective on an analysis of the external pressure that can be
suggested to force DONG Energy into its green 85/15-strategy. Thus, in the following we will shortly outline the most important concepts of this outside-in perspective.

The institutional perspective

The institutional perspective focuses on organisational behaviour (Lorenzen et al. 2008: 145). Through this perspective it is suggested that in order to understand what happens inside the organisation answers should often be found outside the organisation (ibid.: 148). Opposite most other economic theories this perspective will provide explanation to what other considerations besides profit maximisation that influences the success of an organisation. The institutional perspective appoints *legitimacy* as the most central circumstance for organisational success and survival (ibid. 147). In the analysis we will thus begin by analysing how DONG Energy seeks to obtain legitimacy through environmentally friendly initiatives. This helps broaden our horizon, since it enables us to compare the suggested pressure from employees at E&P with the suggested pressure of the surrounding world. Another influential concept that will be deployed throughout the analysis is *isomorphism*, which describes how organisations imitate behaviour and procedures of other organisations, especially when dealing with insecurity and requirements. The perspective operates with *coercive isomorphism* and *mimetic isomorphism* (Ibid.) - these will be explained when deployed in the analysis.

Critique and limitations of the institutional perspective

While the main criticism levelled at the resource-based perspective is that it focuses too much on internal processes the obvious criticism of the institutional perspective it that is focuses too much on external processes. Thus, the limitation of the outside-in agenda is that it does not have concepts to explain the internal values and resources contributing to competitive advantage. However, when deploying both the internally oriented resource-based perspective and the externally oriented institutional perspective, the aim is for the first part of the analysis to grasp the internal and external factors that seem to affect DONG Energy’s brand equity and legitimacy.

Applying economic theories, which provide the opportunity to take several stakeholder relations into consideration, seem to concord with the corporate branding literature that, as seen in
Keller’s definition of corporate brand equity above, takes the positive response of all stakeholders towards the brand as a criterion for success. In the following paragraph we will present the corporate branding authors, concepts and literature that besides the contribution from Balmer & Gray will be drawn upon in the analysis.

**The field of corporate branding**

Corporate branding is a continuously developing field and is seen through an interdisciplinary perspective, in that the entire organisation’s identity, values and image are being incorporated as active parts of the branding process. By establishing a corporate brand an organisation can distinguish and differentiate itself in the minds of all its stakeholders:

> “Corporate brands occur when relevant constituents hold strong, favorable, and unique associations about the corporate brand in memory.”

(Keller/Hatch et al. 2000: 116)

A corporate brand implies a level of quality and consistency of performance in the minds of its target audiences (Balmer & Gray 2003: 985). The corporate branding concept is the result of the acknowledgement that conflicts and complex relations exist between an organisation and its surroundings (Cornelissen 2008: 84). Thus, it seeks to capture all the relations between both internal and external stakeholders by taking an integrated relational stance (Ibid.). Corporate branding should then be understood as an alliance between a symbolic context within which interpretations of organisational identity are formed, top management’s aspiration for what the company should achieve in the future and the outside world’s overall impression of the company (Hatch & Schultz 1997: 358-360). In sum, managing the corporate brand puts emphasis on developing the distinctive characteristics of the organisation through organisational processes and draws on thinking from both marketing, visual identity, communication studies, organisation theory and strategy (Ibid. 2003: 1041).

**The main concepts of corporate branding**

Having outlined the mind-set behind corporate branding, we continue by presenting and discussing some concepts and contributions from the corporate branding literature, which we find relevant in order to answer our research question.
Stakeholder orientation
As emphasised above an essential contribution from the corporate branding mind-set is the importance of holding a stakeholder orientation:

“...the focus in corporate branding is on how an organisation can formulate an enduring identity relevant to all its stakeholders.”

(Cornelissen 2008: 86)

This makes the corporate branding theory relevant when analysing DONG Energy’s ability to attract and retain employees, since it formulates concepts that can describe how other stakeholders beside customers should be strategically dealt with. While product brands mainly target consumers, corporate brands also contribute to the image formed and held by organisational members, business partners and all company stakeholders. Thus, applying this perspective invites us to reflect on the consequences that meeting the need of one stakeholder group (employees at E&P) might have on other stakeholders’ perception of the organisation and vice versa. This further seems to be corresponding with us analysing brand equity as a resource potentially contributing to competitive advantage, because in order for DONG Energy to be truly successful as a state-owned organisation competing in a private market, it requires legitimacy and a credible image in the minds of employees, governmental stakeholders as well stakeholders working in a free market environment.

Corporate credibility

“Reputations reflect behaviour you exhibit day in and day out through a hundred small things. The way you manage your reputation is by always thinking and trying to do the right thing every day.”

(Keller/Hatch et al. 2000: 118)

According to Keller, an important part of building corporate brand equity is holding credibility to all stakeholders of the organisation, since a strong reputation is seen as a sustainable competitive advantage of a business. Corporate credibility consists of corporate expertise, corporate trustworthiness and corporate likability (Ibid.: 123-124).
Corporate expertise relate to the extent to which an organisation is seen as able to conduct its services competently, corporate trustworthiness describes whether an organisation is seen as motivated to be honest, dependable, and sensitive to stakeholders’ needs, and finally corporate likability is seen as the extent to which a company is seen as likeable, attractive, prestigious, dynamic etc. According to Keller, holding corporate credibility offers benefits like being treated favourably by external constituents, such as governments and legal officials (Ibid.). Moreover, a highly credible organisation may also help to motivate existing employees to be more productive and loyal (Ibid.). In the analysis the corporate credibility concept will be applied in correlation with the institutional perspective’s view on legitimacy and the resource-based perspective’s focus on what a valuable brand implies. Supplementing the perspectives with the concept of corporate credibility provides the opportunity to nuance the analysis of what seem to contribute to a strong reputation. Thus the expertise, trustworthiness and likability of DONG Energy and its green branding are factors that will be considered during the analysis.

Gap-analysis
A theory holding a prominent position within the corporate branding field is the gap-analysis – also called the corporate branding toolkit - presented by Hatch & Schultz (2001 & 2003). They argue that a company must align three essential, interdependent elements to create a strong corporate brand; vision, culture and image (ibid. 2001: 130). When an organisation expresses organisational identity it makes use of its cultural artefacts symbolically to present an image that will be interpreted by others. The organisation’s projected image is contextualised by its cultural heritage; likewise will the interpretations that others give to that projection be contextualised by their cultures. Organisational culture continuously becomes more open to greater external stimuli causing organisational image and identity to become more interdependent. The relationship between culture, image and identity form circular processes involving mutual interdependency: “Who we are is reflected in what we are doing and how others interpret who we are and what we are doing” (ibid. 1997: 361). By applying this circular mind-set to the analysis of DONG Energy’s green branding in relation to retention and recruiting employees, it encourages us to go beyond making indications based on the analysis of just one relation but instead to search for potential misalignments in the entire circle of internal and external interactions.
However, based on our methodological choice of conducting in-depth interviews, we only find it possible to draw inferences on behalf of E&P-respondents’ perceived organisational identity and not on the organisational culture, as we believe, like Ravasi & Schultz (2007: 103), that organisational culture rests on a set of taken-for-granted beliefs and norms that guide the everyday employees’ behaviour (e.g. think, feel and act). Thus, based on our delimitation from conducting a field research, we cannot investigate the everyday tacit actions and norms, but through our interviews we will possibly be able to find indications of the organisational identity, since it refers broadly to what members perceive, feel and think about their organisation (Hatch & Schultz 1997: 357). However, we presume that the member’s perceived identity of their workplace will be reflected in the organisational culture.

The gap-analysis is a series of diagnostic questions designed to reveal misalignments in corporate vision, culture and image (model Appendix D). Analysing a potential gap between vision and culture/identity encourage us to ask questions about which specific parts of DONG Energy’s green branding and strategy that the E&P-employees do and do not seem to identify with.

The image-culture/identity gap aims at identifying misalignments between a company’s image and organisational culture/identity, because such a gap leads to confusion among external stakeholders about what a company stands for. When drawing on this gap-analysis one should ask; what image do external stakeholders associate with your organisations and do your employees care what stakeholders think of your company? (ibid. 2001: 132). We need to understand, whether the image seems to affect the employees at E&P, and whether they seem to be aware of their role as employer brand ambassadors, when aiming at recruiting new employees at E&P.

A final consideration in a gap-analysis is the potential image-vision gap, where a conflict between external stakeholders’ perceived image and the top managements strategic vision exists (ibid.: 132). Since, our research question mainly revolves around the potential misalignment between employees at E&P and the green branding, analysing a potential gap between the image and vision is not our main focus. However, by reflecting on how the green branding may affect the attraction of E&P-members as well as analysing the external pressure put upon DONG Energy, we do acknowledge the importance of adhering to external stakeholders’ demands.
Critique and limitations of the gap-analysis

Whilst the strength of the gap-analysis is its encouragement to look at brand building through a circular perspective, the theory has been criticised for working at a sketchy level. As mentioned, it is also named the corporate branding toolkit, which leads the thoughts on to an in-depth method providing various conceptual tools to explain how gaps between the three parameters are revealed and perhaps also overcome. However, the only tools given to analyse the gaps are a series of questions, which reflects the most obvious reasons for misalignments to exist. In line with this, we find the gap-analysis too superficial in relation to analyse gaps between a company’s sub-cultures and their potential divergent perception of the organisational culture/identity. The model provides no tools to investigate these identity gaps, although the authors acknowledge that all organisations have subcultures with differing values and priorities (Hatch & Schultz 2001: 130). In order to provide indications of the potential misalignments between the green branding of DONG Energy and the E&P-members’ beliefs, we find it necessary to draw on the above corporate branding concepts as well as other theoretical contributions, which will be presented.

When we all the same prioritise to use space to present and discuss the gap-analysis, it is based on our acknowledgement, that it has contributed to us being conscious of the importance of taking both internal and external processes at different strategic levels into consideration when searching for answer to why DONG Energy seems to have problems in the employer branding process at E&P. Thus, we choose to think of the gap-analysis as an overall analytical mind-set, which reminds us to continuously shift focus from one analytical level to another in order to take the vision, culture/identity and image into consideration.

Organisation-wide philosophy and employees as brand ambassadors

A final contribution of the corporate branding literature is the acknowledgement of employees having a starring role in building relationships with all the company’s stakeholders as well as contributing to the meaning of the brand e.g. by expressing to others who we think we are as a company (Balmer & Greyser 2006: 735). As emphasised by Balmer & Greyser, employees are the “front line” of the organisation, meaning that they are central as brand ambassadors to the credibility of the brand.
Thinking about employees as brand ambassadors is widely acknowledged throughout the corporate branding field (Cornelissen 2008: 84; Harris & de Chernatony 2001: 441).

Balmer & Greyser (2006: 734) argue that corporate branding should be seen as a management philosophy rather than a function:

“The mix elements should be seen as informing an organizational-wide philosophy rather than as encompassing a mix element to be orchestrated by a department of corporate marketing. In essence, the philosophy of corporate-level branding should permeate how people in the organization think and behave on its behalf.”

In relation to the raised sub-question of how the green branding affects E&P-employees’ role as brand ambassadors we find the suggestion of corporate branding as an organisation-wide philosophy interesting to draw on. If it is indicated that the E&P-employees have difficulties identifying with the green branding, it may require some sacrifices from their part if they are to take responsibility for this line of communication. Since it theoretically is widely acknowledged that alignment of communication is of great importance - whether formal channels or employees’ word-of-mouth spread them – we will adopt the ideal of organisation-wide philosophy. However, with the employees proposed lack of identification with the corporate brand at DONG Energy, it makes us wonder whether corporate branding as an organisational wide philosophy is at all possible in the empirical reality at DONG Energy. Therefore, on the basis of our analysis we will further elaborate on this reflection in the ending discussion, chapter 7.

A shown, corporate branding literature emphasise the importance of bringing the employees to the heart of the branding process and thereby acknowledging both current and prospective employees as an important stakeholder-group. This invites us to continue by discussing the theoretical contribution from the employer branding field, which focuses specifically on this stakeholder relation. Thus, in the following we discuss some main concepts, theories and authors from this theoretical field.
**The field of employer branding**

The concept of employer branding was coined by Ambler and Barrow in 1996 and has its primary origin in corporate branding theory. However, it is characterised as a new discipline with its own objective. As mentioned earlier, employer branding activities aim at creating strong employer brand equity of the organisation.

Unlike other branding disciplines, this literature is quite limited (Backhaus & Tikoo 2004: 502; Engelund & Buchhave 2009: 20), which can be explained by the field’s relatively short existence, but also that it is a complex phenomenon crossing over many disciplines.

Employer branding combines several theoretical disciplines and organisational functions such as HR, Marketing and Communication similarly to corporate branding. This has led to multidisciplinary struggles of defining and placing the organisational and theoretical responsibility of employer branding (Nielsen 2009). However, one thing they all have in common can be linked to the resource-based perspective on human capital as a unique and important resource of the firm (Backhaus & Tikoo 2004: 502). This view corresponds to our choice of perceiving employees as contributing to brands being valuable resources.

As a result of the several dimensions of employer branding, there are various competing definitions of the field. Among these is Backhaus & Tikoo’s definition of employer branding as:

> “The process of building an identifiable and unique employer identity and the employer brand as a concept of the firm that differentiates it from its competitors.”

(Backhaus & Tikoo 2004: 502)

Hence, they emphasise that the purpose of employer branding is to build an employer’s identity that differs from its competitors in order to brand itself as being a unique and attractive workplace, resulting in employer brand equity. Further, they distinguish between employer branding as a *process* and the employer brand as a *concept*. The thesis will draw on this distinction by adapting it into our research area, as we primarily focus on the influence DONG Energy’s corporate brand (concept) seems to have on the employer branding (process) towards retaining and attracting E&P-employees.
**The main concepts of employer branding**

Despite the fact that the employer branding literature is not fully developed, there are some specific concepts and models that are reoccurring. The ones that we find particularly relevant in regard to the thesis are presented and discussed below.

**Employee engagement & empowerment**

As the employer branding discipline has emerged into being an acknowledged business area the role of employee engagement has increased (Barrow & Mosley 2005; Minchington 2010; Engelund & Buchhave 2009; Kunerth & Mosley 2011). Employee engagement is crucial, since employees are the organisation’s most important employer brand ambassador and the external environment’s most reliable source of information about the organisation (Engelund & Buchhave 2009: 48). Ind & Bjerke (2007: 135) support this statement by explaining that all employees have both internal and external touch-points where they directly and indirectly leave an impression of the brand in all interactions. Engelund & Buchhave (2009: 49) argue that employees despite their importance for the strength of the employer brand often are neglected as significant ambassadors. Thus, we find it interesting to discuss the E&P-members’ role as effective brand ambassadors and in this regard what challenges and opportunities *Moving Energy Forward* seems to induce. In this respect, Kunerth & Mosley’s study (2011: 24) about employer branding and employee engagement revealed through a survey among 104 companies that: “Empowerment was a top five ranking driver of employee engagement and a significant current strength”. With that in mind, we wish to cover to what extent the E&P-members seem to feel that the green brand communication helps them foster the ability to act in empowered ways and whether they consider it to be important.

The employer branding theory argues for the importance of employees as engaged and empowered ambassadors, but does not imply how they *become* such strong ambassadors. Therefore, we find it necessary to supplement the concept with ‘Living the brand theory’, which will be discussed later.
Person-organisation fit

The employer branding literature suggests that individuals and organisations are most efficient when their needs, values, and aspirations are aligned.

“The better the match between the values of the firm and the values of the individual, the more likely the individual is to be attracted to the organization.”

(Backhaus and Tikoo 2004: 506)

This alignment is called person-organisation fit. This term will be deployed when examining whether the E&P-employees’ job realities and aspirations seem to match Moving Energy Forward. According to Caborn (2001: 11), organisations cannot expect employees to engage in the corporate business goals unless they are able to identify a personal relevance. Backhaus and Tikoo (2004: 506) agree with this statement, and argue that the employer brand should reflect what current and prospective employees find attractive. However, we find the employer branding’s use of person-organisation fit a bit shallow, since it does not take account of how to examine the prospective and current employees’ different person-organisation fit and their constantly changing identity works. For that reason, we will deploy this concept with support from Hatch and Shultz’ gap analysis and with support from Social identity theory’s focus on member identification. The selected concepts of Social identity theory will be presented later.

Employee value proposition

In the attempt to differentiate the employer brand from its competitors, most organisations develop an Employee Value Proposition (EVP). This comprehends the employer’s communicated promise to its employees and the employee’s perception on ‘the reason for me to work here’ (Seldorf 2008: 52). The EVP is often developed in relation to the corporate vision and strategy (ibid.). By doing so, there is a good chance for the proposition to become unique, since most organisations already have defined its vision as the company’s unique raison d’être of the market. Furthermore, this can ensure that the employees, who sympathise with the company’s overall goals, will be attracted. Conversely, it may also have the risk that specific employee groups will not find the EVP attractive. Thus, it is a difficult task to secure brand consistency without limiting the flexibility to retrain and attract different types of employees (Barrow & Mosley 2005: 125), which may be a challenge for DONG Energy.
Despite the thesis focus on how the corporate brand seems to affect the E&P-members as employer brand ambassadors, we find it necessary to understand the interdependency between the brands within DONG Energy, since we argue that it is the total branding of a company that influence the employees as brand ambassadors. Therefore, we will illuminate the EVP in relation to the corporate brand.

**Employer branding framework**

Employer branding targets both internal and external stakeholders. In this respect, several researchers argue for a trend towards organisations taking an integrated approach to employer brand development (Kunerth & Mosley 2011, Edwards 2010, Barrow and Mosley 2005; Davies 2007; Backhaus and Tikoo 2004). Barrow and Mosley (2005: 143) stress that it is important that the external communication matches the internal communication, which the organisations need to be aware of when developing the employer branding strategy. They emphasise that such a strategic approach can create employee engagement, reliable communication and enhance the reputation of the workplace. It may further reduce the risk of breaching the *psychological contract* as well as the employee turnover rate (Backhaus and Tikoo 2004: 508). According to Rousseau the psychological contract is: “Individual beliefs, shaped by the organization, regarding terms of an exchange agreement between individuals and their organization” (Rousseau 1995/Millmore et al., 2007: 335).

Backhaus and Tikoo (2004) seem to be among the few theorists who have developed a scientific comprehensive framework to understand employer branding. The framework is in accordance with the integrated approach and reveals that effective employer branding creates two principal assets – an external asset of *brand associations* and an internal asset of *brand loyalty* (model Appendix E).

*Employer brand associations* form the *employer image*, which in return has an effect on the attractiveness of the organisation in the minds of prospective talents. Brand associations are defined as the thoughts and emotional memories that the brand name evokes for the receiver, which can be seen as the outcome of the employer branding activities as well as from other sources (ibid.: 505). The employer brand image corresponds to the: “*product-related/non-product related attributes and the functional/symbolic benefits that are encompassed in the brand associations*”(Ibid.).
In relation to our study, the objective will be to gain insights of how the employer branding seems to draw on the associations of the green branding in order to create symbolic benefits and thereby enhance the prestige of the organisation. In relation to the above emphasis on the vision-image gap, this objective will help nuance the analysis by also focusing on the benefits of the green branding. Further, it becomes interesting to analyse the symbolic benefits in correspondence to the E&P-unit’s perception of the firm’s attractiveness, and the potential values and challenges that exist when seeking person-organisation fit.

The framework’s second flow is about employer brand loyalty, which involves the commitment that the employee makes to their employer i.e. the enthusiasm to work hard and the feeling of attachment to organisation’s vision and goals (Ibid.: 508). This loyalty is shaped by the organisational culture/identity, which again is constructed by the insiders and affected by elements of the employer branding. Additionally, Backhaus and Tikoo (2004: 510) state that employer brand loyalty is positively related to employee productivity.

We wish to examine whether DONG Energy’s corporate brand seems to affect the E&P-unit’s brand loyalty. Thus, investigating how the E&P-members identify with the possible symbolic benefits of Moving Energy Forward will provide some indication of the strength of their brand loyalty. The other way around, it also becomes relevant to give indications as to which degree of brand loyalty DONG Energy can require from the E&P-employees in the future.

Critique and limitations of the employer branding framework

Backhaus and Tikoo suggest that it is beneficial that the employer brand communicate accurate information about the workplace. However, if the communication should be 100 per cent accurate, the organisations need to represent an inside-out approach. This means that the organisations start by identifying their culture/identity and then simply build the employer brand around the internal values. In contrast to an outside-in approach, the model’s emphasis on the inside-out approach has the clear disadvantage of not taking the external stakeholder’s demands into considerations (Seldorf 2008: 56). Moreover, the approach of the model can further be criticised for creating a non-ambitious employer branding strategy with no room for idealised aspirations.
Additionally, we criticise the framework of being too linear and cause-effect-oriented, like Aaker’s brand equity concept. The framework does not account for the organisations’ intersecting brands and various interactions in the complex reality. To fill this gap, we are able to draw on the corporate branding theories’ strategic intent, the institutional perspective’s focus on the external environment and the resource-based perspective’s understanding of brand value. Last but not least, we find the model a bit to superficial when aiming at analysing how DONG Energy’s green branding seems to affect its attractiveness in relation to prospective employees and the current E&P-members’ affiliation and productivity, since it only provides propositions and no tools to measure the branding’s actual impact on the employee groups.

Despite this critique of the framework, we find its distinction between brand’s associations and loyalty and these different purposes fruitful in order to keep in mind that DONG Energy’s employer branding process needs to embrace functional and symbolic brand association as well as strong brand loyalty when seeking to generate a high productivity and attractiveness among potential and current talents.

However, in order to analyse the four respondents’ identification with and brand loyalty of the green branding, we find it necessary to draw on social identity theory’s focus on social identification processes - in the following we will argue why.

**Social identity theory’s focus on organisational identification**

Organisational identification represents:

“...a feeling of oneness with the organization, such as when members define themselves in terms of the organization, internalize its mission, ideology, and values, and adopt its customary ways of doing things.”

(Cheney et al. 2004: 134)

Gotsi and Wilson (2001: 100) argue that the more employees identify with their organisation the more likely they are to support and align their own behaviour with the organisation’s value statements. An argument that is also deployed by the previously quoted corporate branding theorists Hatch & Schultz and employer branding theorist Caborn.

Gotsi & Wilson further stress that without strong employee commitment and identification the corporate reputation can be damaged, because external stakeholders increasingly want to know
more about the organisation behind the branding, and thus it harms the organisation’s credibility if these stakeholders experience that the organisation does not ‘walk the talk’ (ibid: 103).

Many views on organisational identity build upon the social identity theory’s focus on members’ social interactions within organisations as a site of individual’s identity work (Hatch et al. 2000: 15). Social identity theorists explain why employees like to identify with their workplace. They posit that individuals derive their self-concept from memberships and interactions. Self-concept is defined as: “the totality of self-descriptions and self-evaluations subjectively available to an individual” (Hogg & Abrams, 1988:24/Dutton et al. 1994:242).

Thus, if the organisation has a positive image that matches the employees’ self-concepts (who they are), they will be drawn to the organisation, since it presents easy opportunities for self-expression towards increased self-images as well as the opportunity to transmit the organisation’s positive values into their self-concepts (Dutton et al. 1994: 244). This also seems to be reflected in the concept of person-organisation fit.

In order to answer our sub-question regarding whether the image of DONG Energy’s green branding seems to affect the E&P-members’ ability to identify with their workplace, we will draw on the social identity theorists Dutton et al.’s (1994:239) model of member identification. This theoretical contribution is highly referred to in the branding literature, as a supplement to their strategic/organisational level of analysis (Hatch et al. 2000; Backhaus & Tikoo 2004; Foster et al. 2010). Thus, this theory’s focus on how members’ organisational identification influence on their self-concepts helps to move the thesis’ focus down to a more group/individual analytical level about the social processes between the E&P-employees and DONG Energy, which the previous presented branding and economic oriented theories seem unable to.

Tuning in on Dutton et al.’s model, it consists of two key organisational images, which should be taken into account when examining the E&P-respondents’ level of identification - see model below. The first image is based on: “what the member believes is distinctive, central, and enduring about his or her organization” and is called perceived organisational identity (ibid.). Perceived organisational identity influences the degree of the members’ identification level in relation to three principals of self-definitions. The first is self-continuity concerning that people value self-integrity and is drawn to organisations that match their own sense of who they are, and workplaces that provide easy opportunities for self-expression (Ibid.: 244).
The second principal is *self-distinctiveness* emphasising that employees find organisations attractive if they provide a sense of uniqueness and thereby providing the possibility to distinguish oneself through their work (Ibid.: 246). The last is *self-enhancement* revealing that organisational members increase their identification with the workplace, if they perceive the organisations identity as attractive, since it will improve their self-esteem (i.e. degree to which one likes oneself), as they acquire a more optimistic evaluation of self (ibid.).

The second image emphasises: “member’s beliefs about what outsiders think about the organization” and is referred to as *construed external image* (ibid.: 239). This image is potentially powerful since people like to identify with an organisation that seems to be recognised as socially prestigious (ibid.: 250). In order to analyse the image’s attractiveness the three principals of members’ self-definition will be included once more. Hence, if both images are perceived positively and enhance self-esteem, continuity and distinctiveness to the members’ self-concept, the theory proposes that it will have a great effect on the strength of the employees’ identification with the organisation (ibid.).

As seen in the model, the analysis should, besides the two key images, also consider the E&P-respondents’ *viability of organisational affiliation*, as this also seems to have an influence on the members’ level of identification, because:
“When a person is visible affiliated with the organisation, self-perception processes heighten his or her own awareness of the attractiveness of the organisation.”

(ibid.: 252)

Finally, Dutton et al. argue that the greater employees identify with the organisation the more their level of contact with the organisation will enhance, resulting in strong loyalty (ibid.: 254).

**Critique and limitations of social identity and organisational identification**

The social identity theory’s emphasis on members’ identity work and its effect on their organisational identification are both its strengths and its weaknesses in relation to our research. Thus, the narrow and subjective focus of this theory (Hatch et al. 2000: 16) is only fruitful in combination with the branding literature’s strategic aim and its view on organisations’ various interactions in order to grasp the broader reality of DONG Energy’s branding. Furthermore, with the theory’s focus on how workplaces affect the employee’s identity work, we consider the theory to lack a strategic aspect when seeking to understand how organisations beneficially can utilise the relationship between employees and corporate branding. Therefore, we find it relevant to include additional theory that emphasises how employees can become strategic brand assets – which we believe living the brand theory can provide insights into.

**Living the brand theory**

Living the brand theory identifies organisations’ workforce as a powerful branding asset and focuses on how organisations’ can convert employees into brand ambassadors (Ind 2007). To reflect on whether the E&P-members strategically can act as strong employer brand ambassadors, we in the discussion will make use of Karmark’s (2005: 106) distinction between employees who live the brand and employees who live by the brand.

**Living by the brand**

To live by the brand, means that employees’ role becomes to understand the brand values and to deliver these to stakeholders by primarily following a brand guide. In order to make them live by the brand, the organisation should employ a marketing and communications-based perspective, which is anchored in a strategic approach that focuses on communication and implementation processes (ibid.: 110).
The brand is developed by the top-management and communicated through a top-down cascade process. This perspective can be seen as a relatively fast way of aligning the brand communication, because the organisation’s culture does not need to be fully aligned with the branding, meaning that the employees do not need truly to identify with the brand. However, this ‘one fits all approach’ can cause complications in relation to different perceptions of the brand guide messages as well as lacking relevancy to the employees.

**Living the brand**

In opposition to living *by* the brand, the focus in ‘living the brand’ lies in that employees must identify with the brand and be embedded in the cultural values in order to represent the brand. To achieve this, Karmark suggests using a *norms and value-based perspective*, which is based on values and anchored in a more cultured approach. Management tools such as events and storytelling is used through a bottom-up process shaped by normative control (Ibid.: 111). Through this perspective, managers get employees to not only *live* the brand professionally but also privately. This represents the employee as brand ambassador 24-hours a day - seven days a week. With employees living the brand, the organisation appears with a very reliable branding, but according to Karmark, this idealised perspective is almost utopia in practice (ibid.: 121). He further stresses that this perspective actually can lead to over-identification:

“*The organization runs the risk of building a brand culture that is closed off to external influences and internal criticism to the extent that it ends up in narcissism and self-seduction.*”

(ibid.:118)

**Hybrid models**

Karmark explicates a third perspective on ‘living the brand’, which is a combination of the two previous perspectives - a hybrid model that integrates internal branding with norms and values. The approach is based on a strong organisational culture, internal communication and direct management control. The purpose here is to integrate cultures, values and the brand in the employees’ mind-set (ibid.: 119). The advantage of such hybrid models is that the organisation manages to involve employees in order to feel commitment and ownership, while the organisation secures a consensual communication.
The disadvantage is, however, that employee involvement combined with central dictation can result in mixed signals, which eventually can lead to cynicism among the employees (ibid.: 120).

Critique of living the brand theory

Karmark’s theoretical contribution to living the brand theory has a practical approach. This means, that we find it difficult to use on an analytical level. However, the theory becomes useful when deploying it in the sections with a more discussing approach having room for a practical element. However, it is noteworthy, that we consider his practical suggestions to be quite vague, as they do appear very similar despite their different approaches.

Moreover, as highlighted above, the three perspectives place different types of demands on the employees in their role as brand ambassadors, and create differing challenges towards the organisation. However, regardless of whether the employees live or live by the brand, these seductive theoretical strategies might result in that the organisations’ workforces become too similar, the motivation and innovation rate may fall, cynicism among the employees may increase and the organisation might find it difficult to meet and reflect the various demands of its stakeholders (ibid.; Morsing 2006: 106).

Thus, living the brand theory can contribute with beneficial strategies to the organisation, but as shown, it requires thoughtful reflections.

Having argued for and discussed the theoretical contributions that will be deployed throughout the analysis, we will complete this theory chapter by discussing the synergies and diversities that exist between the fields of employer- and corporate branding. The final contribution of such a discussion is to identify how the concepts can provide explanation into the influence that each field has on one another and thereby to discuss which theoretical strengths and weaknesses the disciplines seem to have in relation to our research area - thereby answering the thesis’ theoretical sub-question.
Theoretical discussion – synergies/distinctions & strengths/weakness

Based on the above, an evident synergy between the two fields seems to be the acknowledgement of the importance of aligning the internal identity with the external image in order to secure a trustworthy branding. This can be seen in Hatch & Schultz’s gap-analysis as well as in Backhaus and Tikoo’s employer branding framework in that both models focus on internal and external processes as potential assets affecting the brand. This synergy seems to be a natural result of employer branding’s origin from the corporate branding literature where having a strategically integrated approach to the branding activities exist.

Following from this, a common understanding of the fields seems to be the importance of employees as brand ambassadors. As presented earlier employees constitute the interface between the internal and external touch-points thus making the communication reliable by “walking the talk”. Both theories do not seem to provide their own explanation on how to make employees exercise the role as ambassadors; instead they both seem to find theoretical support for this action in social identity theory. Further, the branding disciplines seem to operate at an organisational level by concentrating on a shared brand expression - though having different targets. By focusing mainly on the organisational level both theories seem to acknowledge the challenge of on the one hand securing brand consistency and on the other hand avoiding limiting the flexibility of different subcultures’ relation to the branding (Barrow & Mosley 2008: 125; Schultz et al. 2005: 41). However, it seems as if the disciplines do not provide any tools to analyse how subcultures within each stakeholder group positively and negatively affects the overall brands and how different subcultures best can be included and involved in the brand. Thus, making such an analysis suggestively acquires a focus on a group/individual level of analysis rather than strictly applying an organisational level of analysis. This seems to support our above argued theoretical choice of applying concepts from social identity theory and ‘living the brand’ theory.

As mentioned earlier, the aim of employer- and corporate branding seem to differ in that they deal with singular objectives. Where the employer branding theory aims at having a positive employer image in order to attract and retain talents, the corporate branding theory has a broader stakeholder view by emphasising the importance of holding corporate credibility in all stakeholder relations - implying that each field operate at distinct analytical levels.
By applying corporate branding literature in an analysis the possibility to gain a strategic overview of all the influencing factors, which interacting with different stakeholders forces upon the organisation, becomes possible. Thus, the strength of such a theoretical mind-set seems to be its broad coverage in acknowledging that all stakeholders’ needs must be taken into consideration in the comprehensive brand expression and interaction. On the other side this strength also seems to limit the field, since the broad scope hinders the possibility to get deep insights into the specific needs of specific stakeholders. These strengths and weaknesses of corporate branding seem to be reflected in the gap-analysis when it aims at conceptualising the relations between image, vision and culture/identity, since conducting analysis by applying this model will identify potential gaps between different stakeholders perception of the organisation.

The employer branding literature in opposition has a more narrow focus on the relations between an organisation and its prospective and current employees as stakeholders. This analytical level seems to provide the opportunity to gain deeper knowledge of the needs, interests and brand associations of employees. Hence, the benefit is that the branding effort can be directly targeted at employees by emphasising brand values that speak to this group’s self-concepts. Backhaus and Tikoo’s model conceptualises the positive outcome of this as increased employer attraction and employee productivity. However, the model does not consider how the aspirations of current employees and potential employees influence one another. The gap between external and internal stakeholders is what gets great emphasis in the corporate branding gap-analysis. Thus, this indicates that the two disciplines can complement one another by analysing how to gain employer brand assets while also taken the influence of external factors into consideration. However, we do find the institutional perspective and the resource-based perspective useful in supporting the theories when seeking to understand the importance of meeting the external stakeholders’ demands and to analyse what seem to be the indications of a brand’s equity assessed from both internal and external factors.

Finally, it can be identified that the natural limitation of employer branding is that this analytical level does not account for other brand communication within the organisation. It seems that the literature do not provide any explanation as to how other branding activities influence the employer branding and vice versa. However, the literature do acknowledge that brand integration is a prerequisite and suggests that further research is needed into how each brand enhance or detract from each other (Backhaus & Tikoo 2004: 512).
Based on the above literature overview of both branding disciplines we too identify this lack of explanation of how corporate- and employer branding are interdependent and shape one another positively and negatively. In relation to our research question it can further be argued that each theoretical field do not seem to provide satisfying theoretical frameworks to help us explain the complexity of the interrelationship between DONG Energy’s corporate brand concept and the employer branding process. In this case the possible challenges within the employer branding process might exist because of the green corporate brand’s influence on the E&P-members’ identification with the overall branding. Do our findings indicate that this subgroup seem not to identify with the corporate brand it may influence DONG Energy’s opportunity to make use of them as positive employer brand ambassadors. In this respect, the employees might not be aware of the distinction between the corporate- and employer brand communication. Thus, the corporate brand may affect their role as employer brand ambassadors just as much as the employer brand, and subsequently it may have an effect on the retention and attraction of qualified employees to this unit. Hence, in our analysis we aim at challenging the sharp distinction between corporate- and employer branding.

Reflecting on the purpose of theories in general - theories are developed to reduce complexity of reality, meaning that it on the one hand can be fruitful to categories and induces reality in order to obtain specific knowledge of a certain area. On the other hand, this reasoning could also provide an explanation of why we find it necessary to draw on several theoretical disciplines and concepts in order to analyse our research question and its many facets. Thus, we develop our own framework drawing on various theoretical fields in order to guide our analysis and discussion.
Chapter 5 – Framework of the thesis

Deploying interdisciplinary concepts

Having presented and discussed the strengths and weaknesses of the chosen theoretical disciplines, which we find relevant to deploy, it also appeared that no single theory would provide sufficient answers to our complex research question. For that reason, we will now present our own framework that aims to address the thesis’ theoretical approach in which we combine the central theoretical concepts of the various disciplines that we highlighted above. The theoretical concepts can be seen in the left side of the figure below. The framework further contributes with a brief account of the objectives of the different parts of our analysis and discussion - these can be seen in the right side of the figure.

The analysis and discussion of the thesis is divided into three parts:

The first part working on an organisational level is based on secondary material and takes an outside-in perspective by focusing mainly on what seems to be the external stakeholders (non-) formalised environmental requirements to DONG Energy. Based on the identified requirements and needs of the external stakeholders, we will analyse what seems to make DONG Energy’s corporate brand combined with the employer brand valuable. Hence, the first part seeks to answer the second sub-question by clarifying which particular parts of the branding platform that cannot be changed without appearing illegitimate and avoiding damaging its overall competitiveness and brand equity. This analysis should establish the base for a later discussion about whether E&P-employees’ potential disagreement with the green branding can be met while at the same time complying with the requirements for maintaining a strong image in the minds of the external stakeholders.

The second part working on a group/individual level presents and analyses our primary empirical data in this research. Consequently, this part operates on an inside-out level by examining the E&P-respondent’s degree of identification with the green branding, and thus answering our third sub-question.

To investigate the members’ organisational identification, the analysis will generally concentrate on analysing how they experience DONG Energy as a workplace, how the external
image affects their attitude towards the branding, and finally how their brand associations are reflected in and matches the internal reality. Based on these findings, we wish to discuss how the green branding universe influences the employer branding process towards recruiting and retaining qualified E&P-specialists. Moreover, the aim of this part is to analyse how the E&P-members’ level of identification affects their current appearance as employer brand ambassadors. Thus, it is particularly in this section that we will reflect on our three proposed assumptions, which we put at risk during the analysis.

*The third and final part* provides a closing discussion consisting of both case-relevant reflections as well as some theoretical reflections. The aim of the discussion is to answer our fourth sub-question by reflecting on indications from the analysis of the E&P-members level of identification and to discuss the opportunities and challenges of the suggested solutions given throughout the analysis. Further, the aim is to make a reality check by considering and discussing whether and to what extent the view on corporate branding as an organisation-wide philosophy seem realistic in the empirical reality of DONG Energy.
Conceptual framework for the analysis and discussion

**Analysis - Part 1**

Institutional perspective
- Institutional pressure
- Isomorphism
- Legitimacy

Corporate branding
- Brand equity
- Stakeholder orientation
- Vision/mission gap
- Corporate credibility

Corporate social responsibility
- Shared value

Resource-based perspective
- Rarity
- Inappropriateness
- Imperfect imitability

Employer branding
- Employer brand associations

**Do there seem to be external demands towards DONG Energy's corporate branding?**

Do DONG Energy's corporate brand and/or the employer brand contribute as a valuable resource for the organisation?

- The aim is to answer our second sub-question.

**Analysis - Part 2**

Social identity theory
- Construed external image
- Perceived organisational identity

Corporate branding
- Vision/mission gap
- Image/mission gap

Employer branding
- Employee brand loyalty
- Personal/organisation fit

Living the brand
- Living by the brand
- Living the brand

**Secondary data**

- How do the members at Exploration and Production seem to identify with the green branding?

- What effect does the branding seem to have on the retention and recruitment of E&P members?

- How do the E&P members seem to present DONG Energy as a workplace?

- The aim is to answer our third sub-question and thereby put our proposed assumptions at risk.

**Discussion - Part 3**

Corporate branding
- Common starting/ending point
- Internal branding
- Organisation-wide philosophy

Living the brand
- Brand champions

**Primary data**

- Does a reliable communicative link between the green brand platform and the storytelling told by employees at Exploration and Production exist?

- Does it seem possible to maintain or secure such a synergy while still meeting the expectations from the various stakeholder groups?

- The aim is to answer our fourth sub-question by discussing the implied storytelling of E&P members in relation to the opportunities and challenges of the suggested solutions given in the analysis.

**Research Question**

Based on a theoretical discussion of the interrelationship between the theoretical fields of Corporate Branding and Employer Branding, we wish to investigate how DONG Energy’s corporate brand ‘Moving Energy Forward’ influences the employer branding process of attracting and retaining talented employees at DONG Energy, Exploration & Production.
Chapter 6 – Analysis

Part 1: Organisational legitimacy and brand equity
In this first part we seek answers to the second sub-question by analysing the environment surrounding DONG Energy and its external interactions with the stakeholders. This external oriented analysis aims at laying the ground of what preconditions that forces DONG Energy into the green strategy and branding. We continue by analysing whether the corporate brand *Moving Energy Forward* seems to work as a capability both in relation to the employer branding process and in other relations. Only by conducting these analyses the ability to discuss some realistic scenarios in the closing discussion becomes possible.

Stakeholder pressure and corporate social responsibility
Increasing media attention, growing shareholder expectations of transparent information and demands from interest groups and political consumers challenge the identities of today’s organisations. *Institutional theory* calls it *institutional mechanisms* that impose pressures on companies (Lorenzen et al. 2008: 147). From this perspective, the organisation must consider its obligations towards its stakeholders, because they determine whether the organisation is considered as legitimate. Legitimacy is the company’s most important resource, since being perceived as legitimate increases flow of other resources (ibid). Hence, the *institutional pressure* from a range of stakeholders towards the organisation’s legitimacy, forces it to be closely tied to social and political issues (Cheney et al. 2004: 102; Oliver 1991: 147; Lorenzen et al. 2008: 156). Institutional theory states that in order to understand what happens *within* the company, explanation should be found *outside* the company (ibid.: 148). Thus, to investigate what seem to be prerequisites for DONG Energy’s green branding, we will examine the stakeholder-pressure that surrounds it. Stakeholders can be defined as:

“...groups of people whose collective behaviour can directly affect the organization’s future, but which is not under the organization’s control.”

(Cheney et al. 2004: 122)
DONG Energy holds the entire energy supply chain, and each business area has its own stakeholder groups (Appendix C). However, from a business-wide consideration DONG Energy’s primary stakeholder groups are costumers, investors, the Danish government, suppliers, employees, strategic collaborators and the equally important secondary stakeholder groups consisting of interest groups (NGOs), other governments, communities, media and competitors. DONG Energy seem to acknowledge the importance of complying with its stakeholders’ demands by focusing on stakeholder involvement:

“At DONG Energy, we aim to engage in ongoing dialogue with our stakeholders to align our requirements and expectations with those of our stakeholders. We are open to new ways of approaching things and prepared to act accordingly.”

(DONG E.)

The broad stakeholder orientation has probably emerged in line with the growing interest of Corporate Social Responsibility. Where intangible assets such as environmental responsibility in the industrial society were considered irrational today it is a prerequisite for managing a legitimate business (Mac 2001). The institutional pressure from DONG Energy’s stakeholder groups towards the energy supplier’s CSR is analysed in the following. We begin by arguing for the understanding of the concept CSR that we will be deploy.

There are various definitions of CSR, but we subscribe to Carroll and Buchholtz’ four-part definition:

“The social responsibilities of businesses encompass the economic, legal, ethical and discretionary (philanthropic) expectations that society has of organizations at a given point in time.”

(ibid. 2008: 40)

This four-part definition infers that a social responsible organisation should strive to maximize profit, obey the law, be ethical and act as a good “corporate citizen”. However, it is important to emphasise that the authors state that only by combining all four responsibilities it qualifies for true corporate social responsibility (ibid.: 45).
This understanding of CSR contradicts with the definition of the European Commission:

“A concept whereby companies integrate social and environmental concerns in their business operations and in their interaction with their stakeholders on a voluntary basis.”

(EC)²

Thus, the European commission argues that CSR is only concerned with voluntary activities, and thereby do not include economic and legal responsibilities. However, we choose to follow the definition of Carroll & Buchholtz, believing that an organisation that follows an ambitious law regarding corporations’ social and environmental concerns is acting socially responsible. E.g. if two similar organisations are taken the same social and environmental responsibilities, but is localised in different countries with different political regulations regarding CSR, the definition from the European Commission would argue that only the corporation that is undertaken the weaker regulation is acting socially responsible.

However, in relation to DONG Energy we also question Carroll & Buchholtz’ statement concerning that: “a business has accountability of each [economic, legal, ethical and philanthropic] of these areas of responsibility and performance” (ibid.: 44). A publicly held organisation that takes a philanthropic responsibility and behave as a good “corporate citizen”, by supporting a socially beneficial cause without obtaining any marketing goals or gaining any financial reward, may not be considered as exhibiting social responsibility. The public will possibly wonder why the organisation donates public earnings. In this respect, we have not found any indications of DONG Energy acting philanthropic. Thus, we argue that state-owned organisations, like DONG Energy, have special prerequisites for performing CSR by acting economically, legally and ethically correct.

**Shareholders expectations to economic and legal responsibilities**

Economic concern seems to be considered a part of being social responsible in DONG Energy:

“We believe that we can turn the challenges facing the energy sector into opportunities and thus create added value for DONG Energy, long-term financial added value for our owners, environmental improvements, and also contribute positively to ethical, social and societal development.”

(DONG E.)⁸
Thus, adding economic value for its shareholders is an important business strategy for DONG Energy. A strong and sustainable economy can provide welfare to the Danish society, since the Danish state owns 76.45% of the company (DONG E.)\(^9\). Moreover, it contributes to investments in its ambitious aim of Moving Energy Forward (DONG E.)\(^8\). According to the Danish newspaper Politiken\(^1\), DONG Energy has given a profit of nearly 14 billion DKK in four years and is positioned as number one in the world when it comes to wind farms.

The economist, Friedman (1970) is well known for his controversial statement: “The social responsibility of business is to increase its profits”, meaning that the sole legitimate business of an organisation is to make profit while operating within the bounds of the established laws. Being a public company, it may be argued that DONG Energy’s business purpose is not to maximise its profit but to provide service. However, the external pressure causing DONG Energy to take economic, legal and ethical responsibilities seem to be clearly reflected in the latest conflict regarding the former CEO, Anders Eldrup, who was accused for acting: “in a way that must be deemed to constitute breach of his duties as CEO, in connection with the establishment of salary and employment terms for specific existing and former employees” (JP)\(^1\).

As mentioned this conflict led to enormous press coverage due to a debate about whether the former CEO had acted unethically and financially irresponsible. However, if DONG Energy had not been state-owned, this conflict would properly be non-existing, suggesting that the public organisation is exposed to a strong media and public attention. Furthermore, it should be noted that this conflict might have provided questions about the validity and the corporate expertise of DONG Energy’s employer brand Ambitious People, as it can be interpreted, that the CEO’s desire for hiring talents may have led to unethical behaviour. In this respect, DONG Energy’s employer branding manager is worried that the reliability and reputation of the staff as ambitious could be questioned:

“This case really saddens us. If people believe that we have not done our things properly, and that we have been careless with the money or our way of doing things ... this can be remembered in society for a long time.”

(Gry, Employer branding manager)
Thus, this ethical and legal matter may have harmed the employer value proposition. Since *Ambitious People* is not the main research topic of this thesis other research could make an in-depth analysis of the conflict’s influence of the employer brand.

Considering policy and regulatory conditions, these are inherently of great importance for any business. The Danish government has in March 2012 launched a new climate and energy policy aiming at creating a society based on 100 % renewable energy from the energy and transport sectors in 2050 (Energi Styrelsen)\(^2\). Working towards these goals the policy focuses on climate actions, energy security and green growth. These initiatives are in many ways consistent with DONG Energy’s long-term 85/15-strategy concerning the reduction of CO2-emissions to 15 percent of current levels within the next 30 years while also working for securing energy supply (DONG E.)\(^{10}\).

Institutional theory provides the concept of *coercive isomorphism* (i.e. a pressure in the form of force) (Lorenzen et al. 2008: 158), which *Moving Energy Forward* can be suggested as an example of, because it is an effective mechanism to promote DONG Energy’s green strategy imposed by regulatory authorities. The regulatory pressure from the Danish government may have forced DONG Energy into changing its previous production methods and thus DONG Energy has taken advantage of this pressure through environmental friendly branding.

Another suggestion that could reveal coercive isomorphism is DONG Energy reporting on its CSR initiatives, which is forced by law (DONG E.)\(^1\). However, in 2006 DONG Energy chose to join the UN Global Compact and bounded itself to comply with 10 principles concerning human rights, labour, environment and anti-corruption (DONG Energy)\(^12\). Additionally, the organisation reports on CSR in accordance with Global Reporting Initiative (DONG E.),\(^13\) which are a set of international guidelines for CSR-reporting. This shows a trace of *mimetic isomorphism* (i.e. pressure in form of imitation) in that DONG Energy voluntarily chose to report on CSR, as it presumably is afraid of appearing illegitimate by not doing so.

These pressures indicate that DONG Energy might be pressured to engage in CSR. This is in line with Callens’ study (2000) revealing that more than 50% of theoretical papers quote the external pressures as the main motivation for positive environmental responses of organisations.
EU’s climate policy can be said to be a little less ambitious than the Danish, which could be due to the significant amount of stakeholders that surround EU. EU has developed *Strategic Energy Technology Plan 2050*, which aims to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 80-95% in 2050 (EUO¹; EC²). Hence, the less demanding climate policies coupled with DONG Energy’s international competition might create a competitive disproportion, because investing in green energy may generate higher prices - thereby weaken DONG Energy’s competitiveness. Conversely, the greater Danish regulation can also serve as a competitive advantage, since many political consumers seek environmentally friendly products (Thyssen 2005: 166). Based on DONG Energy’s corporate brand it may be interpreted that it has chosen to meet the challenges by using it as a strategic option to create a strong green reputation. This is in line with Porter and Kramer’s (2006) argument, saying that CSR-initiatives should provide *shared value*, meaning that both society and the organisation should gain value from it. This opinion contradicts with Friedman stating that organisations’ social responsibility is only to maximize profit. However, the purpose of DONG Energy’s CSR-initiatives can be suggested as creating shared value through the provision of cleaner and stable energy whilst at the same time creating the possibility of being at the forefront of Danish political regulations and gaining first mover advantage on green initiatives.

**Stakeholders’ expectations to ethical behaviour**

It seems that DONG Energy also attempt to take ethical responsibilities. This might be due to an expectation in society of large entities to take such a responsibility, which can be seen as a part of the social contract between the organisation and society (Carroll & Buchholtz 2008: 43).

According to Carroll and Buchholtz, ethical responsibilities do:

“...embody the full scope of norms, standards, values and expectations that reflect what consumers, employees, shareholders, and the community regard as fair, and consistent with the respect for or protection of stakeholders’ moral rights.”

(Ibid.: 41)

A suggested example of DONG Energy aiming at taking an ethical responsibility is their focus on appearing transparent:
“DONG Energy aims to ensure that its operations are reliable and transparent and regularly reports on its targets, actions, performance, challenges and future plans”

(DONG E.)

In this respect, Fleischer (2009: 58) stresses that: “improved transparency will be rewarded”. Thus, communicating reliable and honest is an expected, but also appreciated value by stakeholders, suggestively resulting in corporate trustworthiness.

Moreover, it can be implied that DONG Energy’s invitation to stakeholder dialog aim at acting ethically responsible, by trying to embrace the stakeholders’ ‘stakes’ and meeting their expectations. Stakeholder involvement is widely reflected in stakeholder theories as a way of enhancing the level of trust by sharing information of different ‘stakes’ and to engender relevant solutions (Carroll & Buchholtz 2008: 110; Freeman et al. 2007: 116). For instance, DONG Energy claims that the stakeholder dialog have generated new safety and sustainability practices: "joint environmental and safety emergency plans with local fisheries organisations and public authorities in the Barents Sea, Norway, in connection with seismic test drilling” (DONG E.)

Additionally, it may be interpreted that the aim of engaging in stakeholder dialog is not only to create stakeholder value but also to generate shared value.

Moving Energy Forward might aim at gaining goodwill through its legal and ethical responsibilities by communicating about its initiatives to provide clean and reliable energy. However, through such ethically framed communication stakeholders likely will keep an eye on whether the organisation lives up to the promises - especially the media that is known as society’s “watchdog” (Stavnsager 2007; Ørsten 2005).

Various stakeholders have repeatedly questioned DONG Energy’s green purpose, e.g. it has been criticised by the Danish Nature and Environment Board for wanting to use more coal on ‘Avedøreværket’. This led to an increased media attention, which forced DONG Energy to renounce coal at ‘Avedøreværket’ (Ritzau). Furthermore, E&P is the only business unit within DONG Energy that is not included in the 85/15-strategy. The strategy is strictly aimed at the end user whereas E&P delivers oil and gas to the B2B-market (DONG E.)

In this regard, E&P has a separate strategy concerning increasing the business significantly (DONG E.). This strategy has no correlation with the green communication, which potentially can create a communicative clash and challenge the perception of DONG Energy as ethically
responsible by accusing it for ‘greenwashing’. If the media begins wondering why not all units are included in 85/15-strategy it can create a strong public pressure. Later we will return to a discussion of the challenges and consequences that awake when DONG Energy applies two business strategies simultaneously.

With the liberalisation of the energy marked competition has increased forcing DONG Energy to develop a strong reputation as well as to comply with the social contract between the organisation and society. In order to meet the stakeholder’s expectations and being perceived as corporate likable, measures have shown that besides having a strong economy, being trustworthy and responsible is important parameters for success (Business)². Thus, in the following section, an analysis of the brand value and equity of employing such parameters will be examined.

**Brand associations – the uniqueness of DONG Energy’s branding**

In the following we focus on what seems to be the benefits DONG Energy gains from its branding platform. By analysing in what way DONG Energy’s corporate brand in combination with the employer brand can contributes as a valuable resource for the organisation, the aim is to try to understand which specific parts of the branding platform that cannot be changed without weakening the brands’ equity. We analyse both brands, since this part of the analysis relies on the image measurement, providing no opportunity to make a distinction between which effects each separate brand has on the general employer image.

**The value of trustworthiness**

As emphasised above DONG Energy being a publicly held company has got political regulations to comply with, thus the green strategy and branding can in large part be suggested as contributing to a license to operate. The legitimacy is needed, but as interpreted it might also provide strength for DONG Energy’s branding strategy. As emphasised by Balmer and Gray (2003: 974), well managed corporate brands has utility in that they provide a means of differentiation from their competitors and improve the appreciation and loyalty in which the organisation is held by its stakeholders. *Moving Energy Forward* in relation to DONG Energy’s public role can be interpreted as a brand promise, since it contains characteristics that are both functional as well symbolic.
Functional characteristics are associations such as *quality, performance, familiarity* and *predictability* (Ibid.: 987). Due to its public role the awareness and familiarity of DONG Energy is automatically high, however quality and predictability are something that need to be earned, which has become increasingly important after the legalisation of the energy market. By so evidently emphasising that the organisation will work hard through new investments and on-going adjustments to change energy composition into being more environmental friendly, it can be interpreted that DONG Energy’s communication targets these characteristics of quality and performance resulting in *corporate expertise*. The characteristics is further emphasised when DONG Energy communicatively positions itself as first-mover by showing the way into making the necessary changes in the following years:

> “Alone, DONG Energy cannot ensure that the global energy supply undergoes the necessary change in the years ahead. We know that. We hope we can help show the way. We do know where DONG Energy is headed – we have defined the course and the goal for our own journey – and the journey has begun. We call it Moving Energy Forward.”
> (DONG E.)\(^{16}\)

These functional characteristics are supplemented by symbolic terms being rich in image. Such symbolic characteristics are dependent to a considerable degree on *perception, beliefs and experiences* (Balmer & Gray 2003: 989) and when *Moving Energy Forward* is illustrated by pictures of green grass fields and windmills at the sea it creates positive connotations to natural resources. Thus, the combined use of both functional and symbolic values can be seen as green brand promises.

DONG Energy’s CSR position and especially its ethical responsibility of stakeholder involvement seems to strengthen the corporate branding process, since these principles emphasise the importance of consistent dialogue with shareholders, politicians, other stakeholders and employees but also the importance of considering and dealing with the agendas that is essential to the various stakeholders. By attaching *Moving Energy Forward* with the ethical initiatives DONG Energy in large parts seems to succeeds in making its green branding provide *an umbrella of trust* (Ibid: 985) for the organisation:
“A corporate brand may be viewed as a contract in that the company needs to articulate its accord with its key stakeholders by demonstrating, unceasingly and over time, that it has kept true to its corporate brand pledge.”

(Balmer & Gray 2003: 982)

This umbrella of trust can be suggested to enhance the brand equity since it enables DONG Energy to maintain and further extend its operations into work areas that do not by first glance contribute to the environmentally friendly part of the business plan. In other words it contributes with the earlier mentioned license to operate in both environmentally and less environmentally friendly business areas and it is therefore necessary to maintain the corporate trustworthiness.

While the above analysis reveals that the green branding is valuable in relation to its brand equity, because of the trustworthiness it contributes with, it can be questioned whether such ethos qualifies as a true capability for the organisation. As previously showed, if the media and other stakeholders discover that DONG Energy do not hold its green promise the umbrella of trust might easily get damaged and harm the image for a long period.

In relation to recruiting the best possible candidates to DONG Energy, image measurements show (ING.)¹ that employees wish to be employed by an organisation carrying a high level of responsibility and ethos. However, as explained by the identified process of mimetic isomorphism, numerous companies are aware of the importance of exhibiting CSR and thus the candidates will have various opportunities of being employed by an organisation working for a cause and showing responsibility. Further, an image measurement made in 2011 among engineering students shows that DONG Energy is no longer among the top 10 most attractive organisations to work for (ING)². Thus, it seems that while the green branding contributes with brand equity by building corporate trustworthiness it does not qualify for a true competitive advantage in recruiting specialised personnel like engineers. Being responsible can be identified as imitable and as such it is not at capability owned by DONG Energy. Thus, in order to understand whether the green brand platform contributes as a capability we need to look beyond its CSR-position and examine to what extent the combination of employer branding and corporate branding makes the platform unique.
Ambitious People – Moving Energy Forward

Branding becomes a resource because of intangible elements like it being embedded in historical patterns and perceptions. However, in order for a brand to work as a capability the resource-based perspective suggest that it has to be rare, inappropriable and imperfect imitable (Balmer & Gray 2003).

Balmer & Gray (2003: 990) argue that the rarity of a brand exists because of social complexity of many interactions besides formal communication shaping the branding process. Thus, the rarity of a corporate and employer brand is the result of the social complexity and comparatively long gestation (Ibid.: 988). The effective corporate and employer brand should reflect the organisation’s culture:

“Corporate branding brings to marketing the ability to use the vision and culture of the company explicitly as part of its unique selling proposition.”

(Hatch & Schultz 2001: 1)

Further, employees play a starring role in practicing the branding and thereby making it become alive (Cornelissen 2008: 86). Thus, it can be interpreted that the rarity of a corporate and employer brand seems to exist if the branding becomes the organisational-wide philosophy that Balmer & Greyser (2006: 734) argue should reflect how people in the organisation think and behave on its behalf.

DONG Energy’s branding platform concerning Moving Energy Forward and Ambitious People have got their own separate selling propositions, and can thus be communicated as individual brands targeted at different groups. The selling proposition of Moving Energy Forward can be interpreted as the already identified use of characteristics of performance and quality through changing the composition of energy supply and DONG Energy’s role as first mover. The communication seems to be so broad that it can be targeted at various stakeholders. The selling proposition of Ambitious People takes form as what the employer branding literature entitles employee value proposition (EVP) in that it targets current and prospective employees (Seldorf 2008: 52). It seems to aim at creating perceptions in the employees’ mind that DONG Energy is built up by ambitious employees that stand behind the success of the organisation.
Further, DONG Energy’s employer branding manager stresses that a part of the EVP also lays the message that as an employee at DONG Energy you need to have the ability to deliver good results and the willingness to make great efforts (Gry, Employer branding manager). However, as previously indicated, the present situation of the organisation might question the trustworthiness of the EVP.

Seen in isolation the two brands provide DONG Energy with the opportunity to communicate directly to various stakeholder groups. However, the green strategy of the corporate brand seems to be challenged in differentiating itself on the good cause. Furthermore, it can be identified that the employer brand also seems to meet challenges with differentiation. This is based on a reflection that it can be difficult to think of a company that will not concur with the statement that employees of that specific corporation is driven by ambition. This can be validated in the fact that the Danish it-company NNIT has an Employer brand with a similar employee value proposition *Ambitious People – winning teams* (NNIT)

Analysing the brand equity through the resource-based perspective, it can be argued that while DONG Energy’s corporate- as well as employer brand separately contributes with value for the company, they are not rare, since they are built up on messages that can easily be imitated by competing brands.

**The value of a combined branding platform**

According to Seldorf (2008: 52) an EVP has increased possibility of becoming unique if it is developed in relation to the organisation’s vision and strategy, since a vision often describes the reason for the organisation’s presence in the market. Despite the novelty of the employer branding phenomenon, the employer brand at DONG Energy, unlike many others, is created simultaneously with the organisation’s corporate brand. According to the Employer branding manager this is due to the merger in 2006 which led to the start of DONG Energy – thus no vision, branding or communication strategy existed, thus providing the opportunity to build up the various elements so that they were aligned (Gry, Employer branding manager). From the resource-based perspective, a brand platform becomes inappropriatable when beliefs and experiences are so attached to a brand that it cannot be bargained away (Balmer & Gray 2003: 989). The strength of DONG Energy’s branding platform seems to be based on the fact that the corporate- and employer brand are created concurrently:
“We stood in a favourable position in that we did not have a corporate brand and we did not have an employer brand when we began, thus there were no issue in getting them to fit... we were so lucky, and when I say we, I mean us at HR, that we were involved in the other process regarding our corporate brand. Likewise, staff at Communications was also involved in our brand – thus it really was a combined process.”

(Gry, Employer branding manager)

For a brand platform to become successful it is important that it is organisationally integrated and reflects the culture of the organisation (Hatch & Schultz 2001: 1041). Ambitious People gain its strength in that it is based on surveys and focus group interviews with 3000 employees within the organisation. The employer brand is build up on a classical model of want, can, should and thus reflects the combined opinion of the top management and PD department’s aspirations for DONG Energy (want), the opinion of employees of what characterises them as a work force (can) and finally the opinion of external prospective employees of what connotations they have of an attractive employee (should) (Gry, Employer branding manager).

The involvement of employees is particularly important in securing relevancy and connection (Seldorf 2008: 52). It can be interpreted that Ambitious People in large part is built on beliefs and experiences that help gain inappropriability for the brand. However, as argued earlier the rarity of a brand is formed by interactions besides the formal branding. Such socially formed interpretations can be identified in the combination of Ambitious People and Moving Energy Forward. What seems to provide rareness is that they in combination extend the usage possibilities. While they separately aim at individual target groups, they in combination provides the opportunity to stretch the storytelling and thereby the possible interpretations. Thus, the employer brand Ambitious People seem to add a humanitarian dimension to Moving Energy Forward by showing that there are human actions behind the aspiring corporate branding such as; ‘DONG Energy is moving energy forward through ambitious people’. Likewise, the corporate brand seems to add a cause, thus providing the green strategy to the employer brand that earlier was identified as important when recruiting personnel; ‘Ambitious people moving energy forward’.
The uniqueness seems to be that the platform is built on a recognition that interpretations come from social complexity and that it aims at communicating in a form that meets this complexity, while expressing a coherent branding. Since the selling proposition of the corporate brand and the EVP of the employer brand is made in such a way that they can be mixed in various combinations they can also be targeted at various stakeholders:

“It can be employed together, but also alone, so we can use them towards different stakeholders, depending on what we aim to communicate.”

(Gry, Employer branding manager)

These various combination opportunities seem to qualify the combined branding platform to become a capability, since magnitude and diversity of these various interactions with stakeholder will make it challenging for a competing brand to imitate. This is due to the fact that it seems to be difficult to grasp the intricacies of the overall process. Hence, the social complexity in the many interactions that the branding platform triggers seems to become an isolating mechanism protecting the branding. In the following analysis and discussion we should therefore acknowledge the importance of the combined use of the employer and corporate brand in that it seems to enhance brand equity.

‘Ambitious People • Moving Energy Forward’ when recruiting personnel

Having suggested that the capability of DONG Energy’s branding platforms lies in the recognition of the social complexity and the various combination opportunities that still express coherent branding, we should end this paragraph by focusing specifically on the external part of the target group of interest – that is the prospective employees. Thus, based on secondary material we wish to find indications of whether the branding platform can be seen as a capability in recruiting specialists. The findings will provide the opportunity to compare the following analysis of the identification work of E&P-respondents with the image held by prospective employees.

According to Backhaus and Tikoo (2004: 504), employer branding creates the principal asset of brand associations - which help to shape the employer image affecting the attractiveness of the workplace to potential employees.
In this regard, Davies (2006: 671) argues that effective employer branding should be viewed through an *emotional lens* providing the opportunity to see which emotional responses that the brand awakes. He finds support for a hypothesis that the stronger an employer brand’s personality is, the greater will be the employee’s affinity to the brand (Ibid.). As shown, *Ambitious People* is built on a storytelling of DONG Energy consisting of talented and ambitious employees and as argued this EVP does not seem to qualify for rarity. However, it does seem to trigger emotional responses since it focuses of the quality of current employees. Thus, rather than focusing on building the image of DONG Energy as workplace the employer branding actually seems to build current employees image by emphasising their skills. Such communication contributes with *symbolic benefits* (Backhaus & Tikoo 2004: 505) relating to prestige of the firm and the social approval that applicants imagine they will gain from being employed by the organisation. It can be suggested that the social approval from *Ambitious People* is that by being employed by the organisation one will be thought of as an ambitious person. If the employer brand succeeds in leaving this impression it should lead to pride in the membership of the organisation (Davies 2006: 671).

The image measurement *Profilanalysen 2011/2012* reveals that DONG Energy no longer has a top-ten position as the most attractive workplaces among engineers (ING)³ (Appendix B). From a theoretical point of view this can seem surprising, since the employer brand does target social prestige and emotional response. This makes us wonder whether the combination of *Moving Energy Forward* and *Ambitious People* seems to influence on the employer branding process – of whether, despite the necessity of the green branding in order to meet external demands, it might not trigger emotional response in a way that keeps the employee image at the top of the scale.

Thus, it can be reflected upon that the earlier identified capability of combining the employer and corporate brand might not seem as visible when focusing strictly on specialists like engineers as potential employees. In the ending discussion we will reflect on whether the two can be combined in a way so that it becomes a competitive advantage when focusing on recruiting specialist whilst still maintaining its role as a capability towards other employee profiles and stakeholders. Further, an analysis of the importance of emotional attachment in the identification process of employees will be made in the following. According to Foster et al. (2010: 402) current as well as future employees should be educated about the brand values to
enhance their intellectual and emotional engagement with the brand, thus it can be suggested that putting an emphasis on the importance of DONG Energy’s CSR is needed if the good cause and the emotions awaked by this should work as a capability in recruiting specialised personnel. It seems that they need to be educated into being engaged by DONG Energy’s good cause of changing energy composition.

Summing up, this part of the analysis indicates that DONG Energy’s green strategy and branding seem to be a prerequisite viewed from a broader stakeholder perspective. Moreover, the combined branding platform seems to work as a capability, however we question whether the branding seem to enhance brand equity when focusing on specialised profiles.

**Part 2: Identification & brand loyalty**

Having analysed the external pressures that seem to cause the green branding of DONG Energy and at the same time can work as a capability when the brands are combined, we now shift focus into being internally oriented. Building on the findings from our interviews with four E&P-members and the two informant interviews, the contribution of this internal oriented analysis is to examine the respondents’ degree of identification with their workplace and to try to uncover how *Moving Energy Forward* influences the employer branding process of attracting and retaining talented employees. To make such an analysis, we are inspired by Dutton et al.’s (1994) theory of member identification - suggesting that it is needed to analyse both the members’ construed external image and their perceived organisational identity in order to find indications of the member’s level of identification with their workplace.

**The construed external image**

In the this section the aim is to gain an understanding of how employees at E&P believe that outsiders experience the image of DONG Energy’s corporate brand, and the image of the E&P-unit as well as of the oil industry in general. The contribution of such an analysis is to obtain knowledge of how the employees’ perception of the image affects the level of identification they have with *Moving Energy Forward*. 
We employ the concept *construed external image*: “what a member believes outsiders think about the organisation” (Dutton et al. 1994: 239). The construed external image provides more than just information about the likely social evaluation of the organisation in question. For employees, the construed external image answers the question: “how do outsiders think of me because of my association with the organisation?” (Dutton et al. 1994: 248). In relation to this we extent the *image-culture/identity gap* of Hatch & Schultz (2001: 131) by twisting the questions: “What image do stakeholders associate with your brand” (Ibid.) and “Do your employees care what stakeholders think of your brand” (Ibid.) into: what image do employees at E&P think that stakeholders associate with their brand and does this opinion matter to their level of identification?

**The construed external image of Moving Energy Forward**

As identified above the green communication in DONG Energy’s branding in large part seems to be caused by external pressure for and popularity of *the good cause*. As argued fighting for a good cause has almost become a hygiene factor for organisations – something expected – rather than something rare. Despite their daily work with oil and gas all the E&P-respondents seem to show understanding of the reason why DONG Energy so heavily make use of the green messages. This can be illustrated by Geologist 2 saying: “Well, that’s what people want to hear, I suppose” (Geologist) and further by Manager 1:

“If you look at DONG Energy all together, it really is a great idea to brand DONG Energy on the green stuff, I think ... as a publicly owned energy supplier you have to be a role model”

(Manager 1)

These quotes seem to imply that the employees understand the external pressure put upon DONG Energy as a visible player in society and thus they as a starting point accept DONG Energy’s *corporate moral branding*. Corporate moral branding describes how an organisation is using its brand platform to engage in an exercise of choosing between good and bad (Morsing 2006: 104).
According to Dutton et al. (1994: 240) organisational membership can convene positive attributes on its members and they may feel proud to belong to an organisation that is believed to have socially valued characteristics. Further, through the concept of auto-communication it is described how an organisation can use external channels to communicate to internal stakeholders how the organisation optimally wants its employees to think and act (Kistrup & Toft 2006: 118). In auto-communication the philosophy is that organisations simultaneously are both sender and receiver of its own external communication with the aim of exchanging values (Ibid.).

However, while the employees accept the green branding, it does not seem to contribute with many positive nor negative affiliation on their part, rather it seems to reveal an neutrality as seen in the quote by Manager 2: “I understand why. I have no problems with it...” (Manager 2). The reason that the employees may not be that emotional affected by Moving Energy Forward could be due to the fact that they seem not to tie their own self-concept with DONG Energy’s green strategy indicating a lack of person-organisation fit. As suggested by Dutton et al. (1994: 242) the strength of an employee’s organisational identification, reflects the degree to which the content of the member’s self-concept is tied to that particular employee’s organisational membership. This can be empirically validated by Geophysicist 1 stating that he perceive E&P and Wind Power as not just two different units but as different businesses:

“Well, I must admit I look at it as two different businesses.”

(Geophysicist 1)

This indicates that the construed external image of Moving Energy Forward generally does not awake a high level of identification for the respondents and does not contribute with much self-enhancement on their part.

While this finding seems to stand out quit clearly when surfing the answers given, nuances in the level of identification can be suggested among the respondents. As stated above, with inspiration from Hatch & Schultz we ask what image do employees at E&P think that stakeholders associate with their brand and does this opinion matter to their level of identification? It could be suggested that the answer that each employee gives will be based on the experience that they have gained in the interrelation with external stakeholders.
It is theoretically supported that organisations have difficulty fully aligning outsiders’ belief about an organisation with insiders’ reading of these beliefs - especially if the interaction is limited (Dutton et al 1994: 249; Harris & Chernatony 2001: 450). While both managers and Geophysicist 1 all frequently engage in external activities Geologist 2 claims she has very limited external contact. This seems interesting since it can be suggested that Geologist 2 has the weakest identification with Moving Energy Forward. While Geologist 2 seem to experience the situation from within E&P, Geophysicist 1 frequently interacts with university students and see how interesting they find new technologies for renewable energy and further he uses positive phrases like: “Great, absolutely great” (Geophysicist 1) when asked about the green communication. Therefore, it appears that Moving Energy Forward has a little positive effect on his self-concept. Further, this positivity could also be suggested in Manager 1’s earlier highlighted quote: “a great idea to brand DONG Energy on the green stuff” (Manager 1). Thus, the amount of interaction with external stakeholders might create positivity towards Moving Energy Forward – suggestively because it makes the corporate credibility visible.

The construed external image of the E&P-unit and the oil industry

While the above reveal that the level of identification with the green brand platform is somewhat low and that the employees have limited emotional responses towards it, we should also consider the construed external image of E&P as well as the oil industry in general. Comparing the interviews a pattern seems to exist. First, the respondents emphasise that E&P seems to be invisible in the external communication of DONG Energy. Geophysicist 1 has the opinion that: “the external communication has to be more visible – perhaps also the internal” (Geophysicist 1) and Geologist 2 states:

“Well, we do discuss, that our former CEO had a very hard time using the words “oil and gas” if he could find another way to express himself.”

(Geologist 2)

In relation to recruitment of personnel, Geophysicist 1 seems to experience a problem that candidates at job-interviews think that DONG Energy is heading away from oil and gas. In his’ opinion they do so because all they meet at DONG Energy’s website is green communication:
“When candidates visit our website they think - dear god DONG Energy is heading away from oil and gas. But that is a misunderstanding.”

(Geophysicist 1)

The lack of visibility might also help explain the earlier finding that the employees have a low degree of identification with Moving Energy Forward. As proposed by Dutton et al. (1994: 252) the greater visibility of a member’s affiliation with the organisation, the stronger the relationship between the attractiveness of the construed external image and the organisational identification. Suggestively, when the work of E&P seems to be invisible in the corporate branding, the employees at this unit properly will not feel pride in the communication.

The perceived invisibility is followed by the employees thinking of themselves as scapegoats:

“If one is a real conspiracy theorist, then one might feel like the black sheep in the family, right?”

(Manager 2)

Feelings of being a scapegoat are according to Morsing (2006: 98) a possible negative response to corporate moral branding. When making use of moral messages in the brand platform an organisation performs a normative control over its employees that either implies a reduction of values diversity or awakes feelings of insecurity. Such feelings might possibly lead to less loyal employees, since as emphasised by Backhaus & Tikoo (2004: 504) the loyalty towards the employing organisation will depend on the quality of employment having to do with the job satisfaction that the employee experiences.

The question now rises of how the respondents seem to perceive the construed external image of the oil and gas industry in general. As already suggested the employees tend to feel like the scapegoat within DONG Energy. This perception is further reflected in their construed external image of the industry. The black and white portrait of renewable energy as good and fossil fuels as bad is according to the employees a simplistic picture. They all believe that the image of the oil and gas industry is bad, since the public debate is lacking nuances:
“Most definitely, it is a very one-sided picture... what people don’t realise is that they would not be able to warm their houses and drive their cars without oil and gas.”

(Geologist 2)

Perceiving one’s business area as having a negative image, should according to Dutton et al. (1994: 240) lead to employees experiencing negative personal outcomes, such as depression and stress. However, when asked about their satisfaction with working in this industry they all emphasise that they are very satisfied. From a 1-10 scale they all place their satisfaction as 8 or 9. The employees highlight the complexity and great cash flow as their main drivers. They believe that the bad image is due to public ignorance of the complexity of the industry and thus the often-negative publicity does not seem to affect their work satisfaction and identification with the industry. This finding seems to contradict with a proposition made by Dutton et al. (1994: 250), stating that:

“The greater the attractiveness of an organisation’s construed external image, the stronger a member’s organisational identification.”

The reason for the contradiction might be found in Geologist 2 emphasis that specialists like herself want to be employed in this industry regardless of the public opinion. In accordance to this, Harris and Chernatony describe how people with different background and seniority level differ in their perception of their brand (2001: 446). This is an interesting finding since it indicates that especially specialist have a high level of identification regardless of the image of the industry. Diving into the answers given by the other specialist Geophysicist 1 he too spends great amount of time explaining the difference between oil/gas and coal. Further, he tells the story of how he managed to catch the interest of otherwise sceptical students when telling about the complexity and importance of the oil and gas industry. This success seems to contribute to his self-enhancement as he believes that he changes the students’ perception of E&P and the industry for the better.

**The construed external image and its perceived effect on recruitment**

In closing this section about the construed external image of *Moving Energy Forward*, of E&P and of the oil and gas industry we should analyse the employees’ perceived and experienced
challenges in relation to recruitment of personnel. Thus, we end this section by diving into how the construed external image creates perceived challenges of recruiting.

“In the context of recruitment, potential applicants will be attracted to a firm based on the context to which they believe that the firm possesses the desired employee related attributes.”

(Backhaus & Tikoo 2004: 505)

From the above it was implied that the invisibility of E&P in the corporate line of communication creates the perception in the employees’ mind that applicants are unaware of the opportunities that exist working with oil and gas at DONG Energy. In relation Backhaus and Tikoo (2004) quote such lack of visibility may lead to potential applicants not finding DONG Energy desirable, since they do not perceive it in the context of the oil and gas industry.

“Much of the strength of branding lies within the power of the symbolism of the brand”

(Backhaus & Tikoo 2004: 506)

Looking at how the green image then affects the applications that E&P do receive this also creates a perceived challenge. Manager 1 has got a financial education and recruits profiles with similar skills. He often experiences that applicants make use of the symbolism of Moving Energy Forward by stating how pro-green they are: “I suppose there is a lack of understanding among applicants of what is green and what is not” (Manager 1). Thus, for less-specialised profiles the symbolism of the green branding platform attracts them to seek employment at E&P. However, if they experience a completely different reality when being employed, according to Backhaus & Tikoo, this might contribute to intentions to quit (2004: 508).

**Perceived organisational identity**

In this part, we analyse what the E&P-respondents believe is distinctive, central and enduring about their workplace, which is what Dutton et al. (1994: 239) define as the members’ *perceived organisational identity.*

In order not to analyse it as a one-sided relationship between employee and workplace, we draw on Cheney et al.’s four objectives of identification: *organisation* (DONG Energy), *department*
(E&P), profession (e.g. geologist) and personal values (personal interests) (Cheney et al. 1998/Engelund & Buchhave 2004: 260). These objectives offer an interesting analytical toll to cover organisational identification from a multidimensional angle, in that the members may vary in identification level in relation to the objectives. However, the forth objective personal values will not be examined separately, but will be brought in during the examination of the others. The analysis aims to provide a deep understanding of the level of person-organisation fit and thereby to what extend DONG Energy’s green communication seems to influences the E&P members’ degree of identification.

The E&P-members’ perceived identity of DONG Energy

When analysing the interviews a distinct pattern of what employees and managers believe characterise DONG Energy seem to appear. The prominent associations revolve around DONG Energy’s social responsibility concerning security of energy supply and green vision. All the respondents perceived the association concerning DONG Energy’s importance in maintaining and securing a reliable energy supply as something that is distinctive, central and enduring about their workplace. This was explicated when Manager 2 stressed:

“We contribute to maintaining a security of energy supply ... the energy consumption in Denmark is not only covered by the wind. There a number of factors that needs to be taken into consideration in relation to the overall energy account.”

(Manager 2)

Following from this they perceive that delivering reliable energy is the basis for DONG Energy’s existence and thus they referred to this as the most important job of the organisation. Two of the respondents illustrated the important role of DONG Energy by referring to the same story about young Africans who studied for an exam at the airport, since this was the only place with electric light. This corresponds with the explanation giving by the Employer branding manager, that the perception of DONG Energy’s importance in relation to stability in energy supply is a part of the organisational culture:

“We are indispensible... we make us self believe in that, because if we went home, the whole society would stand still.”

(Gry, Employer branding manager)
Hence, it can be interpreted that this association has a great influence on the members’ self-enhancement, contributing with meaning to their work and self-esteem. Enhanced self-esteem was evident in most of the interviews in the way the respondents reflected themselves through the position as important players in modern society. However, the association does not seem to provide a considerable degree of self-distinctiveness to some of the employees’ self-concepts. This is apparent in Manager 2’s argument revealing that communication about the importance of reliable energy supply is probably unexciting: “It may well be that it is too boring to relate to, but it is an essential part of our society” (Manager 2). This association is perceived as a distinctive character of the organisational identity, but because of the assumption that people outside DONG Energy do not find it noteworthy, it may not provide the employees with a sense of uniqueness. This also appears to be reflected through DONG Energy’s external communication, where it is not a part of the dominating storytelling. This downsizing of the importance of reliable energy can be compared to the findings of a study made by Davis (2007: 677) revealing that brands associated with competences (i.e. conscientiousness, ambitious and secure) did not seem to generate differentiation, loyalty and affinity, since these are seen as hygiene factors. In contrast, brands related to agreeableness (i.e. empathy and social responsibility) caused satisfaction and affinity among the employees. Thus, DONG Energy’s prioritisation of the green communication may be explained by the reason that many of the employees in the other units are attached to the dimension of agreeableness as well as the earlier argued reason concerning DONG Energy’s attempt to appear legitimate.

In sum, it can be suggested that the perceived association regarding reliable energy seems to create a strong person-organisation fit, but it is weakened by the construed external image and the downplayed external communication.

The second prevalent association that the E&P-employees emphasised as distinctive, central and enduring about DONG Energy seem to be the green vision. This probably stems from the interview-guide revolving around this issue, but it might also be due to the fact that DONG Energy’s branding revolves around this green purpose. Despite that it was revealed as a pervasive part of DONG Energy’s identity, a shared expression of lacking belongingness and identification seems to be apparent within the E&P-unit. As one of the E&P managers described:
“The 85/15 vision is something that’s communicated from DONG Energy, and the only thing I know about it is what can be read on our intranet. It’s not something that I have been involved in or have influenced in any direction.”

(Manager 1)

It can suggest that the lacking identification further is amplified by the fact that E&P is the only unit not being a part of the green strategy:

“E&P is not a part of the picture [85/15 vision], because it [oil and gas] is not an end product that is sold to end users, the oil and gas products is sold on a market - a world market”

(Manager 1)

Thus, the unit has a completely different strategy that aims to increase its business significantly (Manager 2). In this regard, we asked whether DONG Energy’s green strategy could be related to E&P’s business strategy, and Geophysicist 1 stated:

“They have nothing in common, such as I see it. As you can see... there is invested a lot of money in the oil business. It's not because people stop investing, rather the contrary.”

(Geophysicist 1)

As a consequence of this, when we first began to invite E&P-employees to participate in interviews about the unit and DONG Energy's green strategy, we were meet with resistance since they could not see the relevance. This further seems to emphasise that this unit does not support or is included in the green strategy. Hence, the lack of involvement may have made them insecure and suspicious about being interviewed, since as emphasised by Hatch and Schultz (2001: 130): "frustrated employees react with cynicism and suspicion. Such scapegoating and distrust are extremely dangerous for companies". Thus, what is "dangerous" in this respect seem to be that the E&P-employees tell a different story than the rest of the organisation. This may eventually damage DONG Energy’s green reputation. In this respect, Hatch & Schultz (2001: 130) express: "Top managers need to be sure that the vision that inspires them will resonate throughout the company".
In spite of DONG Energy’s statement of the importance of employees being involved as brand owners (DONG E. Appendix B), it can be interpreted that E&P is isolated following its own separate strategy. According to a study made by Ind (2001: 75), this problem is well known by companies:

“Often brand mission, vision and values are rooted among senior managers, but do not permeate the rest of the organisation. The scores are lowest in Europe, where only 36 percent of interviewees thought the brand mission, vision and values were disseminated and believed in by employees”.

This seems to illustrate the complexity of embracing all subcultures within the company’s mission, vision and values. Being the only unit in DONG Energy that is not a part of the shared strategy and brand communication does seem to have an effect on the members’ degree of identification with the green universe. The lack of involvement in the employees’ everyday works does not seem to create observable value for any of the E&P-respondents’ self-concepts. Supporting this notion, the P&D manager explain how she believes employees at E&P identify with the green branding:

“I think they live with it, it’s not that they think - that’s me - when they see the green line... nor do they think that’s not me. They see the logo of DONG Energy and think - that’s me.”

(Susanne, HR partner)

There seems to exist an evident vision-culture/identity gap between DONG Energy’s green vision and the perceived reality of the E&P-employees (Hatch and Schultz 2001: 130). The authors argue: “This misalignment develops when senior management moves the company in a strategic direction that employees don’t understand or support” (Ibid.). Hence, the E&P-members seem to have no significant work related attachment to the green brand generating certain challenges for DONG Energy: The storytelling told by the employees possibly will diverge from the green story told by DONG Energy, potentially confusing or creating uncertainty about DONG Energy’s corporate credibility among its stakeholders. Additionally, the E&P unit’s communicative disclosure from the rest of the organisation seems to have
reduced their brand loyalty. According to Backhaus and Tikoo (2004: 508), a weakened brand loyalty makes it easier for employees to change employer and may also reduce the employee productivity. Thus, as Christensen et al. (2008: 38) argues: “Weak or inappropriate organizational identities will probably reduce economic value”.

What effect the low brand loyalty towards DONG Energy seems to have on the E&P-employees degree of identification with their unit will be examined in the following.

**The E&P-members’ perceived identity of the E&P-unit**

During the interviews we asked the E&P-employees what they defined as the characteristics of their unit. A pattern of what the unit represented seem to appear: 1) having an ambitious strategy though with an uncertain future, 2) dealing with complex tasks, competent co-workers and a high work pace, and 3) playing a pivotal community role.

In relation to the ambitious strategy, the E&P-managers emphasised that the department was undergoing expansion and both seemed proud of being a part of this. As one manager expresses:

“It's very very few companies, if any, which can prove a production profile like ours. An expected doubling of turnover, EBITDA and oil production - It's not many who can boast of that - if any in Western Europe”(Manager 2) and continues:

“It's simply just a business you can be pleased to work for, because it offers so many opportunities for development and change...huge opportunities...if managed correctly”.

This indicates that the manager is proud of the increasing production of oil and gas, which provides elements to his self-expression and enhances self-esteem, since the business success gives him empowerment and opportunities to influence the future strategy. The attractive perceived identity seems not only to enhance his self-esteem but also to provide a sense of distinctiveness, because as he states, this type of production profile is rare. This indicates that he perceives that his potential as a manager also differs from other managers within this area, which can also be seen in the other E&P-manager’s reason for being employed at E&P:

“I was really pleased of my former job. But through the [recruitment] process I became aware of a company in high growth, with a lot of competent people, and it was probably what actually drove me to the decision of changing [workplace]”

(Manager 1)
Hence, when looking at the two managers’ statements it indicates that both perceived the growth of the unit as distinctive, central and enduring about E&P. According to Dutton et al. (1994: 243) it is common practice for organisational leaders to communicate what is distinctive, central and enduring about their workplace, but it is also very powerful since their communication can create a collective identity for the members. This might also be the case in E&P as the employees similarly articulate the business revenue, as something that makes them feel important: “But we also earn more money - we have a EBITDA of 3.5 billion. And we are 700 employees, and that means 5 million per. employee. I think this is an interesting number. How many Danish companies can deliver 5 million per. employee?” (Geophysicist 1). Later in the interview he highlights how some personnel at DONG Energy have been harassed because of the crises regarding the high salaries, and in this respect stresses: “If I experience this. Then I just tell those numbers”. This quote seem to reflect how Geophysicist 1 experiences the collective identity and equally important his self-integrity to be challenged. However, at the same time it indicates how this has strengthened his perception of the value of E&P’s earnings.

Besides the prestige of E&P’s growth and value creation all the respondents also pointed to an uncertainty about whether E&P would be sold off - thereby not being a part of DONG Energy in the future: “There might be a strategy in separating E&P from DONG Energy in the long term, however this does not mean that I have insight into it”(Manager 1).

Nonetheless, the respondents seem to be affected differently by this uncertainty. Mainly Geologist 2 seems to feel it as a personal uncertainty in that she becomes afraid of losing her job:

“When there is an article in the newspaper, and they write that it might be a good idea to sell E&P, then I think... now we have bought our house, and then what?”

(Geologist 2)

This seems to reveal a challenge of not breaking the psychological contract between her and the workplace, because if she feels this insecurity over a longer period, she might begin looking for employment elsewhere. The other respondents do not seem to have the same level of emotional response, however, it can be interpreted that this uncertainty may generate a form of cognitive dissonance in the minds of the E&P-members. They might be confused of on the one side
E&P’s strategy concerning growth and value creation and on the other side the concern about whether E&P should remain as a unit held by DONG Energy. Additionally, it can have negative consequences for the E&P-employees’ level of identification and affiliation with DONG Energy, since this uncertainty possibly can create a mental distance between E&P and the rest of the organisation. Furthermore, this mental distance may be enhanced when E&P is the only unit that is not a part of DONG Energy’s green strategy and because of E&Ps invisibility in the green branding. Hence, if DONG Energy has no intention of selling E&P, the organisation seems to have a future role in communicating this clearly to the E&P-employees, since it otherwise may have negative effects on their degree of identification.

During the interviews all the respondents stressed that complex task, competent co-workers and a high work pace was something that characterised E&P. The perceived value of the complex tasks appeared to be attractive in relation to the respondents’ self-continuities. In this respect Geophysicist 1 said: “I’m enormously lucky in the sense that I use the things I learned at the university” (Geophysicist 1). This indicates that he feels that his job allows him to express his personal competences and characteristics. According to Dutton et al. (1994: 245) members will find the organisational image more attractive if they contribute to a consistent sense of self. This means, that Geophysicist 1’s perceived value of the working tasks presumably has strengthened his person-organisation fit. Moreover, Manager 1 also believed that the oil and gas industry is exiting and complex and what particularly distinguish E&P from other companies in the industry is the competent co-workers:

“I think there are many talented people in DONG ... so if I should brand DONG on something, it would be talented people.”

(Manager 1)

Hence, it may be interpreted that the auto-communicative effect of DONG Energy’s employer brand Ambitious people generates a sense of self-distinctiveness and self-enhancement. This is in line with Christensen (2004), which discovered that the auto-communicative effect of external communication significantly provides substance to the employees’ identity work and often result in a form of self-seduction. This is especially interesting when compared to the earlier finding that the brand is not rare seen from an outside-in perspective, but viewed from
the E&P respondents’ perception it shows that the branding has a self-affirmative effect that might enhance the brand loyalty and identification process. However, the indication of current and potential employees valuing the employer brand differently seems to be a common challenge as revealed in several case studies (Maxwell & Knox 2009: 896).

In relation to the strong identification with *Ambitious people* a discourse about ‘stress’ seems to be present in all of the interviews and underpins the employees’ own perception of being ambitious. However, during the interviews Geophysicist 1 emphasises that the high work pace also means that he does not have time to represent E&P on Geosciences Day at the University of Copenhagen. This could be suggested as critical since as earlier suggested he gets self-enhancement of the feeling that he changes students’ perception of the oil and gas industry and these positive feelings could subsequently lead to a higher degree of identification. This is in line with Dutton et al.’s (1994: 251) statement that says:

“When people are visibly associated with an organization, they are more frequently reminded of their organizational membership.”

Thus, compromising with being present at external events might reduce affinity if employees no longer get involved in external interactions.

Based on the interviews the pivotal community role of E&P is the last prevailing characteristic of the unit. Some of the employees highlighted that E&P’s high earnings contribute with welfare to the Danish society. In this context, Manager 2 stated that E&P: “…maintains a certain contribution to our welfare. Income and taxes means a lot to the governments overall accounting” (Manager 2). This suggests that the manager attaches E&P to a very important position which may improve the level of self-enhancement and thereby provide a strong degree of identification with the unit.

Furthermore, the perceived pivotal community role is also explicitly connected to the previously identified association concerning DONG Energy’s social responsibility of securing and maintaining reliable energy supply. All the respondents argue that E&P contributes with reliable energy. This seem to illustrate that they perceive E&P’s work as essential for DONG Energy’s social responsibility, which might enhance the feeling of belongingness to the rest of the organisation.
Ind (2001: 77) supports the idea of the importance of employees seeing a purpose with their work:

“Leaders have to believe that vision and values can only make a difference if they acquire real meaning. They have to move beyond words into action and to engage employees at an emotional level.”

Thus, the pivotal community role may in extension of the green vision emotionally affect both E&P and the rest of the organisation. In this respect, all the respondents articulated that the story of E&P could be emphasised in DONG Energy’s branding, since the brand rests on two legs—clean and reliable energy. This could be seen as a solution to a challenge of balancing integration and flexibility through the corporate branding. In relation to this challenge, Van Riel notion of common starting points and common end points offers an interesting explanation of how brands can be both consistent and flexible (Van Riel 1995/2003/Christensen et al. 2008:438). According to Van Riel, the common starting points are “central values which function as the basis for undertaking any kinds of communication envisaged by an organisation” and common end points concern: “the goals the organisation has set for itself”. Between those common ‘guidelines’ the branding should be flexible and make space for different interpretations (ibid.). Based on the above, it can suggested that DONG Energy’s corporate branding currently does not embrace flexibility, but in the future Moving Energy Forward and its focus on clean and reliable energy could work as a common starting point for both DONG Energy’s green story and the E&P-employees’ storytelling of contributing to reliable energy. However, the common ending point of the 85/15-strategy makes the corporate branding distant from the E&P-employees, thus, one way of strengthening the E&P-members’ identification with the corporate brand could be to establish and communicate an E&P goal that intends to contribute with elements to the common aim of Moving Energy Forward. By creating a balance between integration and flexibility, the E&P-members would probably be more likely to identify with the perceived identity of DONG Energy, and not only with E&P. We will return to this suggestion in a later discussion.
The E&P-members’ perceived identity of their professions

According to Cheney et al., many employees first and foremost identify with their profession (Cheney et al. 1998/Engelund & Buchhave 2004: 260). In this case, mainly the two specialists within E&P reflected a strong identification with their profession during the interviews. When we asked Geologist 2 why she had chosen to work for DONG Energy, she said: “Well, there's not many opportunities in Denmark if you want to work in the oil industry” (Geologist 2), and she further explained when we asked about whether she believed that DONG Energy’s green branding had influence on the recruitment process:

“When you as a geologist/geophysicist search for a job in the oil industry, then I don’t think that you’re that much interested in what is happening in other parts.”

(Ibid.)

As can be seen, she seems far more interested in the oil industry and her profession than in DONG Energy. The P&D-manager further stated that the internal job mobility might have something to do with whether the employees identify more with their profession than with DONG Energy. Thus, she argued, that the future employees’ ability to rotate internally affects what P&D tells during a job interview:

“For instance, if we recruit a geologist, we may strictly concentrate on E&P as discipline; because there is no natural ... what else can they do here? But if we recruit a ‘Cand.merc.er’ - to put it slightly at the tip - then the ‘Cand.merc.er’ would be very interested in DONG Energy, because there is an internal job market.”

(Susanne, HR partner)

Returning to Geologist 2’s lacking identification with DONG Energy this may be due to her limited job opportunities. Geophysicist 1, the other specialist also seems influenced by strong identification with his profession. However, as identified earlier, his visible affiliation with DONG Energy made him identify with the organisation and not only with his profession. Based on this it seems that E&P is facing a challenge in that Geologist 2 have no particular loyalty and attachment to DONG Energy. Her reason for working in DONG Energy is based on the fact that there are few Danish
employment opportunities within the oil industry. Thus, it could be interpreted that similar employees with low levels of organisational identification, but with a high degree of geographical mobility, can be extremely difficult to retain. In fact during the interview with Geophysicist 1, he too argued:

“I get emails every week with job offerings, where they almost say, how much money I will make”

(Geophysicist 1)

This statement reinforces the fact that it can be challenging to retain these types of employees.

Summing up, based on the analysis of the E&P members’ perceived identity of DONG Energy, E&P and their respective professions, we found that the majority of the respondents had the strongest degree of identification with the E&P department. The lacking identification with DONG Energy did not seem to weaken the members’ identification with their department or profession. Finally, the findings suggest that the employees’ degree of identification also depend on their profession and visible affinity. Thus, it seems challenging to retain employees who only identify with their own profession in that the employees will have no specific affiliation with the employing company.

**Construed internal image**

Having analysed the construed external image as well as the perceived organisational identity as it is experienced from the perspective of the E&P-employees, we will shortly consider what we have chosen to name the *construed internal image* from the perspective of these employees. Dutton et al. (1994) do not operate with this concept, however we find it fruitful to analyse how the respondents perceive their units internal image. That is to say, how they believe that other business units thinks of E&P.

The argument for conducting this analysis is that it can imply whether the employees feel a social cohesion with the rest of the organisation or not. Such cohesion or lack of it, might affect the level of identification with DONG Energy.
When reflecting on culture, Balmer & Greyser states that: “Culture is important since it provides the context in which staff engage with each other” (2006: 735). However, as revealed under the section of perceived organisational identity the level of identification that the employees at E&P have with DONG Energy as organisation is considerably lower than the level of identification with E&P as unit. Moreover, during the construed external image-analysis it was revealed that the amount of external interaction seems to affect the level of identification with the green branding. If as suggested by Balmer & Greyser engagement with one another affects the collective feeling of employees (Ibid.) it can be anticipated that the low level of identification with the organisation also can affect the cohesion that the E&P-employees have with the rest of the organisation, thus influencing on how they perceive their own internal image. As was identified during the construed external image-analysis the employees perceived E&P as being neglected in the external communication. This finding also seems to hold true internally. As stated by Manager 2, the introduction material that he receives when welcoming a new employee in his opinion do not adequately introduces the aim and contribution of E&P (Manager 2). Further, the Employer branding manager describes how the former CEO Anders Eldrup was frequently asked by newly employed E&P-members to explain how E&P fitted into the 85/15-strategy (Gry, Employer branding manager).

Another pattern that seems to repeat itself is the E&P employees’ perception that they internally also are scapegoats being portrayed as bad guys. Dutton et al. (1994: 254) refers to the concepts of in-group and out-group dynamics to explain how a member’s level of identification with e.g. a group within an organisation causes the member to discriminate in favour of the perceived in-group members and against out-group members. A continuous example told by both HR partner Susanne, E&P-manager 2 and Employer branding manager Gry is the illustration made on an internal presentation: In a depiction three-quarter of a slide is covered in green colours along with portrayals of drying laundry. The last one-quarter of the slide is black whilst portraying a pall of smoke. This illustration underpins the good vs. bad image and may enhance the employees’ identification with E&P as the in-group and the rest of the organisation as the out-group, thus further increasing the distance between E&P and the rest of the organisation. Reflecting on Balmer & Greyser’s (2006: 735) statement that culture should contribute to collective feelings of employees, it can be questioned how such an us against them scenario
should awake feeling of belongings and cohesion among employees at E&P. This reflection can be identified in the statement made by HR partner Susanne:

“It is a pain spot for us. Obviously there is no one who wants something to be all black or green, but there are quite a lot of the employees who become offended when it is communicated as all black”

(Susanne, HR partner)

While, it seems that DONG Energy in large part has succeed in aligning the communication internally and externally, which there is considerable theoretical support for the importance of (Harris & Chernatomy 2001: 441), it seems that the negative consequence on the level of identification due to the external communication further seems to extend into negative internal consequence reflected as E&P-employees feeling low cohesion towards the rest of the organisation as the *out-group*.

**Putting our assumptions at risk**

**Identification and its consequences on retention and recruitment**

In this chapter we so far have analysed the construed external image, the perceived identity and the construed internal image – all seen from the perspective of the employees at E&P. The analysis have revealed a pattern of a generally low identification with DONG Energy and *Moving Energy Forward*, a somewhat high identification with E&P and the oil and gas industry but also variation into the level of identification depending on the profession, educational background as well as managerial level of the respondents. In the following a discussion will be made of how the found level of identification towards *Moving Energy Forward*, DONG Energy as organisation and E&P as unit can be suggested to influence on the employer branding process of retaining and attracting employees. Backhaus and Tikoo’s (2004: 505) suggest that employer branding lead to two principle assets; the first is *brand association*, which beneficially leads to *attraction* and the second is *brand loyalty*, which should lead to *employee productivity*. Hence, the discussion is divided into two main parts revolving around these issues. The aim is to put the two first assumptions made in the introduction at risk in order to try and expand our horizon as prescribed in the hermeneutical circle.
A1: Employees at DONG Energy, Exploration and Production have difficulty recognising their business area in the corporate brand Moving Energy Forward and as consequence do not identify with the green branding or feel loyalty towards DONG Energy as organisation.

A2: The corporate brand Moving Energy Forward has negative consequence for the recruitment of personnel to DONG Energy, Exploration and Production.

We do so by returning to Balmer & Gray’s (2003: 972-993) employment of the resource-based perspective in relation to analysing the brand equity. Thus, the consequences proposed in the assumptions are analysed in relation to their effect on the equity of DONG Energy’s branding platform and the employer branding process.

The employees’ level of identification and its consequence on retention

It is now widely realised that a discussion of the strength of a corporate brand cannot be undertaken in isolation from a discussion of an organisation’s identity (Balmer & Gray 2006: 988). The strength of a corporate brand can only become truly sustainable if it is understood and supported by an organisations members and thus is reflected in the culture (Ibid.; Hatch & Schultz 2001). As it was suggested during the perceived identity-analysis the employees at E&P lack belongings to and identification with the green vision and branding platform. They seem to get no self-enhancement from this line of communication since they do not support it or feel included in it. The construed external image-analysis and the construed internal image-analysis further suggested that they perceive E&P as communicatively invisible both internally and externally but do acknowledge the pressure that causes the corporate moral brand of Moving Energy Forward. Thus, all three paragraphs indicate that the employees exhibit neutrality towards the brand: “They live with it” (Susanne, HR partner). Employing Balmer & Gray’s resource based perspective the rarity of a brand lies in the symbolic values also known as the corporate brand values that have roots in the organisation’s identity (Balmer & Gray 2006: 987).

However, if our findings hold true that the employees at E&P have low identification and a neutral attachment toward DONG Energy’s brand values of Moving Energy Forward it weakens the rarity of the brand because it then becomes something that DONG Energy claims rather than something that actual reflects the real organisational identity.
In relation to retention of employees, Backhaus & Tikoo describes how retention of employees relies on employer brand loyalty that is analogous to organisational commitment:

“Organisational commitment is defined as identification and involvement with the firm, including acceptance of the organisation’s goals and values, eagerness to work hard, and desire to remain with the firm.”

(Backhaus & Tikoo 2004: 508)

While the employees at E&P accept DONG Energy’s goals and values their eagerness to work hard is not driven by these, rather they are driven by the business success of E&P as a unit providing them with empowerment and self-esteem. Thus, the communicative disclosure of E&P from the rest of the organisation which was suggested to reduce the employees brand loyalty further risks damaging the equity of Moving Energy Forward in relation to retention of employees at E&P, if it does not provide a realistic job preview of that particular unit’s goals. Realistic, adequate and honest employer branding messages are important for retention of employees and for organisational success (Backhaus & Tikoo 2004: 507).

Reflecting on our assumption that employees at E&P have difficulty recognising their business area in Moving Energy Forward and as consequence do not identify with the green branding or feel loyalty towards DONG Energy as organisation the above findings seem to be aligned with what we thought. It seems as if the method to retain employees at E&P is not to be found in DONG Energy’s current corporate brand values. However, expanding the focus away from Moving Energy Forward into considering the level of identification with E&P and with DONG Energy’s employer brand Ambitious People the analysis has suggested that these elements generates a strong level of identification as well as contribution to self-distinctiveness and self-enhancement. Earlier in the analysis it was identified that the suggested inimitability making DONG Energy’s branding a capability relied on the combined use of Moving Energy Forward and Ambitious People.

However, if our first assumption seems to hold true this capability seems seriously questioned in relation to the employer branding process of retaining employees. During the perceived identity-analysis it seemed as if the feeling of being perceived as ambitious through Ambitious People contributed with confidence for the employees and created a strong identification.
Moreover, the employees’ perception of E&P’s work as essential for DONG Energy’s social responsibility and as playing a pivotal community role was suggested to enhance their feeling of belongings towards the rest of the organisation. Reflecting on the equity of DONG Energy’s branding platform, comparing these finding seems interesting since it opens for the opportunity of stretching the moral combined employer brand and corporate brand. If E&P employees do get self-enhancement by *Ambitious People* and further get self-enhancement by the corporate social responsibility of having an important community role, then the earlier identified inimitability may still be prevalent if the current communicative disclosure of E&P in the branding was removed. Thus, for now we will leave this consideration as an open reflection but will return to it in the ending discussion in the following chapter.

**The employees’ level of identification and its consequence on recruitment**

Shifting focus into reflecting on the consequence that *Moving Energy Forward* has on the recruitment of personnel to E&P the construed external image-analysis suggested that the employees believed that the invisibility of E&P in the communication caused applicants to think that DONG Energy was heading away from oil and gas. The findings indicated that the 85/15-strategy had caused applicants to believe that DONG Energy was turning all green and when aiming for employment in the oil and gas industry this seemed to cause insecurity among newcomers of the prospective of DONG Energy as employer.

A similar insecurity of the current employees was suggested throughout the entire chapter where it was found that *normative control* caused by the moral branding and the auto-communicative effect of lacking appearance of E&P seem to led to doubt and insecurity about the future of the unit. Backhaus & Tikoo suggest that *brand associations* lead to *employer image*, which then lead to *employer attraction* (2004: 505). The insecurity that both current and prospective employees of E&P associate with DONG Energy might according to this framework weaken the attractiveness of DONG Energy’s employer image and thus also weaken the recruitment potential. Reflecting on the consequence this might have on DONG Energy’s branding platform as a capability, Balmer & Gray (2003: 987) emphasises that the *value* that effective corporate branding contributes with is that it provides organisations with a financial advantage in terms of cost associated with recruitment and training of staff. However, if our findings hold true that the employees’ brand associations creates insecurity about the future of E&P the green brand
platform properly will not demonstrate this financial advantage. Rather it makes one wonder whether *Moving Energy Forward* increases the costs of recruiting at E&P since it requires extra human and communicative resources to promote the expansion strategy of E&P and thus convince potential employees of the future possibility being employed at the unit. Thus, from a return-on-investment perspective *Moving Energy Forward* seems to weaken equity. However, in our second assumption we put a perception at risk that *Moving Energy Forward* has negative consequence for the recruitment of personnel to E&P. While the above findings reveal challenges and costs in relation to recruitment at E&P the cause of these cannot be tracked directly back to the messages in the green communication. Rather the insecurity seems to exist because of the heavy weight that the green messages get compared to messages emphasising E&P.

In both the construed internal image-analysis and the construed external image-analysis a self-portrayal of *us against them* was identified and suggested as leaving the E&P-employees with the feeling of being portrayed as bad guys. This portrayal was identified both for E&P as unit and for the oil and gas industry in general. In relation to recruitment Backhaus & Tikoo (2004: 506) emphasise the importance of the social approval applicants imagine they will enjoy if they work for the organisation. Nonetheless, it was indicated that the respondents tend to show little negative emotional response to the bad reputation of the oil and gas industry. They perceive that it is caused by public ignorance. Further, since it is the entire industry that has this bad reputation it does not seem to damage their self-confidence. However, turning to the portrayal of E&P as the bad guys compared to the rest of DONG Energy, this scapegoat image may decrease the recruitment possibilities.

Backhaus & Tikoo state that the role of image in attraction relates to *similarity attraction* and *person-organisation fit* – the better fit between the brand values and the individual’s values the more attractive will the organisation be as employer (Ibid.). In relation to the 85/15-strategy and *Moving Energy Forward* it was previously suggested that DONG Energy positions itself as first mover within renewable energy. By doing so, they tempt to differentiate themselves from the bad image of the industry. The consequence of this differentiation from the competitors might be that DONG Energy enhances the good vs. bad distinction by positioning DONG Energy as the good hero leading the way. Aiming at attracting talents to E&P this first mover position
might actual risk lowering the possibility of recruitment. As shown in both the construed external image-analysis and perceived identity-analysis specialists tempt to tie a great part of their self-concept to their profession.

Thus, when DONG Energy through the green branding applies the same yardstick to all kinds of fossil fuels, the fit between the branded organisational values and the specialists’ personal values risks disappearing. Reflecting on this good versus bad portrayal in relation to our second assumption, Moving Energy Forward can be suggested having negative consequences in recruitment of at least specialised personnel to E&P. Moreover, this lacking person-organisation fit might also damage the equity of the green brand as a capability since the durability or strength of the brand relies on: “total organisational commitment and fidelity to the notion that behaviour mirrors rhetoric” (Balmer & Gray 2003: 989). Written differently, the equity of a brand relies on organisations walking the talk (Gotsi et al.), which obviously can be questioned when considering the expansion strategy of E&P. This reflection is continued in the next chapter.

**The E&P-members as effective employer brand ambassadors?**

Having identified the strength of the E&P-members’ organisational identification and analysed its influence on the recruitment and retention of personnel to E&P, we will now elaborate on how this affects their role as employer brand ambassadors. Thereby, we put our third assumption at risk:

*A3: The storytelling of employees at Exploration & Production is not aligned with the corporate brand Moving Energy Forward resulting in them not being effective employer brand ambassadors.*

However, before examining the corporate brand’s likely influence on the E&P-respondents as employer brand ambassadors, we begin by discussing how they act as ambassadors for E&P in general. This allows us to get a broader understanding of how they represent DONG Energy as well as E&P.

The analysis of the perceived identity of E&P indicated that the members seem to have a high level of identification with the unit.
The interviews indicated that the majority of the respondents were pleased to be a part of the department’s success and proud of their delivery of reliable energy and of the high profit contributing to public welfare. This positive storytelling and emotional attachment indicates that the respondents are powerful E&P-ambassadors since they show engagement to talk about E&P as an attractive workplace.

This engagement might be due to the fact that it provides positive outcomes to their self-concepts, but also because they are not subjected to any manuals telling them what they should communicate about their work in E&P. Thus, it can be interpreted that they are given empowerment to speak freely. In this respect, several theorists argue that employee participation and empowerment lead to increased commitment (Kunerth & Mosley 2011: 24; Ind 2007: 48; Karmark 2005: 114, Edward 2010: 13). However, the E&P-members’ negatively held construed external image of E&P and the oil industry as well as the perceived communicative disclosure of E&P probably generates consequences for their role as ambassadors. On the one hand it might impede the members’ enthusiasm to speak about their work to outsiders when they are not being explicitly asked about it, since it may harm their self-concepts:

“The way people think an organisation is seen by others is important for their self-esteem. It’s always better if people say wow! When you explain whom you work for, than if they look sympathetic and say, who?

(Ind 2001: 69)

On the other hand, it may also trigger the members to promote a positive image of the unit, which was expressed by the visible affiliated employees at E&P. The latter reaction can result from the member’s sense of survival, because as Dutton et al. (1994: 254) argue: “When people strongly identify with their work organization their sense of survival is tied to the organizational survival”. Although it is encouraging that employees with a high degree of organisational identification defend the organisation and makes a virtue out of changing the negative image, it can according to Dutton et al. (1994: 239) have negative consequences for employees in the form of depression and stress.

Hence, on the surface the respondents seem to be effective E&P ambassadors although underneath the surface they likely are challenged by the negative construed image of E&P.
Furthermore, as it was shown, especially one of the specialists had the strongest identification with her profession. This seemed to reduce her identification with E&P resulting in her suggestively not being an effective ambassador. However, her communication was not misaligned with the other respondents’ perceived identity of E&P, illustrating that as long as the job offers opportunities to enhance her professionalism then she will not be an unfavourable ambassador. This raises an interesting discussion about how she and like-minded E&P-employees, who exclusively identify with their profession, can become more than a ‘neutral’ ambassador for E&P.

Indicating that the majority of the respondents are positive ambassadors for E&P, it is interesting to discuss whether they appear to be effective employer brand ambassadors of DONG Energy's communication targeted external stakeholders. It is particularly interesting, since the previous analysis of the institutional pressure showed that the green branding is almost a precondition for DONG Energy in order to be perceived as legitimate. Additionally, it is relevant because DONG Energy has chosen to deploy an integrated approach to its brand communication and argued for the necessity of utilising all organisational members as brand ambassadors with the aim of creating an organisational culture that “lives the brand” (DONG E. Appendix B). Additionally, this can be theoretically validated:

“If values are deeply rooted and coherently interlinked, then the relevance of the brand’s values and the connections staff make with the brand enable them to deliver the brand promise in a more natural manner, with passion and commitment. This, in effect, brings the brand to life and enhances the likelihood of better performance.”

(de Chernatory 2002: 122/Karmark 2005: 106)

As seen in the perceived identity-analysis the respondents associated E&P with competent co-workers as something that was distinct, central and enduring about the unit. It was revealed that it could be related to an auto-communicative effect of the employer brand Ambitious People, which also seemed to enhance their self-concept.

Based on these findings, it can be argued that this person-organisation fit shows that the employer brand was deeply rooted in the minds of the E&P-employees and, as de Chernatory
would declare, it enables them to bring the brand to life. Furthermore, deploying Karmark’s (2005: 111) distinction of whether organisational members live the brand (i.e. being the brand) or live by the brand (i.e. delivering the brand), and further to understand in what level the E&P-members seem to act as brand ambassadors, it can be difficult (in spite of their strong identification) to say that all the respondents lived the brand, when strictly relying on interviews. However, particularly two of the respondents, Manager 1 and Geophysicist 1, seemed close to live the brand since both seemed to enhance their self-esteem and self-distinctiveness by reflecting themselves as being a part of an organisation with ambitious people. When explaining what characterised the unit they both draw naturally on the employer brand. For instance, Manager 1 told that he still participates in the Christmas party with his former colleagues at Maersk, and when asked how it is like to work in DONG Energy, he explains that it is an inspiring environment with very talented people. One of the reasons why it may come naturally for the two E&P-members to communicate about Ambitious People might again be due to the fact that the employees have a saying in the brand development, as that it is based on internal surveys and focus group interviews (Gry, Employer branding manager).

However, the other two respondents did not seem to refer as naturally to Ambitious People - in fact when asked about what characterises their work, they spoke more generally about E&P as an exciting place to work. Hence, based on the interviews it can be interpreted that they are neither living the brand nor living by the brand, but they seem not to be far from the last one.

Having discussed how the employees diverge in their effectiveness as brand ambassadors for Ambitious People, we finally move on to a discussion about whether the E&P members overall is effective employer brand ambassadors for DONG Energy’s entire branding. To do so, we will elaborate on which influence the E&P members’ suggested low degree of identification seems to have of consequences for them as brand ambassadors for Moving Energy Forward. The respondents’ lacking organisational identification with Moving Energy Forward has the effect that none of them communicate about the green strategy or branding without being explicitly asked. The analysis of the construed external image implied that when we asked about the strategy and branding two different stories appeared. Geologist 2 and Manager 2 believed that the green strategy was required for DONG Energy, but personally it did not seem to influence their self-concepts in any positive way.
Thus, this confirmed the P&D manager's contention about the E&P-employees’ relation to *Moving Energy Forward*: “I think that they live with it...” (Susanne, HR partner). Manager 1 and Geophysicist 1 also argued for the necessity of the green branding, but in addition, it appeared to have a little positive effect on their self-concept, as they liked to work in a company that cares for the environment, e.g. this was reflected when Geophysicist 1 stressed the importance of the strategy: “I will do anything to support the strategy” (Geophysicist 1). In spite of this, it should be noted that all the respondents articulated that E&P had nothing to do with the 85/15-strategy and instead spoke about E&P’s business success and future growth. Moreover, the fact that the E&P-employees in the first place refused to participate in the interviews seems to support the finding that the employees will not voluntarily speak about the green strategy to outsiders. Based on this it can be suggested that none of the E&P-members are effective brand ambassadors for *Moving Energy Forward*, since their storytelling about DONG Energy seem not to be fully aligned with the green branding. However, as illustrated above, Geophysicist 1 and Manager 1’’ storytelling regarding *Moving Energy Forward* does not contradict with the official storytelling of the green branding. Viewed from the theoretical distinction between employees who lives the brand or lives by the brand, it seems that all the E&P-members does none of it, but if DONG Energy find a way to give E&P a ‘stake’ and a ‘voice’ in the branding, the findings could indicate that employees like Geophysicist 1 and Manager 1 could *live by the brand* and then become brand ambassadors for *Moving Energy Forward*.

Based on the above-suggested pattern of the respondents as brand ambassadors our third assumption does not seem to hold true. We can support the first parts of it stating that: “The storytelling of employees at Exploration & Production is not aligned with the corporate brand *Moving Energy Forward*”, however from the four E&P-interviews it seem impossible to give the same clear answer to the last part of the phrase, stating: “resulting in them not being effective employer brand ambassadors”. The above suggests that the corporate brand does have a negative influence on the E&P-members as effective employer brand ambassadors, since they do not support the brand communication. As emphasised previously, Engelund and Buchhave (2009: 48) stress that employees are the organisations’ most important employer brand ambassadors and the external environment’s most reliable source of information. This indicates that it can be harmful for the corporate brand’s credibility when the E&P-members do not support it, as external stakeholders might put more emphasis on what they have
been told by the employees than on what is communicated through formal canals. Furthermore, it may also be critical in relation to retention and recruitment of E&P-employees:

“The brand process starts here with the nature of recruitment. The people an organisation employs and the degree to which their personal values match those of the brand are essential elements within the brand process. [...] the better the match at the outset the greater likelihood that the individual and the corporate values will adjust to meet each other’s needs”

(Ind 2001: 128)

Hence, it can create a vicious circle if the E&P-employees, as unfavourable ambassadors for Moving Energy Forward attract employees who do not support the green strategy as well. Thus, the earlier identified portrayed ‘us against them’ might continuously be strengthened and the organisation-wide cohesion and collaboration might remain low.

"Ideally, the identity behind the corporate brand would pervade the entire organisation, from top to bottom, and would be an integral part of the mission and vision statements and of the values that employees associate with their organisation.”

(Cornelissen 2008: 86)

Based on this quote, we find it interesting to investigate whether it seems possible to approach the quoted ideal, and subsequently to consider what it will take to make the E&P-members naturally support DONG Energy’s corporate brand. We will consider this in the following discussion.

Turning back to why the analysis has questioned our third assumption, we must acknowledge that the E&P-members seem in many ways to be effective ambassadors for E&P in general and for the employer brand Ambitious People. Thus, Moving Energy Forward does not seem to make them poor employer branding ambassadors, but seen from the larger perspective it might have critical consequences for DONG Energy’s total credibility, the organisation-wide cohesion and eventually also for the E&P members self-esteem.
Chapter 7 – Discussion

Part 3: Is it possible to create a communicative link?

“It seems easier to talk about the brand than to live it. Living the brand requires commitment and sincerity and that means it has to permeate the whole organisation.”

(Ind 2001: 121)

Throughout the analysis various examples have given indications that on the one side Moving Energy Forward seems to cause serious problems for the recruitment and retention of employees at E&P. On the other side, the lack of commitment, identification and loyalty of the E&P-employees towards the green branding risk weakening the equity of the brand not just in relation to the employer branding process, but also in the interactions with various stakeholders of the organisation. In relation to the above quote we have given indications that DONG Energy’s branding at the moment do not permeate the entire organisation – that a reliable communicative link between the green branding and the storytelling by E&P-employees does not seem visible. In this discussion the aim is therefore to reflect on the cause of this and to discuss the opportunities and challenges of the suggested solutions given throughout the analysis of possible ways of making such links. Further, the aim is to make a reality check by discussing whether and to what extend the suggested isolation of E&P-unit can be overcome.

The discussion is divided into three main parts; beginning with a discussion of challenges and possibilities when combining the employer brand and the corporate brand in a way that could include E&P. This is then compared to the findings of the first part of the analysis, revealing what is difficult to change without damaging the legitimacy and brand equity that DONG Energy holds in other stakeholder relations. Having made these case-relevant reflections the scope of the discussion broadens through an ending consideration of whether it is realistic to think that organisation-wide support for a brand platform can be found.
Stretching DONG Energy’s branding – challenges and opportunities?

During the analyse it was found that when the respondents seem to have difficulty identifying with the green branding the earlier identified capability of combining Moving Energy Forward and Ambitious People is seriously questioned. A reflection was made of the possibility of removing the current communicative disclosure of E&P by stretching the brand platform into communicating about the important community role that seems to provide self-enhancement to the E&P-employees. Since Moving Energy Forward is built up of messages of both clean and reliable energy, the perception of the pivotal community role that DONG Energy and specially E&P have in securing reliable might be possible to highlight in Moving Energy Forward. Further, it was suggested that by giving the E&P-employees such a ‘stake’ in the corporate brand it might enable them to ‘live by the brand’. However, it can be questioned whether the willingness would exist in other business units of giving E&P this kind of ‘stake’ by making changes in the branding. Reflecting on this, it seems likely that a specialist like an engineer working with renewable energy supply will get self-enhancement by the green dominance in the branding since it translates his daily work into a moral good cause. Further, a brand manager who has seen the external results of corporate credibility would properly need persuasion for changing the brand. Finally, personnel like HR partner Susanne, who is not educated into a specific specialist function and who is mobile to change job position internally in DONG Energy also finds pride in the moral cause:

“Well I must admit that I get a lot of value by perceiving myself like I’m contributing to the becoming of a green future.”

(Susanne, HR partner)

Thus, it seems that it would require an effort of change management to make the rest of the organisation adjust to transformations of the green brand. Moreover, this also indicates that some employees, like Susanne, will have the tendency to ‘live the brand’ and others to ‘live by the brand’, which could suggest that DONG Energy could employ what Karmark (2005: 119) express as the hybrid model that integrates internal branding with norms and values – this in order to encourage the diverged employees to be as effective employer brand ambassadors as possible.
Since the research question of this thesis rest on information that DONG Energy has serious challenges of recruiting and retaining staff at E&P, we continue with the assumption that the lacking appearance and scapegoat portrayal of E&P will be acknowledged by the top management as a problem as it has been acknowledged by line-staff like Employer branding manager Gry and HR partner Susanne. Thus, we continue the discussion of how changes in the brand communication can possibly be made. During the perceived identity-analysis it was found that *Moving Energy Forward* possibly could work as a *common starting point* (Christensen et al. 2008: 438) providing E&P-members with the opportunity to attach their own storytelling into the corporate brand. By adapting the concept the authors call for organisations to draw actively on the experiences, ideas and enactments of the organisation’ employees (Ibid.: 439). Seen in relation to *Ambitious People* and the E&P-unit it was previously suggested that the employees are effective ambassadors due to them being given empowerment to speak freely about their experiences. Thus, this could further argue for the appropriateness of letting them attach their own storytelling to *Moving Energy Forward*.

However, turning the table, Christensen et al. (2008: 439) accentuate that: “*Some level of centralisation ... necessarily precedes a decentralised structure*” (Ibid.). With the current low identification with *Moving Energy Forward* and the ‘us against them’ perception that exist within E&P it can be discussed whether it would be strategically beneficial to let the E&P-employees loose to interpret their own storytelling into the corporate brand. During the interviews with E&P-managers the question was asked of whether they had been in dialog with the HR-staff at People and Development-staff (P&D) regarding what to tell applicants about the 85/15-strategy, *Moving Energy Forward* or *Ambitious People*. Both managers look surprised while answering that they do not discuss the branding of DONG Energy in the context of recruitment.

Thus, in relation to recruiting personnel, it seems that a low level of centralisation exists. When the identification with *Moving Energy Forward* seems to be low and when the employees seem to feel portrayed like scapegoats in the branding it can be seriously questioned whether their own storytelling will contribute to the consistency and thus equity of the brand platform or whether holding the entire value chain of energy supply in DONG Energy creates such a complexity that it cannot be contained by a simple brand value proposition like *Moving Energy Forward*.
Regardless of the answer to this question it undoubtedly would require a great deal of centralised management from functions like People & Development and Group Marketing to insure a consistent brand delivery throughout the organisation. Reflecting on the lack of interaction between P&D and recruiting managers at E&P, it on one side could show signs of what Mosley (2007: 129) also has observed – that despite the increased attention on the role of HR in brand building, HR is not playing a strategic role in people management practices to ensure the delivery of the brand promise.

On the other side, Employer branding manager Gry describes how new employees all have to participate in seminars regarding what to communicate externally, thus suggesting that P&D do contribute to people management in regard of brand delivery. However, despite this effort it can carefully be implied that the E&P-managers have not understood the benefit of branding in relation to recruitment. Mosley (2007: 131) works with the concept of employee touch-points understood as all HR products. He suggests that these touch-points should be deployed actively in the internal brand governance by the fusing together of core brand values and employee competencies. Thus, the everyday experience of employees through communication with their line managers and corporate leaders should rest on the shared acknowledgement that brand delivery is part of one’s performance criteria. Based on the above discussion and this reflection it could be suggested that P&D at DONG Energy need to rethink its HR touch-points in regard to its recruitment material provided to recruiting managers at E&P. Whether, the additional HR products need to focus further on brand building is beyond the extent of this discussion.

Up until now the discussion has somewhat taken an outside-in approach by discussing ways to ensure that the employees can understand the brand promise of Moving Energy Forward and their part in delivering an on-brand experience to potential employees. However, throughout the analysis it has been widely suggested that Moving Energy Forward also causes problems in relation to retention of E&P-employees since their loyalty toward DONG Energy seems weakened by them feeling invisible and as scapegoats. Thus, the discussion should continue by taking more of an inside-out perspective.

Foster et al. (2010: 402) adopts the concept of internal branding to describe the essentiality of employees being committed to the branded values of the organisation:
“The premise is that internal branding activities communicate and educate employees about the brand values to enhance their intellectual and emotional engagement with the brand.”

In the first part of the analysis it was indicated that specialised external profiles might need to be educated into being engaged by DONG Energy’s good cause of changing energy composition. These discoveries seem to be in accordance with the later findings suggesting that specialists within E&P have difficulty understanding their connection to the corporate brand. Ind (2001: 124) describes that many units, especially if they have acquired some cynicism, will ignore or perhaps even counteract the brand values. He highlights that the solution of brand managers is to add an extra layer to the affinity that employees feel for their own unit by making them engage in a larger corporate purpose. In his recommendations on how to make the brand come alive, he suggests that brand champions should be appointed in every key functional unit. These are local representatives who are committed and willing to proselytize on behalf of the brand. It should be profiles that have the respect of colleagues and believe in the power of branding (Ibid.).

From the analysis it has been suggested that Manager 1 and especially Geophysicist 1 show the greatest understanding of the necessity of the green branding. Based on that, it can be suggested that they under the right premises can fulfill the role as brand champions by e.g. telling the story of how E&P contributes to the reliability-part of Moving Energy Forward. Thus, potentially they can positively influence sceptical co-workers like Geologist 2. However, as the analysis also indicates the negative image of E&P and the oil industry do affect all employees regardless of the external contact, which questions whether any of the employees currently can work as brand champions. In relation to retention of these employees it would further be problematic to engage them into a role as spokesmen for brand messages that they currently feel isolated from, since as emphasised by Mosley (2007: 129) employees easily can feel that they are no more than a channel to stakeholders and thus ultimately feel that their own behaviour is superficial when it does not rest on deeply rooted brand beliefs. Being brand champion for the corporate brand would not rest on deeply rooted beliefs, and thus the loyalty towards DONG Energy as branded organisation would continuously be limited. This also seem to point at the finding that the current branding on which Moving Energy Forward rely does not benefit the equity of the brand since it is not rooted in the entire organisation’s culture affiliations and beliefs, which as
emphasised by Mosley (2007: 129) is needed to outperform competitors. Thus, it can be suggested that associations such as the community role need to be attached to the brand in order for it to work as competitive advantage in relation to recruiting and retaining employees at E&P. However the question rises whether the external pressure and the capability that the combination of *Moving Energy Forward* and *Ambitious People* suggestively make in other stakeholder relations can tolerate a potential change in the brand communication. This will be the subject of the following part of the discussion.

**Would changes damage the equity of the branding platform?**

In the first part of the analysis it was indicated how DONG Energy through *mimetic isomorphism* voluntarily has joined environmentally friendly initiatives and further by *coercive isomorphism* have taken advantage of the green pressure by making its branding green. Thus, DONG Energy in large part has positioned itself as a first mover in relation to the green agenda. This suggests that while a lot of pressure exists for DONG Energy to act ethically correct the management of the organisation has also chosen to differentiate DONG Energy through the green branding and strategy, which speaks against a potential change in the brand communication. On the other side, DONG Energy also emphasise the importance of their operations being reliable and transparent and with the current communicative disclosure of E&P the transparency seem to be somewhat low. Thus, by stretching the brand platform into communication about the community role of E&P the ability to look through the fog of DONG Energy’s different activities might be improved and as emphasised by Fleischer (2009: 58), the reliability of the organisation might be increased. However, from a PR-angle changing the branding platform might also jeopardise the trustworthiness of the green communication, since it may look as if DONG Energy is backpedalling from the ambitious 85/15-strategy. Furthermore, with this spring’s chaotic situation it would be surprising if the management would risk being subject to yet another intensive media coverage. Often it seems as if the media attention won’t stop before something or someone is named guilty, thus DONG Energy might want to be cautious not to be framed in a way so it look as if they do not deliver on their green brand promise.

While there seems to exist both pros and cons of changing the green branding in relation to the external pressure put upon DONG Energy, it can also be discussed whether stretching the brand
into a community role would strengthen or weaken its overall brand equity if seen from all stakeholder relations. As shown, when analysing Moving Energy Forward as a valuable resource, the brand being built on functional and symbolic characteristics is valuable, because it suggestively provides an umbrella of trust, which gives a license to operate in other business areas. Seen from this perspective, the E&P-unit is thus also dependent on the green branding even though the employees do not articulate it as so. Even though the invisibility of E&P creates problems in relation to recruitment of personnel to E&P it is also worth considering that when living their own silent life in the shadow of Moving Energy Forward, E&P and its activities are protected against great negative publicity. At the moment it is as much the oil industry that has a bad image as it is E&P as individual player. As emphasised above the media might question the 85/15-strategy if the public attention towards E&P’s strategy of growth is increased. Hence, this speaks against stretching the branding.

Once again flipping the coin there also seem to be indictors speaking in favour of stretching the brand. As argued in the analysis neither Moving Energy Forward nor Ambitious People individually seem to qualify as a capability, because they become too easy to imitate. Moreover, it was questioned whether specialised personnel are as attracted by the green branding as other profiles. With inspiration from Foster et al. (2010: 402) it was suggested that these specialists needed to be educated into being engaged by DONG Energy’s good cause of changing energy composition. Thus, if DONG Energy needs to make a future employer branding effort to make the brand return to the top of the list as a prestigious employer this could also be viewed as a welcome-sent opportunity to tell about E&P’s role as contributing to reliable energy supply. However, this also seems to cause some problems, since the analysis further indicates that CSR - if being the only unique selling proposition - may not contribute to a competitive advantage in relation to recruitment, since the majority of today’s companies work for a ‘good cause’. This suggests that the branding of DONG Energy should be changed but should not be built on another CSR-employee value proposition like e.g. the community role of DONG Energy and E&P, since such messages will not enhance the brands equity.

While this discussion also implies pros and cons for stretching or changing DONG Energy’s green branding at last important consideration has to be taken into account. During the analysis it was suggested that Moving Energy Forward and Ambitious People in combination could
qualify for a capability due to the opportunity of framing the storytelling and thereby allowing various interpretations. It was suggested that Ambitious People contributes with a humanitarian dimension and likewise Moving Energy Forward contributed with the expected good cause. The capability seem to exists, since the combined brand platform meets the social complexity caused by the organisations interactions with its surroundings, and thus the opportunity to deploy the branding in several stakeholder relations work as an isolating factor towards competitor’s brands. Given the magnitude and diversity of DONG Energy’s many stakeholders a pattern of the findings throughout the analysis seems to accentuate the complexity when DONG Energy interacts with all these various stakeholders. Independent of whether DONG Energy changes its branding or not, the equity of the brand will in large part be dependent on whether it grasps the complexity of dealing with so many stakeholder relations. Hence, the future branding of the organisation should contain elements that could be open for various interpretations. Beneficially it should be developed from the inside-out so that it permeates the whole organisation – thus increasing the chances of employees living the brand (Ind 2001: 121).

We will end the discussion by providing thoughts into the likelihood of corporate branding ever truly mirroring the organisational reality.

**Branding as an organisation-wide philosophy – Is it a theoretical ideal?**

In the beginning of this thesis we declared that we would adapt the mind-set of Balmer & Greysen (2006), stating that corporate branding should be seen as an organisation-wide philosophy. Moreover, the analysis has been resting on several theoretical contributions articulating how the organisational culture needs to be reflected in and further needs to support the branding. Ind (2001) emphasises the importance of emotional engagement of all employees through the organisational values reflected in the brand. Hatch & Schultz (2001) emphasises the importance of aligning the cultural roots with the corporate image and strategy, since an organisation’s distinctiveness invariably finds one of its sources in the culture within the organisation. Further, Balmer & Gray (2003) perceive a corporate brand as a capability if specific criteria like rarity and inimitability are met. The corporate brand is a navigation tool, since employees are crucial to the success and maintenance of corporate brand (Ibid). Based on this, it can be interpreted that the equity of a corporate and employer brand relies on employee behaviour mirroring rhetoric or rephrased that an organisation’s personnel need to walk the talk.
to secure corporate credibility. The solutions, challenges and opportunities in the above discussion are thus based on the belief that such organisational and cultural commitment to the brand building and brand governance is possible. However, based on the interviews in this specific case study of DONG Energy it seems that it requires a great managerial willingness if corporate branding should become an organisation-wide philosophy. As suggested during the analysis, the fact that E&P at DONG Energy currently is working towards a growth strategy that runs in parallel with the 85/15-strategy seem to threaten the equity of Moving Energy Forward, because it causes great challenges to get the employees to ‘walk the talk’ when they do not identify with the branding. In relation to corporate branding theorists’ observation of the organisational requirements of corporate branding, it seems as if we have reached a dead end in aiming at providing explanation into the complexity of securing employee commitment when two parallel strategies in DONG Energy exist simultaneously. While we do not question the appropriateness of securing organisation-wide support of the corporate branding, it does make us wonder whether it is more of a theoretical ideal than an empirical reality? We will let this question remain unanswered but will end the discussion by suggesting that the complexity of the organisational culture and strategies, the many stakeholder relations and the holding of the entire energy supply chain within DONG Energy, challenges the theoretical contributions of both the employer branding and corporate branding literature.
Chapter 8 – Conclusion & further research

Conclusion

Based on a theoretical discussion of the interrelationship between the theoretical fields of Corporate Branding and Employer Branding, we wish to investigate how DONG Energy’s corporate brand ‘Moving Energy Forward’ influences the employer branding process of attracting and retaining talented employees at DONG Energy, Exploration and Production.

In this thesis we have raised the above research question based on an interest and curiosity of the interrelationship between the fields of corporate branding and employer branding, since this interrelationship has not yet been fully covered in the theoretical as well as empirical research (Foster et al. 2010: 405). Based on a single-case study concerning the energy supplier DONG Energy, we have had the opportunity to deploy and challenge the existing theory on an empirical case, where the corporate brand causes challenges for the employer branding process of recruiting and retaining employees. Six in-depth interviews form the empirical ground on which the findings of this thesis build. Thus, our inductive reasoning entails that our findings should be seen as indications of the challenges meeting DONG Energy in relation to the employer branding process.

The research question has been answered through the support of four sub-questions whilst rendering visible three declared assumptions in order to put our prejudices at risk as prescribed in the hermeneutic.

The first sub-question raised the question, which synergies and distinctions seem to exist between the theoretical fields of employer- and corporate branding, and it was suggested that both fields seem to operate on a strategic organisational level, but deal with singular objectives and deployment of the brand equity-concept - resulting in different analytical levels. It was covered that corporate branding seems to contribute with an understanding of the importance of the brand reflecting the internal reality while also taking all stakeholder interactions into consideration. Employer branding, with its narrow focus on attracting future employees and
creating loyalty among current employees, seems to emphasise this stakeholder group’s importance for the organisation’s effectiveness and image. However, despite the fields’ acknowledgement of organisational culture, our findings seem to indicate that both meet explanatory challenges when aiming at embracing the complexity of the interdependency between them. Furthermore, since both fields operate on a strategic corporate level they suggestively are limited when providing explanation to the social processes regarding the employees’ identification with the branded organisation. The theoretical discussion further suggested that none of the theories seen in isolation seem to provide satisfying analytical instruments. Based on that, we found it necessary to develop our own framework drawing on several theoretical contributions with the branding literature as foundation in order to answer the research question.

The second sub-question regarding the external pressure towards DONG Energy’s green branding was answered during the first part of the analysis. Relying on secondary empirical data it was indicated that DONG Energy seems to have certain economic, legal and ethical responsibilities that appear to leave the organisation’s green branding as a prerequisite for its legitimacy in the external environment – thus suggesting traces of mimetic and coercive isomorphism. It was implied that DONG Energy might be taking advantage of the external pressure by creating shared value through its green branding, resulting in the organisation positioning itself as a first mover. Based on these findings, it was analysed whether DONG Energy’s corporate brand and the employer brand seem to contribute as valuable resources viewed from a resource-based approach to brand equity. It was suggested that the two brands separately might be easily imitable, but that the combined branding platform possibly might meet the social complexity of DONG Energy’s many interactions, hence contributing as a capability for DONG Energy that strengthens the brand equity. However, it was questioned whether the branding platform would enhance brand equity when focusing strictly on specialised profiles as potential employees. The clash of expectations pointed towards a challenge in finding a way in which the two brands can retain their position as a capability as well as a licence to operate towards a broad stakeholder group, and at the same time become a competitive advantage when attracting specialised employees. This outside-in analysis laid the ground for the second part of the analysis concerning the internal social processes of the E&P-employees’ organisational identification.
The third sub-question then raised the question of which level of identification E&P-members seem to hold towards their workplace, and how Moving Energy Forward affects the employees’ role as employer brand ambassadors. With inspiration from Dutton et al.’s (1994) model of member identification and relying on our interpretation of the six in-depth interviews, we investigated, what seem to be the E&P-members’ construed external image, the perceived identity and the construed internal image - all seen in relation to DONG Energy as organisation, E&P as unit and the oil industry in general. Indication was given of a pattern of a generally low identification with DONG Energy and Moving Energy Forward, a somewhat high identification with E&P and the oil and gas industry - but with variation into their level of identification depending on the respondents’ profession as well as their visible affiliation to the organisation due to their amount of external interactions.

It was reflected on how the low level of identification possibly weakens Moving Energy Forward as a capability, because it then might become something the organisation claims rather than a reflection of reality. These indications seem to be consistent with our first assumption, since the suggested misalignment between Moving Energy Forward and the E&P-respondents’ perception of what seems to be distinctive, central and enduring about their workplace possibly weakens their brand loyalty in relation to retention. In this respect, our second visible assumption regarding the corporate brand’s potential negative consequences for the recruitment of E&P-personnel also seems to correspond to the indications found through the analysis. It was suggested that a current communicative disclosure of E&P exists, which might result in prospective and current employees expressing insecurity about E&P’s future appearance at DONG Energy. Further, the implications given of E&P-members’ construed external and internal image of E&P suggestively enhances a good vs. bad distinction resulting in E&P-members might be feeling portrayed as scapegoats. This was suggested to weaken their self-concepts, their role as brand ambassadors and thereby DONG Energy’s recruitment possibilities. From the answers given by the respondents, our findings indicate that Moving Energy Forward might cause an “us against them”-feeling among E&P-employees in their interrelations with the rest of the organisation, which could result in a negative effect on the affiliation to and cooperation within DONG Energy.
The second part of the analysis ended by elaborating on how the E&P-members’ suggested low level of identification with the corporate brand seem to influence their role as employer brand ambassadors. We thereby put our third and last assumption at risk regarding that the storytelling of E&P-employees might not be aligned with the corporate brand possibly resulting in them not being effective employer brand ambassadors. From the indications given in the analysis, the assumption seem to correspond to the likely pattern, since the above suggested misalignment possibly resulted in them being unfavourable ambassadors of *Moving Energy Forward* as the corporate credibility could be questioned when E&P-members currently seem to have their own storytelling. It was further suggested that this could contribute to a vicious circle by attracting new employees with the same mind-set and thus continuing the suggested ‘us against them’-feeling. However, the analysis also indicated that the respondents had high identification with both E&P as unit and the employer brand *Ambitious People* – if true, making them valuable ambassadors in regard to this line of communication.

*The fourth sub-question* was answered during the ending discussion and concerned the question of whether it seem possible to secure a reliable communicative synergy between the green branding and the storytelling told by E&P-employees while meeting the external stakeholders’ expectations. During the analysis it was suggested that a possible way to remove the current communicative disclosure of E&P could be to stretch the corporate brand into communicating about the E&P-employees’ important community role of securing reliable energy supply, since this possibly provides self-enhancement. Speaking in favour of stretching the brand it was argued that by giving the E&P-unit a ‘stake’ in *Moving Energy Forward* and further providing the members with empowerment to speak freely about the branding it possibly would enhance the likelihood of them living by the brand. Speaking against stretching the brand and providing empowerment, it was questioned whether the employees would have a positive storytelling when they suggestively feel portrayed as scapegoats – potentially resulting in a weakening of the consistency and thus the equity of the brand. Considering the external pressure, it on the one side was indicated that stretching the brand might increase the transparency of DONG Energy’s operations but on the other side might cause an unwanted negative media attention. In relation to the equity of the brand it was discussed that CSR seem to have become an unquestionable hygiene factor indicating that *Moving Energy Forward* might not contribute to a competitive advantage when recruiting to E&P.
Finally, we found indications on that independent of whether DONG Energy changes its branding in the future, it seems that the equity of the brand will be dependent on whether it grasps the complexity of dealing with various stakeholder relations and take account of the interrelationship among its brands and their different objectives.

**Further research**

Throughout the thesis potential interesting research topics has revealed itself, thus in this chapter we will elaborate on and briefly present proposals of further areas of research.

**Educating employees into living the brand**

In the analysis and discussion of the thesis it was suggested, that employees at E&P need to be educated into the values of the brand in order for them to live by the brand. Barrow and Mosley (2005) further emphasises that organisations need to keep a constant focus on brand development and during this development employees should be constantly educated. Thus, further research could dig into theories of organisational learning specifically considering how organisations constantly can renew it-self and learn on different organisational levels. Inspiration could be found in Crossan et al.’s (1999) *Organisational learning framework: From intuition to institution*, which exactly emphasises the importance of individuals’ learning. Moreover, Weick’s (2005) theory of *sense-making* and *sense-giving* could contribute with an understanding of how managers at all levels should provide meaning by translating the brand values into the employees’ daily work-life.

> “Failure to engage line managers with the vision that demonstrates creation of value will result in your employer brand strategy becoming just another project that gets ‘tick of the box’, but creates no lasting value”.

(Michington 2010: 13)

In this respect, Smith et al. (2004) argue that managers are both role models as well as supporters in guiding the employees in relation to the corporate vision, thus it would be interesting to study how the managers at E&P act as role models and whether they can enhance the E&P-members likelihood of living by the brand in the future.
Comparative analysis of sub-units’ different perceptions and realities

Further research could compare the findings of the E&P-units difficulty in identifying with Moving Energy Forward with the level of identification in other sub-units. It could be investigated how other units within DONG Energy interpret the branding. An analysis across departments would also be able to contribute with an identification of whether the corporate brand brings the units together or creates the opposite effect. Thus, it would be interesting to investigate whether the corporate brand affects the degree of social and intellectual capital between the entities, which is the main focus of Nahapet & Groshal (1998). They emphasise that one of the most important resources of modern organisations is knowledge gained from a high social capital.

Crisis communication and brand rebuilding

During the process of writing this thesis, DONG Energy became centre of attention regarding the accusations against and dismissal of the former CEO, Anders Eldrup. The heavy media attention has damaged the image of DONG Energy as organisation (Børsen)¹ and thus a crisis communication study could uncover DONG Energy’s crisis management and further investigate the crisis effect on the equity of DONG Energy’s branding. As reflected in the first part of the analysis, the negative media coverage may have weakened the ethos of Ambitious People since the public may have got the impression that personnel in DONG Energy act careless. As a theoretical foundation for such a crisis communication study, Johansen & Frandsen’s (2008) The Rhetorical Arena (our translation of ‘Den Retoriske Arena’) could be useful. Crisis theorists like Coombs and Benoit inspire this model, since it embraces both the context and communication in the crisis situation.

The CEO’s support of the brand

In the wake of this spring’s crisis at DONG Energy, concern has been raised of whether DONG Energy will be able to keep its leading position within offshore windmills, when the anchorman, Anders Eldrup, no longer is present to continue the strategy (Information)². Based on this, it would be interesting to analyse what consequences the installation of the coming CEO, Henrik Dühring Poulsen, transferring from a position as CEO at TDC, will have on DONG Energy’s 85/15-strategy and its branding.
As emphasised by several branding theorists, such as Dunn & Davis (2004); Minchington (2010); Engelund & Buchhave (2009) and Kunerth & Mosley (2011), the CEO must embrace the brand as an important asset and thus brand building must begin at the top of the organisation. Barrow & Mosley (2005) further stress that newly installed CEOs’ often aim at making their trademark on the organisational strategy. Reflecting on this, further research could scrutinize whether the suggested stretching of the corporate brand could become possible under the new CEO’s command.

Another reflection that could be followed is the personal image of both the former and the future CEO. An analysis of the significance of Anders Eldrup’s personal brand in relation to DONG Energy’s brand could be made in order to understand the potential weakening of the brand’s equity due to his departure. Further, analysing what value Henrik Poulsen’s personal image may contribute to DONG Energy’s corporate image could be interesting since he will get a future starring role as ambassador for the brand.

**Viewing the case through the eyes of another theory of science**

In this thesis the case has been analysed through a social constructivist stance, which have affected the findings in that they have appeared through the interaction between the text and us as interpreters. Our primary aim has been to understand and uncover the complexity of DONG Energy’s branding and its effect on the many interactions. Aiming at a more critical stance, the deployment of a critical discourse analysis as Fairclough presents it, could have been made. His analysis aims at revealing suppression since he strives for a change of social inequality. Through such a stance our analysis would have changed its focus into perceiving the E&P-members as suppressed in relation to the green branding by searching for discursive closure and hegemonic battles between the discourse of E&P and that of DONG Energy’s corporate branding.

**Validating the findings of this thesis**

As a last obvious proposal for further research is that the complexity of interrelation between corporate and employer branding should be validated through various studies of both resembled as well as other kinds of organisations.
For instance, it should be examined whether this complexity also exists in privately held companies and in end-product oriented companies. Further, the influence of product brands on employer brands and corporate brands in relation to the employer branding process could be brought into an analysis of the found complexity. By holding such knowledge, theoretical tools that could explain the interrelations could be developed and thus could close the existing theoretical and empirical gap.
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3:
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5:
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6:
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7:
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8:
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9:
Located at April 20th 2012

10:
Located at April 20th 2012

11:
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Located at April 21st 2012
12:
Located at April 22nd 2012

13:
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14:
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15:
Located at April 23rd 2012

16:
Located at April 23rd 2012

**Energi Styrelsen**

1:
Located at April 21st 2012

2:
Located at April 21st 2012
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1:
Located at April 24th 2012

2:
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EU-oplysningen
1:
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Appendix A: DONG Energy PowerPoint Presentation 1

PowerPoint Presentation acquired from DONG Energy. We have only enclosed those slides that we have referred to during the thesis.
Appendix A: DONG Energy PowerPoint Presentation 1 (Continued)
Appendix A: DONG Energy PowerPoint Presentation 1 (Continued)
Appendix B: DONG Energy PowerPoint Presentation 2

PowerPoint Presentation acquired from DONG Energy. We have only enclosed those slides that we have referred to during the thesis.

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**The story of how we made our employees brand owners - and reached top 10 most attractive workplaces in three years**

Gry Egstrup & Charlotte Thiesen

---

**This is why employees as brand owners are important!**

1. "The employees we are looking for, do not necessarily look for us"
2. "The employees we want to retain, do not necessarily want to stay with us"
3. "And good employees, always have a choice"

---

**The challenges we were facing in 2007**

- Identity: ?
- Reputation: ↓
- Workplace: 60
Appendix B: DONG Energy PowerPoint Presentation 2 (Continued)
Appendix B: DONG Energy PowerPoint Presentation 2 (Continued)

Involving employees whenever you can

We have reached many objectives

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TOP 10</th>
<th>Top students</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>20,000</td>
<td>83%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix C: DONG Energy PowerPoint Presentation 3

PowerPoint Presentation acquired from DONG Energy. We have only enclosed those slides that we have referred to during the thesis.
Appendix D: Hatch & Schultz’ Corporate Branding Tool-kit

(Hatch & Schultz)
Appendix E: Backhaus & Tikoo's Employer Branding Framework

(Eckhaus & Tikoo 2004: 505)
Appendix F: Types of interview questions

In the following, we argue for the method and our reflection on with type of question, we wish to ask the respondents during the qualitative interviews.

All of the interview guides take Hansen & Andersen’s three dimensions of question types into account. These are content, time and response dimensions (Hansen & Andersen 2009: 102). In spite of the dimension being developed to quantitative methods, we find them useful in structuring the framework of themes to be explored. In the content dimension the scientist decides whether to use factual, cognitive, attitude or evaluation based questions depending on the type of information needed (ibid). According to Hansen and Andersen, the type of questions can further be divided into retrospective, current or prospective, which should be considered as the questions time dimension (ibid: 104). The third dimension concerning response addresses the issue of what type of interview guide that seems appropriate.

Since the aim of our informant interviews is to gain in-depth knowledge about the strategic mind-set, practical work and the overall approach to corporate branding and employer branding in DONG Energy, we primarily employ factual and evaluation based questions framed through the retrospective and prospective time dimensions. Conversely, the interview guides targeted at managers and employees at E&P will mainly be constructed of attitude based questions in the light of prospective and current time dimensions in order to measure and understand the respondent’s attitude and opinion about DONG Energy’s green universe.
Appendix G: Interview guide, Employer Branding Manager, Gry Egstrup

Navn:
Anciennitet:
Titel:

1. DONG Energys employer brand ”Mennesker med ambitioner” er som bekendt tæt knyttet til corporate brandet ”Energi i forandring” - som I kommunikerer, har DONG Energy brug for ambitiøse og dygtige medarbejdere til at levere og udvikle ren og stabil energi.

Da I udviklede employer brandet samtidigt med corporate brandet, hvilke fordele så I ved at lægge de to brands tæt op ad hinanden?

Hvilke udfordringer har der været forbundet ved dette valg?

2. Kort fortalt, hvad er formålet med jeres employer brand ”Mennesker med ambitioner”?

3. Hvordan oplever I den generelle holdning blandt medarbejderne til kommunikationen omkring ”Mennesker med ambitioner”?

4. I vores opgave koncentrerer vi os som bekendt om medarbejdergruppen E&P. Har I oplevet, at denne medarbejdergruppe har haft en særlig holdning til denne kommunikation (Mennesker med ambitioner)?

5. Kort fortalt, hvad er formålet med jeres grønne corporate brand ”Energi i forandring”?

6. Hvilke målgrupper er ”Energi i forandring” primært henvendt til?

7. Hvordan oplever I den generelle holdning blandt medarbejderne til kommunikationen omkring ”Energi i forandring”?

8. Hvordan oplever I medarbejdergruppen E&P’s holdning til den grønne kommunikation?

9. Medarbejderne i E&P arbejder jo som bekendt ikke direkte med vedvarende energi. Har I gjort noget særligt for, at medarbejderne i E&P kan spejle sig i kommunikationen omkring ”Energi i forandring”?

Er I stadig på nogen udfordringer i forhold til at få E&P medarbejderne til at synes, at kommunikationen er relevant for dem?

Hvis ja: Hvilke udfordringer? Har I gjort noget for at løse dem?
Hvis nej: Hvad tror du, det skyldes?
Appendix G: Interview guide, Employer Branding Manager, Gry Egstrup (Continued)

10. DONG Energy er jo en meget synlig organisation og i den forbindelse, vil vi gerne høre, om I gør noget særligt, for at hjælpe medarbejderne med, hvad de kan fortælle om organisationen, hvis de bliver spurgt i deres netværk?

11. Gør I noget særligt for at jeres medarbejdere skal fortælle noget bestemt om ”Energi i forandring”?

12. På en skala fra 1-10 (hvor 10 er det højeste). Hvor vigtigt er det for jer, at medarbejderne i E&P e taler positivt om DONG Energys grønne virksomhedsstrategi og -branding?

13. Gør I noget særligt for at få jeres medarbejdere til at fortælle om DONG Energy, som en attraktiv arbejdsplads?

14. På en skala fra 1-10 (hvor 10 er det højeste). Hvor vigtigt er det for jer, at medarbejderne i E&P fortæller om employer brandet ”Mennesker med ambitioner”?

15. Benytter I jeres medarbejderes netværk i rekrutterings-øjemed?

16. Når I afholder eksterne employer branding arrangementer henvendt til ingeniorer og ingeniørstuderende (rettet mod E&P-enheden), benytter I der kommunikationen omkring ”Energi i forandring”?

Hvis ja: Hvad fortæller I?
Hvis nej: Hvorfor ikke?
Appendix H: Interview guide, HR partner, Susanne Andersen

Navn:
Anciennitet:
Titel:

1. Når I rekruttere medarbejder til DONG Energy, hvilke metoder benytter I så primært (fx jobopslag, sociale medier som linkedin, headhunting, medarbejdernes netværk)?

2. Vores speciale handler om medarbejderstaben i Exploration & Production. Hvordan rekrutterer I primært specialister til denne enhed?

3. Hvordan vurderer I muligheden for at rekruttere kvalificerede medarbejdere til Exploration & Production?

4. Hvad fortæller I kommende medarbejdere, om det at være ansat i DONG Energy?

5. Fortæller I noget særligt til kandidater der søger job i Exploration & Production?

Kan du fortælle tre ting, som I sælger arbejdspladsen på til denne medarbejdergruppe?
Er der noget særligt, de gerne vil høre om?

6. Hvordan oplever I medarbejdertilfredsheden i E&P? På en skala fra 1 til 10 (hvor 10 er det bedste). Hvor høj medarbejdertilfredshed vil du tro, der er i Exploration & Production?

7. DONG reklamerer i tv-reklamer, aviser og på nettet om at DONG Energy ønsker at levere og videreudvikle ren og stabil energi. Benytter I denne grønne kommunikation i rekrutteringsprocessen?

8. Medarbejderne i E&P arbejder jo som bekendt ikke direkte med vedvarende energi. Har I erfaring med om potentielle medarbejdere i E&P har interesse om at høre om "Energi i forandring"?

9. Hvordan oplever du, at nuværende E&P-medarbejderne identificere sig med den grønne strategi?

10. CSR og klima/miljø er for alvor blevet en del af samfundsdebatten og flere undersøgelser viser i den sammenhæng, at mange ønsker at arbejde, som netop tager et stærkt samfundsansvar og som har et positivt image, som medarbejderne kan spejle sig i. Oplever du, at det er mere eller mindre populært at arbejde for E&P fx ift. Wind Power? (både ift. ansøgere og nuværende medarbejdere)
Appendix H: Interview guide, HR partner, Susanne Andersen (Continued)

11. Når I rekrutterer til bestemte afdelinger i E&P, inddrager I da medarbejdere/ledere fra den pågældende afdeling i rekrutteringsprocessen?

Hvis ja: Hvordan inddrager I medarbejderne?
Hvis nej: Har I overvejet at gøre det? Hvad ville I gøre?
Appendix I: Interview guide, Managers and employees at E&P

Navn:
Anciennitet:
Titel:

1. Hvis du skulle nævne tre ting, der kendtegner dit arbejde, hvad skulle det så være?

2. Hvorfor har du valgt at arbejde for DONG Energy?

3. På en skala fra 1-10 (hvor 10 er det bedste), hvor glad er du for arbejde i E&P, DONG Energy?

4. Har du nogensinde anbefalet nogen i dit netværk at søge job i Dong Energy?
Hvis ja: Hvad fortalte du om at være ansat i E&P, DONG Energy? Hvad fortalte du om DONG Energy som arbejdsplads?
Hvis nej: Kunne du finde på at anbefale det? Hvad ville du i så fald fortælle om E&P? Hvad ville du fortælle om DONG Energy som arbejdsplads?

5. **Dette spørgsmål er kun rettet til ledere:** Har HR informeret dig om, hvad du og dine medarbejdere kan fortælle om DONG Energy som en attraktiv arbejdsplads?
Hvis ja: Hvad har HR fortalt dig? Har du fortalt det videre til dine medarbejdere?
Hvis nej: Mangler du denne type information?

6. Samarbejder du med andre forretningsområder?
Hvis ja: Hvem samarbejder du med og hvor ofte?

7. Hvad bidrager E&P med i forhold til DONG Energys samlede forretning?

Hvad synes du om reklamerne?

9. Bidrager E&P i forhold til strategien om ’Energi i Forandring’?

10. Er det rigtig forstået at E&P ikke beskæftiger sig med ren og vedvarende energi, men derimod med stabil energi?
Hvis ja: Hvis du skulle fortælle, hvordan I arbejder med stabil energi, hvad ville du så fortælle?

11. Til sidst vil vi spørge dig, hvordan fik du i sin tid jobbet i DONG Energy?
Appendix J: Audio-file of interviews (enclosed CD)

The enclosed CD includes our qualitative interviews.

Track 1: (35:19)
Geophysicist 1

Track 2: (15:56)
Geologist 2

Track 3: (20:26)
Manager 2

Track 4: (29:57)
Manager 1

Track 5: (44:18)
Gry Egstrup, Employer Branding Manager at People & Development

Track 6: (34:54)
Susanne Brandi Andersen, HR Business Partner at People & Development