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# Athlete or employee – a study of professional handball players

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MSc (EBA) in Brand & Communications Management  
Master Thesis

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Hand in: June 30 2014

Supervisor: Hanne Kierstein

Pages: 76  
Characters: 176.147 STU

Copenhagen Business School 2014

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## Executive Summary

Being an elite athlete was once just a hobby. Something you did on the side, while studying or working. In many sports, it is today changed into a professionalized industry, where the athletes are not just athletes seeking to win, but also employees, who depend on their sport to pay for their cost of living. This thesis investigates which attitudes and motivations of elite professional handball players in Denmark have towards employment in general and employers specifically, and what makes some employers more attractive than others. The research topic is relevant not just for employers seeking to optimize their staff, but also for academics to understand a particular industry and profession, where the roots are in recreation rather than labour.

What the research found is that while playing handball is a job for them, this has limited impact in their professional lives. In their daily motivation it is handball, not money, that motivates the majority of them, and for all of them it is important that their skills and performances are recognized. For the majority of the players, recognition is especially significant as it gives meaning to a job, which often includes sacrificing family time for the job. One area where the players have been touched by professionalization, however, is a willingness to place themselves before the employer, as they will remain loyal only as long as they are satisfied. What determines satisfaction and what makes an employer attractive is largely based on what the club can offer the player from a sporting perspective, however the club must live up to the players' wishes for salary and family considerations to be considered. However, another very significant factor for motivation and the attitude towards the employer is that the club lives up to the promises it makes, as players will react very negatively if they are broken.

The findings should be relevant to employers within the handball industry, as the research has identified what things is part of determining motivation and presented an argument for why this is particularly important in professional sports. The findings also point to a need for further research into areas of motivational theory, where the findings and existing models do not match entirely.

**Table of Contents**

Executive Summary.....	1
1 Introduction.....	4
1.1 Problem identification and research question.....	4
1.2 Focus and relevance of research .....	4
2 Methodological Considerations.....	4
2.1 Research Philosophy .....	5
2.2 Research Design .....	7
2.2.1 Literature search .....	8
2.2.2 Interviewing experts.....	8
2.2.3 Focus groups/Interviews.....	9
2.3 Interview Methodology .....	9
2.3.1 Thematizing.....	9
2.3.2 Designing.....	10
2.3.3 Interviewing .....	12
2.3.4 Transcribing .....	13
2.3.5 Analyzing.....	14
2.3.6 Verifying.....	14
2.3.7 Reporting .....	17
2.4 Delimitation.....	17
3 Theoretical direction.....	18
3.1 Employee identity.....	18
3.2 Employer attractiveness .....	22
3.3 Employee retention.....	23
4 Danish professional handball.....	25
5 Findings .....	26
5.1 Research results .....	26
5.1.1 A search of the literature.....	26
5.1.2 Interviewing experts in the subject.....	31
5.1.3 Conducting interviews – summaries of meaning condensations .....	33
6 Analysis.....	41
6.1 Reflections on the interview process and the findings.....	41

6.2	Player 1.....	42
6.2.1	Theoretical analysis.....	42
6.2.2	Part conclusion.....	44
6.3	Player 2.....	45
6.3.1	Theoretical analysis.....	45
6.3.2	Part conclusion.....	48
6.4	Player 3.....	49
6.4.1	Theoretical analysis.....	49
6.4.2	Part conclusion.....	52
6.5	Player 4.....	53
6.5.1	Theoretical analysis.....	53
6.5.2	Part conclusion.....	56
6.6	Player 5.....	56
6.6.1	Theoretical analysis.....	56
6.6.2	Part conclusion.....	59
6.7	Player 6.....	60
6.7.1	Theoretical analysis.....	60
6.7.2	Part conclusion.....	63
7	Discussion.....	63
7.1	Comparison to expert interviews .....	69
7.2	Comparison to literature search.....	70
8	Closing points.....	73
8.1	Conclusion.....	73
8.1.1	The players' attitudes and motivations towards employment.....	73
8.1.2	The players' attitudes and motivations towards employers.....	74
8.1.3	What make some employers more attractive than others .....	74
8.2	Managerial Implications .....	75
8.3	Theoretical Implications.....	76
8.4	Directions for Future Research.....	76
	Bibliography.....	78

## 1 Introduction

### 1.1 Problem identification and research question

Danish elite handball has grown from being a spare time activity, with the game being a (very serious) hobby, into being a professional endeavour, where the players are under contract and the sport is a job (Storm & Almlund, 2006). Since professional handball has its roots in recreation rather than labour, it is relevant to investigate whether the attitudes, motivations and decisions made by the members of that profession mirror that of recreation or of labour. In order to uncover this, the main explorative research question is:

**RQ:** Which attitudes and motivations do elite Danish professional handball players have towards employment and employers within professional Danish handball, and what makes some employers more attractive than others?

### 1.2 Focus and relevance of research

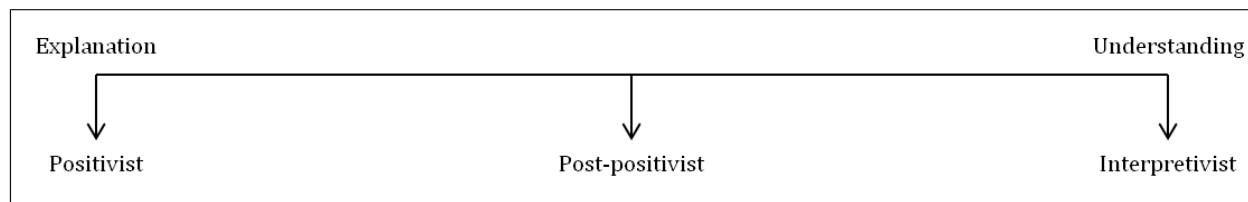
The focus of the thesis is on the Danish professional handball players' personal attitudes and motivations vis-à-vis employment and employers, and how this affects their choice of employer. This should be of interest, not just to academics in the fields of employer branding and Human Resources in sports, but also to employers, player advisors, and player associations, as the thesis provides further understanding of a certain group of workers in that industry.

## 2 Methodological Considerations

Research philosophy and theoretical science is an important part of academic writing. Epistemological and ontological considerations are not just theoretical endeavours, but the framework on which the entire research is built. The research philosophy shows the approach to the data and contains assumptions about the author's worldview, and will greatly influence research strategy and choice of methods, and shows how the research topic is being approached (Saunders, Thornhill, & Lewis, 2009); (Bryman & Bell, 2011).

## 2.1 Research Philosophy

Within the field of social science there are several different perspectives on which approach a researcher should take on a given phenomenon. Each perspective has a different view on epistemology (seeing reality as a social construct or as existing objectively outside the actor) and ontology (whether there is an objective truth or if it all depends on how the research is performed), and it is central to understand how these choices relate to each other (Grix, 2010); (Saunders, Thornhill, & Lewis, 2009).



**Figure 1** Research Spectrum (Grix, 2010)

Figure 1 depicts a spectrum of the three main research directions. Positivist research attempts to explain objective, observable reality through the collection of objective data, from which law-like generalizations and testable truths can be made (Grix, 2010). This means that data will often be quantitative and collected in a structured manner that avoids obstructing the output, as the research must be value free from the researcher. Consequently, its epistemology assumes an absolute objective truth, and its ontology, an objective observable truth (Saunders et al., 2009). Post-positivist research acknowledges an objective reality, but it also stresses that different social actors see the objective reality subjectively. Even though the researcher is aware that this difference exists, it is still not probable to find the truth, but only a perspective of it (Saunders et al, 2009). As such, post-positivist research has objectivist ontology and an epistemology inclined towards interpretivism. Finally, interpretivism is at the other end of the spectrum and rose as a reaction to positivist research, because interpretivist researchers did not believe that the methods of natural science were right to analyse the social world (Grix, 2010). Interpretivist research rejects the idea of an external social world, independent of the actors, and instead works with the idea that the social world is constructed through the interactions of actors within it, and as a consequence there is not a clear separation between value and fact (Grix, 2010). Social

phenomena do not exist independent of the actors, meaning that the researcher must understand the meanings that motivate the social actors and understand the world from their perspective to gain knowledge (Saunders, Thornhill, & Lewis, 2009). In this perspective, the ontological assumptions are subjective, while the epistemology is interpretivist.

In light of the research question, interpretivism is an appropriate research philosophy. It considers humans as social actors, who “interpret our everyday social roles in according with meaning we give to those roles. In addition, we interpret the social roles of other in accordance with our own set of meanings” (Saunders, Thornhill, & Lewis, 2009, p. 116). This is in alignment with the research question, which deals with subjective understandings of the reality of being a Danish elite professional handball player. In other words, the aim of the research is to understand, rather than explain. This also means that the method of data collection is qualitative, and the data collection techniques most often used in interpretivist research are small sample, qualitative in-depth investigations (Saunders, Thornhill, & Lewis, 2009). The handball players’ attitudes and motivations towards employment and employers is the central part of what this research attempts to uncover, making interpretivism a better choice of research philosophy than e.g. positivism. In positivism, complete objectivism is strived for, and results are often quantitative rather than qualitative in order to be able to make statistical analysis, and eventually law-like generalization, like those from the areas of physical and natural science (Saunders, Thornhill, & Lewis, 2009). The difference between positivism and interpretivism can also be understood in the sense that where the former emphasises *explaining* human action, the latter gives special importance to *understanding* it (Bryman & Bell, 2011).

The chosen research philosophy rejects the idea of a reality external of the social actors. Individuals have separate perceptions of reality, and in this type of research, it is the task of the researcher “to be able to make sense of and understand their motive, actions, and intentions in a way that is meaningful” (Saunders, Thornhill, & Lewis, 2009, p. 111). Again, this is an approach well suited for the topic of this thesis, as the research aims to uncover the subjective attitudes and motivations of the social actors in a particular context, and as such it makes little sense to

consider any objective social reality, as this simply does not fall within the research question posed.

Epistemologically, the knowledge gathered has an interpretivist nature. The outcome, that this thesis produces, represents the researcher's point of view relative to the phenomenon, as the research is value bound and "that the researcher is part of what is being researched and cannot be separated and so will be subjective" (Saunders, Thornhill, & Lewis, 2009, p. 119).

When attempting to view the world from other peoples' points of view and uncovering their subjective attitudes and motivations, it is difficult not to be influenced by one's own values and opinions, and even with a strive towards objectivity "your choice of philosophical approach is a reflection of your values, as is your choice of data collection techniques" (Saunders, Thornhill, & Lewis, 2009, p. 116). Consequently, many make the case that the researcher must explain her or his biases and assumptions, thereby giving the reader an understanding of why certain choices and conclusions were made (Bryman & Bell, 2011).

Saunders et al (2009) also note, how a key part of interpretivism is that the researchers enter the world of the research subject and attempts to understand the world from the research subjects' point of view. This trait is also why it is argued that interpretivism is often a very suitable research philosophy for areas such as organizational behaviour, marketing and human resource management. These areas are often both complex and unique, and it is thus essential to understand the particular circumstances and individuals involved with the topic (Saunders, Thornhill, & Lewis, 2009). Employee attitudes and motivations are closely related to these areas, and as such makes interpretivism an appropriate research philosophy.

## **2.2 Research Design**

Overall, there are two general approaches to research, deduction and induction. Deduction is very structured, as it moves from theory to data, and most often deals with quantitative data. Induction, on the other hand, is more flexible depending on the development of research, seeks to understand the meaning humans attach to events, emphasises the context of the research, and contrary to deduction rather collects qualitative data (Saunders, Thornhill, & Lewis, 2009).



Given the intent of this research paper – to uncover attitudes and motivations towards employers and employment amongst professional Danish handball players, induction seems the better choice of approach as it emphasises the attainment of subjective meanings in order to formulate a theory, rather than deduction, where the point is to test whether data fits theory (Bryman & Bell, 2011).

The goal of the research question is similar to that of an exploratory study, defined as “finding out ‘what is happening; to seek new insights; to ask questions and to assess phenomena in a new light’” (Saunders, Thornhill, & Lewis, 2009, p. 119). Given the limited research and academic knowledge in this area, an exploratory study is in place, in order to build a foundation of knowledge, which future studies can build upon. According to Saunders et al (2009) there are three primary ways of conducting exploratory research: **A search of the literature, interviewing experts in the subject** and **conducting focus group interviews**. In the following section all three tools will be discussed according to their usefulness in conducting the research.

### **2.2.1 Literature search**

The literature search will present the existing knowledge related to the research question and other relevant findings to further understanding of the topic. This will include both scientific research as well as other data that adds to a greater understanding of the topic and helps answer the research question.

### **2.2.2 Interviewing experts**

In order to understand professional Danish handball players, experts in the form of a player advisor and an executive from a professional handball club will be interviewed. These experts represent two different external perspectives on the players, from two parties that are closely related to the group of people being researched, making them a valuable source of differentiated knowledge on the research topic. The manner, in which these interviews will be conducted, will be presented in the interview methodology later in the thesis.

### 2.2.3 Focus groups/Interviews

Focus groups have the benefit of allowing multiple respondents to collectively construct meanings and make sense of phenomena through interaction, and allows for the respondents to challenge each other's opinions and statement in a manner that may be difficult in a one-to-one interview (Bryman & Bell, 2011). However, in a preliminary conversation about the research topic, the director of the Danish Handball Players Union, Michael Sahl Hansen, informed that their experiences show that professional Danish handball players are not likely to share personal information in groups (personal communication, March 20, 2014) and, as a consequence, it would be a misuse of time and resources to perform these. Instead the data will be gathered through one-to-one interviews. The manner, in which these interviews will be conducted, will be presented in the interview methodology section of the thesis.

## 2.3 Interview Methodology

Kvale (2007) presents the 'Seven stages of an interview inquiry'. This is a framework, under which the entire process of interview driven research is explained, and different perspectives and methods are presented and discussed. This framework will be the basis, on which this research will be performed, and it will now be explained, what will be done in each of the seven stages.

### 2.3.1 Thematizing

This is the 'why' and the 'what' of the investigation, which is stating the research purpose and, naturally, this should take its point of departure in the research question: *Which attitudes and motivations do elite Danish professional handball players have towards employment and employers within professional Danish handball, and what makes some employers more attractive than others?*

If the research question is broken into parts, the first part, which asks about the attitudes and motivations towards employment, deals with the players' thoughts about themselves and their role as employees. The second part, which asks about the attitudes and motivations towards employers, has a more extrovert focus, as it deals with the players' side of the relationship with employers. The third and final part, what makes some employers more

attractive than others, is closely related to the second part. This is because it asks how these attitudes and motivations towards employers come into play, when the players' are able to choose between employers.

It is the research question and this explanation of it that is foundation for the research and for the following six stages of the interview inquiry.

### **2.3.2 Designing**

As presented earlier, the study will include two types of interviews. The first one is with two experts who add an external perspective to the analysis, while the second type is six interviews with professional Danish handball players. What constitutes the right number of respondents can be a source of discussion, however Kvale (2007) notes that the standard number of interview subjects is  $15 \pm 10$ , with the number depending on time and resources available. He warns against having too many interview subjects, as fewer interviews can give more time to prepare and analyze those that are conducted with a better outcome. Based on this, and the resources available in this research, six player interviews are deemed appropriate. Furthermore two expert interviews will be conducted before the player interviews and will serve as a point of discussion of the findings and the analysis.

Both types of interviews are semi-structured. The choice of semi-structured over unstructured interview is made, as the existence of a purpose and a specific approach to the interview requires that it is semi-structured, because "it is neither an open everyday conversation nor a closed questionnaire" (Kvale, *Doing Interviews*, 2007, p. 11). All interviews will be conducted in Danish. This will be done to avoid that the players will be limited by expressing their opinions in a foreign language. Consequently, whenever quotations are used they will have been translated from Danish to English.

Life world: The point of qualitative research is to understand the respondent's lived world and interviews as a method are a powerful method.	Meaning: The interview seeks to discover both facts and meanings. To uncover meanings, it can be necessary to ask questions to confirm interpretations.	Qualitative: This type of interview does not seek quantification, but nuanced accounts of various aspects of the respondent's life.
Descriptive: The researcher should encourage the respondent to describe their feelings, experiences and actions with nuance.	Specificity: The interview should encourage descriptions of specific situations and experiences to conclude meanings at a concrete level.	Qualified naïveté: The interviewer should be open to new and unexpected input and be critical of his/her own presuppositions.
Focus: While maintaining openness, the researcher must guide the subject in a certain direction – not towards certain answers – in order to maintain the focus of the research	Ambiguity: Answers may be ambiguous. The researcher must make an effort to ensure, that ambiguity is not caused by poor questions, but reflect ambiguous experiences.	Change: Answers may be changed during an interview due to reflections made by the respondent.
Sensitivity: If there are multiple interviewers, this can create inconsistencies between the focus of each interview.	Interpersonal situation: An interview is a personal experience and the knowledge gathered is created from this. Thus the interviewer is part of creating the knowledge.	Positive experience: The researcher must strive to make the interview a pleasant experience as this make sharing experiences and views more likely.

Of the 12 aspects described in Table 1, especially two are relevant to the theme of the research; 'Descriptive' and 'Focus'. With a 'descriptive' aspect, the respondent is encouraged to describe their experience, feelings and actions as precise as possible in order into gain

nuanced descriptions. The 'focus' aspect, as the name reveals, focuses on certain themes chosen by the researcher. Questions are open-ended, but are guided towards certain topics, though not specific opinions. These are the most important aspect in relation to the research, as the analysis will depend on rich descriptions on themes related to the topic.

Finding respondents will be done using criterion sampling, a specific kind of purposeful sampling. Purposeful sampling is recognised as being useful in qualitative research, as it helps look at the experiences of specific groups of people rather than general trends (Palys, 2008), as is the case in this research. The criteria used are: 1) Respondents will not be employed by the same club. 2) All players are born between 1984 and 1988. 3) All are employed by a Danish club. 4) All have played for the Danish national handball team. Playing in different clubs makes the findings more broad, while the other criteria make the group more heterogeneous as all being national team members, at a similar age and all playing in Denmark ensure a relatively similar level of talent and career accomplishments. The particular age group and level is also representative of players in the peak of their handball career and are consequently very attractive employees making them a relevant segment for research.

### **2.3.3 Interviewing**

Each interview will be introduced by a briefing where the topic of the research, the purpose of the interview and the practicalities concerning recording is explained. After each interview the respondent will be debriefed, meaning that the person is offered an opportunity to reflect upon the interview itself and ask further questions about the research itself. Both are done to make the respondent more comfortable and remove anxieties about being interviewed (Kvale, *Doing Interviews*, 2007).

Each type of interview will follow the same scripts, one for the expert interviews (Appendix 1) and one for the player interviews (Appendix 2). Kvale (2007) points out that the guides for semi-structured interviews should include a mix of themes and topics to be covered in the interview and of specifically worded questions, but leaves it to each researcher to determine how strict to follow the guide. This research will adhere strictly to the questions posed, but will allow time for the respondent to talk more broadly on the themes and topics that are

intended to be covered, and for the interviewer to follow up on new directions emerging from the interview.

When designing the interview questions, Kvale (2007) suggests that the questions should be evaluated on a thematic and dynamic dimension. The thematic dimension is concerned with “the ‘what’ of an interview, to the theoretical conceptions of the research topic, and to the subsequent analysis of the interview (Kvale, *Doing Interviews*, 2007, p. 57)”. The dynamic dimension refers to: “the ‘how’ of an interview; they should promote a positive interaction, keep the flow of the conversation going, and stimulate the subjects to talk about their experiences and feelings. The questions should be easy to understand, short, and devoid of academic language” (Kvale, *Doing Interviews*, 2007). When creating the research guides, careful attention has been paid to ensure that both these dimensions are considered and applied in order to stimulate conversation and to produce knowledge of high quality, which is relevant to the research. The questions prepared in advance are primarily what Kvale (2007) calls ‘Introductory questions’, as they are very open-ended and place the subjective experience of the respondent at the center of the investigation. These are supported by direct questions intended to be asked later in the interview to ensure knowledge of specific experiences. All of these are open to be followed by clarifying and interpreting follow-up questions in order to ensure, that the interviewer’s understanding of the respondent’s experience is in alignment with that of the respondent. The interview guides will include suggestions for these follow-up questions to help guide the interview in the direction of the purpose of the research, but the individual interview will determine if and how many of them are directly used.

#### **2.3.4 Transcribing**

The transcriptions of all interviews can be found in Appendix 3-10. As noted by Kvale (2007), something is lost in transcription, as it translates oral communication into written. Given that the transcripts of the interviews are not intended as the end-product, but as a tool for the later analysis, they will be done verbatim to reflect exactly what was said during the interview. This method for transcription is commonly used for qualitative, exploratory

research (Halcomb & Davidson, 2006), making it a suitable choice for this research. Kvale (2007) notes that re-listening to the recording of the interview after the initial transcription can reveal errors, and as such, multiple listenings and repetitions of the transcription process will be performed in order to ensure accuracy.

### **2.3.5 Analyzing**

The mode of analysis chosen for the interviews is meaning condensation. This is a method with five steps: 1) A reading of the complete interview, 2) Text is broken into units of meaning, 3) The theme which dominates each unit is stated in a simple manner, 4) Evaluating each meaning unit in terms of the purpose of the study, 5) The essential themes of the study are written together in a descriptive statement. The American psychologist Amedeo Giorgi developed the method in the early 1970s (Kvale, *Doing Interviews*, 2007) and this method offers “a process of intersubjectivity, reflexivity, and feasibility, while maintaining a responsible level of methodological rigour” (Malterud, 2012, s. 796). Similarly, the idea of breaking down the interview into parts and uncovering recurring themes, which can be categorised and compared is also suggested other researchers (Sapsford & Jupp, 1996); (Gibbs, 2007). Kvale (2007) also notes how this analysis method requires a rich and nuanced description from the respondent and this suits the type of questions being asked well. After these five steps, the themes will be the centre of further theoretical analysis, taking departure in the theories presented later in the thesis as well as the complete set of data.

### **2.3.6 Verifying**

Reliability and validity are core criteria when it comes to establishing and assessing the quality of research, and while there are established ways of doing so in quantitative research, this is more difficult when the research is qualitative. Kvale (2007) acknowledges this issue, and while he explains how reliability and validity could be understood in qualitative research, this thesis will instead use the alternative criteria for evaluating the trustworthiness of qualitative research suggested by Lincoln and Guba in Bryman and Bell (2011).

First of all they suggest credibility as an alternative to internal validity (the match between the researchers' observations and the theoretical ideas they develop). In order to achieve this,

it is suggested that each respondent is given the findings to verify that the portrayal of their world-view is accurate, a technique called respondent validation. If the respondent confirms the findings, they can be deemed more credible: "If there can be several possible accounts of an aspect of social reality, it is the feasibility or credibility of the account that the researcher arrives at that is going to determine its acceptability to others" (Bryman & Bell, 2011, p. 396).

Secondly, transferability replaces external validity (whether findings can be generalized). This means that what the researcher cannot achieve in breadth, she or he must do so in depth. "As qualitative research typically entails the intensive study of a small group, or of individuals sharing certain characteristics (...), qualitative findings tend to be oriented to the contextual uniqueness and significance of the aspect of the social world being studied" (Bryman & Bell, 2011, p. 398). The benefit of qualitative research over quantitative research is the ability to uncover a high level of details, and Lincoln and Guba argue that an emphasis on this can replace external validity.

Thirdly, dependability parallels reliability (whether a study can be replicated), which is achieved by keeping a complete record of phases of the research process available, should anyone want to challenge the findings. It is recommended to have an auditor that can evaluate if proper procedures have been followed. However "it is very demanding for the auditors, bearing in mind that qualitative research frequently generates extremely large datasets" (Bryman & Bell, 2011, p. 398).

Finally, confirmability is used in the place of objectivity (the lack of influence of the researcher on the subject). This means: "while recognizing that complete objectivity is impossible in business research, the researcher can be shown to have acted in good faith; in other words, it should be apparent that he or she has not overtly allowed personal values or theoretical inclinations manifestly to sway the conduct of the research and findings deriving from it" (Bryman & Bell, 2011, p. 398).



### **2.3.6.1 Justification of choices**

#### 2.3.6.1.1 Achieving credibility

In qualitative research, validity is concerned with how much the observations actually reflect what is being investigated (Kvale, *Interviews, an introduction to qualitative research interviewing*, 1996). To evaluate this, it becomes a philosophical question of what truth is. From a positivist perspective there is an objective truth and the ideal is to have a one-to-one correspondence between the truth and the findings. From constructivist perspective there is not a belief that an objective truth exists and such there is a different understanding of validity. Rather than attaining certain knowledge, validity becomes a matter making a defensible knowledge claim, and this is supported by respondent validation.

#### 2.3.6.1.2 Achieving transferability

The choice of a semi-structured interview method rather than an unstructured, which are more frequently used in exploratory research, is done to ensure transferability of the data. The main benefit of a non-standardized structure is the ability to explore a complex issue; the downside is however that those findings are difficult to replicate (Saunders, Thornhill, & Lewis, 2009). Thus a semi-structured interview structure, meaning that all players have faced similar interviews, means their responses are more comparable.

Due to the limited scope of the findings in qualitative studies, it is often argued that making any generalizations from the results is hardly possible (Bryman & Bell, 2011). In order make up for the small sample, both Bryman and Bell (2011) and Kvale (1996) argue that the generalizability of qualitative data rests on the quality of the data. "The validity of the generalization hinges on the extent to which the attribute compared are relevant, which again rests upon rich, dense, thick descriptions of the case" (Kvale, 1996, p. 223). Another way to measuring the quality is the ability to link it to existing theory in a theoretically sounds manner. "The findings of qualitative research are to generalize to theory rather than to populations (...) it is the quality of the theoretical inferences that are made out of qualitative data that is crucial to the assessment of generalization" (Bryman & Bell, 2011, p. 409).

#### 2.3.6.1.3 Achieving dependability

Reliability relates to consistency in the research. Things that can have a negative impact are unintended leading questions, as well as the fact that different wordings of the same question can result in different answers (Kvale, Interviews, an introduction to qualitative research interviewing, 1996). To alleviate this, particular attention has been paid to avoid unintended leading questions, as well as the decision to make the interviews semi-structured, meaning that the consistency between what the interviewees are asked is strong.

#### 2.3.6.1.4 Achieving confirmability

In this thesis this will be done by firmly justifying any choice, where a bias could exist in order to show good faith.

### 2.3.7 Reporting

Quotes are inherently fragments of a greater conversation, as suggested by both Kvale (2007) and Bryman and Bell (2011). When quotes are used in this thesis, an effort will be made to present the context in which the quotes were made. This does not just give the reader a greater understanding, but also adds credibility to the findings. Contextualizing is especially central given that the interviews are conducted in Danish, and the quotes that are presented are translations made by this author. While correctness in the translations is strived for, some elements may be lost in translation, making contextualization even more important. Respondents' identity will not be revealed when presenting the information gathered.

## 2.4 Delimitation

This thesis researches the attitudes and motivations of a specific type of employee in a specific industry and specific country. Consequently the findings are not intended to be able to make conclusions about other types of employees in other industries or countries, but should however be able to inspire similar and further research in either this or similar fields.

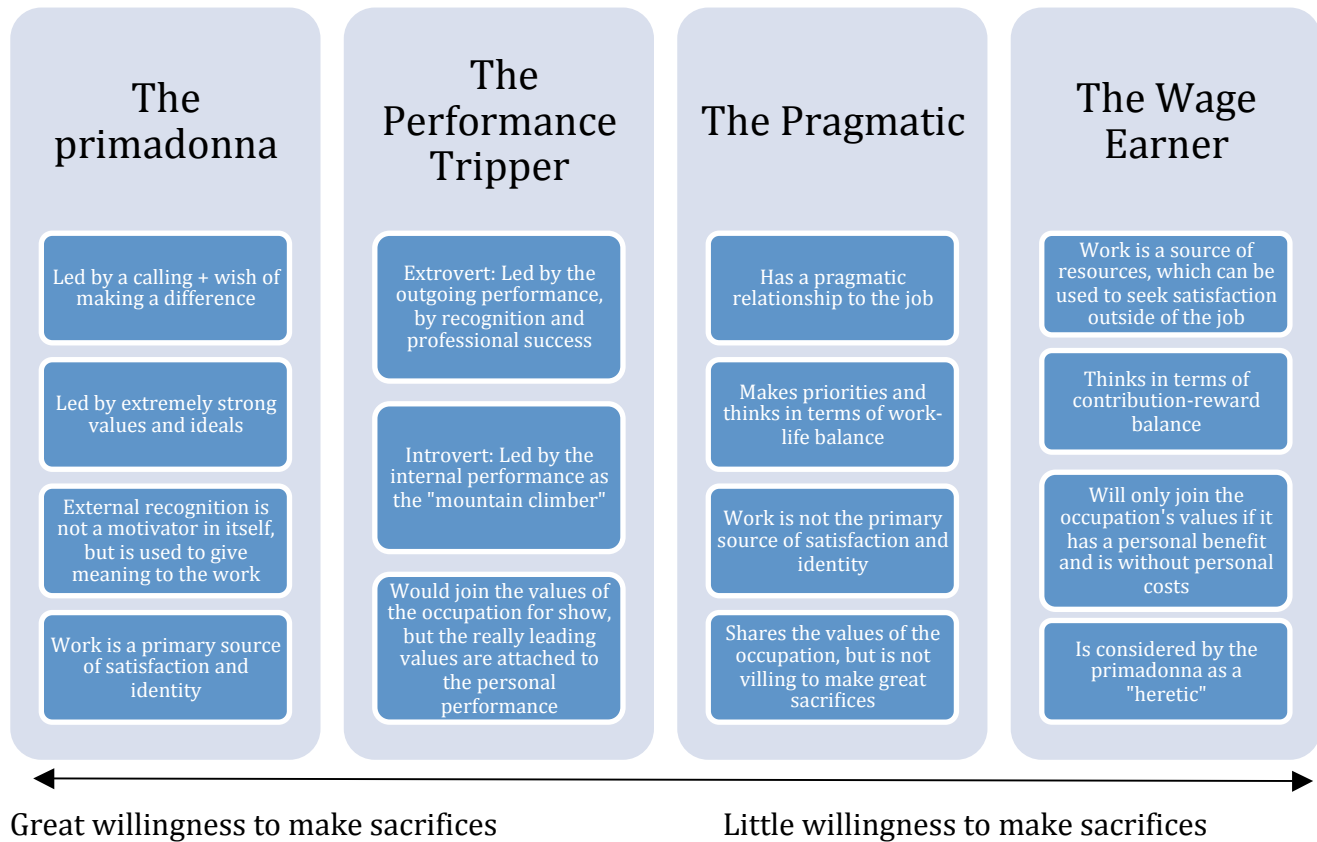
### 3 Theoretical direction

In order to answer the research question and to set up a theoretical framework of analysis, it is necessary to investigate existing theory related to the research question. Based on the research question and the understanding of it outlined in section 2.3.1, three central concepts have been identified, which will be used as the framework for analysing the findings: Employee identity, employer attraction, and employee retention. In the following chapter, theories related to these concepts will be presented in order to be used in the discussion.

#### 3.1 Employee identity

Classical theories on employee motivation are mostly based in the industrial society and, while they may still be able to explain modern working society, Hein (2009) points out that in the knowledge society there is a new type of worker: The highly specialized creative employee. What defines this type of worker is that the job requires academic knowledge or many years of training in the field, and that an employee without similar knowledge or training cannot substitute it. Furthermore, the work done by this type of employee is defined as the ability to think creatively and adapt to challenges and obstacles 'on the spot' due the training they have had. The author goes on to list different types of jobs that fit this description, including elite athletes.

Figure 1 shows the four archetypes for highly specialized creative employees. The archetypes are placed on scale of willingness to make sacrifices. This is to be understood as the amount of mental energy allocated to the job, as well as the willingness to fight for what you believe in at your job. It should be noted that the model describes the inner motivations of employees, so while a person might have the motivational profile of a primadonna, he or she might still act as a pragmatist. This shows a dynamism within the archetypes, but the author also notes how it can create frustration for the employee, if they feel the need to act in opposition to their motivational profile (Hein H. , 2009).



**Figure 2: The four archetypes for highly specialized creative employees. Personal translation based on (Hein H., 2009, p. 197)**

**The Primadonna** is led by a calling to make a difference for someone or something, which entails dedication and a sense of obligation to always do one's best, along with a drive to seek meaning. The primadonna will seek a meaningful job and in order to achieve this, will engage him or her fully into it. While not necessarily a workaholic, the job is very important to the primadonna, being a source of both joy of life, job satisfaction, identity and meaning of life. Consequently, professional and personal values will merge, and the philosophy of the primadonna is to live through the job, rather than just work to live. Three existential motivational factors drive the primadonna. 1) The Kick. It is associated with the search for meaning and occurs, when a special connection is made with the people they serve and creates a strong sense of happiness. Just the memory of the episode can bring a high level of motivation. 2) Flow. The

feeling when you are absorbed in solving a difficult task to the extent that you lose sense of time and space. The primadonna rarely experiences the feeling of flow outside of work and thus needs to work to experience the feeling, which motivates them. 3) Identity. When professional and personal values blend together, the job becomes a strong source of identification for the primadonna, who thrives when he or she has a strong identity. For primadonnas, it is important to be able to identify with the values and identity of the organisation (Hein H. H., 2009).

**The Performance Tripper** is, just like the primadonna, very much committed to his/her job. But while the primadonna's identity is created by making a difference for someone or something else, the performance tripper is working for him/herself and identity comes from being the best. The performance tripper can be separated into an extrovert and an introvert. The extrovert is driven by wanting to perform, be the best, and, most importantly, to be recognized as such. If others do not recognize the performance, it will not be considered as a success. The kick that comes from recognition of performance is an essential part of the performance tripper's construction of an identity as being one of the best. The introvert performance tripper places little value in the opinion on others. For him/her, performance is rewarding when challenges are overcome and problems are solved personally – it is a success, not because what it means to others, but because he or she did it – it is this experience that is meant by “mountain climber “ (Figure 2). For them, this work process is what creates a sense of flow, where they are completely focused on one task, and the kick comes from the ability to solve a difficult problem. The introvert performance tripper performs best when they are allowed autonomy and control over their own work (Hein H. H., 2009).

**The Pragmatic** cares about his/her job and wants to do a job that lives up to expectations, but more significantly there must be a balance between work and private life. Without time and energy for life outside of the work place the pragmatic will be stressed and will not perform. The pragmatic is in some ways similar to the primadonna, as the pragmatic usually also likes the idea of working for higher cause and will likely share the professional values of the primadonna. The main difference is that, as the name reveals, they are far more likely to compromise with professional standards. The pragmatic is also motivated by flow and kick, similarly to the

primadonna, but because the strength of these experiences are related to the engagement and investment in the job – something the pragmatic is not as likely to do – these experiences will not be as strong as for the primadonna. Just as the primadonna, the pragmatic desires a sense of identity, but for him/her, the identity is created through social relations in the work place rather than the values of the organisation. The pragmatic also cares a lot about experienced equity, and more so than for the primadonna and the performance tripper, it is important for the pragmatic that other people are not given a bigger reward for a similar level of effort (Hein H. H., 2009).

Finally, **the Wage Earner** is focused on maximizing pay, while minimizing effort. The wage earner will often be the person that knows the rules and contracts in detail in order to point out, why a certain task should not be done or why a break needs to be held at a certain time. Just like the pragmatic, the wage earner cares deeply about equity, and an experience of being under-rewarded is highly demotivational. While compliments and recognition does motivate the wage earner in part, the overshadowing motivational factor is earnings, but an employer will rarely see an effort from a wage earner surpassing what is explicitly agreed upon (Hein H. H., 2009).

Another way of considering employees is according to the level and primary focus of their engagement in relation to employment. Barrow and Mosley (2005) present the results of a survey which identifies four types of employees: **The ambassador (41 %)**, who is fully committed to the company and to their career, and whose commitment is driven by the ability to succeed and help the company succeed, and having strong confidence in the leadership. **The career oriented (20 %)** are people who place their career over the current job. Their commitment is driven by the opportunity to work with their key skills every day and to have an understanding of how their performances are judged. **The company oriented (8 %)** are employees, for whom the commitment to the company surpasses that of their own career. Their commitment is driven by the work place being fun and that there is sense of fairness in how employees are treated. Finally, **the ambivalent (31 %)** are employees who are committed to neither their current job nor their career and tend to be low skilled workers. The idea of not just segmenting based on demographics, but also on people's attitude towards their job and their

career, allows for even more ways to communicate in a manner that speaks to people's needs and motivations.

### 3.2 Employer attractiveness

Ewing (2006; p. 96) defines employer attractiveness as "the envisioned benefits that a potential employee sees in working for a specific organisation". This concept, and the definition thereof, is suited for this research, given that part of the aim is to uncover what makes an employee attractive within this target group.

Based on his research, Ewing (2006) presents five dimensions that together can be used to assess employer attractiveness (Table 2), which all describe different ways that a current or potential employee can be attracted to an employer.

<b>Table 2: Dimensions of attractiveness</b>	<b>Interest value</b>	<b>Social value</b>	<b>Economic value</b>	<b>Development value</b>	<b>Application value</b>
<b>Key features</b>	Exciting work environment, novel work practices, creativity appreciated	Fun work environment, good collegial relationships, team atmosphere	Salary, job security, and promotional opportunities.	Recognition of skills, self-worth, confidence, career enhancing experiences	Opportunities for employees to apply what they have learned.
Based on (Ewing, 2006, pp. 97-98)					

Another part of attracting employees is ensuring that your brand as an employer is positioned in a manner that attracts the desired segment of target employees. Two central dimensions of positioning are the points of parity and points of difference relative to the competitors. "Traditionally, the people responsible for positioning brands have concentrated on points of difference—the benefits that set each brand apart from the competition" (Keller, Tybout, & Sternthal, 2002, p. 3). Points of difference (POD) are the things, that the brand can offer that other brands cannot and by which it hopes to attract the target segment. What Keller, Tybout, & Sternthal (2002) argue is that while successful brands need POD, there is another dimension they need to consider to sustain the brand against competitor, which are points of parity (POP):

“There are always circumstances in which it’s necessary to “break even” with competing brands” (Keller, Tybout, & Sternthal, 2002, p. 3). Using the term ‘breaking even’ encapsulates exactly what POP is about. POP are the things you need to offer as a brand to even be able to compete with your competitors, and without ensuring your POP relative to the competitors, the brand will simply not appeal to the target group.

### **3.3 Employee retention**

Employer attractiveness and employee retention are closely related to each other. Even if an employer is successful at becoming an attractive employer, they also need to live up to that attractiveness once the employee is in the organisation. Employee turnover is expensive and to retain talented employees it is important that promises made are upheld (Andersen, Larsen, & Schmidt, 2002).

An area within human resource management related to the research is the alignment of expectations between employee and employer within the initial part of the employment, which is referred to as orientation. It is in this period that it will be uncovered, whether there is the so-called ‘person-organization fit’, that is, whether there is compatibility between the values of the individual and the organization. This fit is not just a pleasant benefit, but has been shown to have a direct relationship with short-term job-satisfaction and retention (Taylor, Doherty, & McGraw, 2008).

The reason for this is ‘the psychological contract’. This is a term used to describe the individual’s expectations of the employer and what they perceive is the employer’s expectations of the individual. If this contract is ‘breached’, i.e. the expectations are not met; this can lead to dissatisfaction, frustration and other negative impact on the individual's work behaviour. What employers can do to minimize this risk, is to ensure that it does not portray an inaccurate or misleading image of the organization's expectations of the employees. Having a person-organization fit is valuable to organizations, as operating in an environment in sync with one's own values is a more positive experience. Socialization plays an significant part in the person-



organization fit, as the newcomer is likely to have a better understanding of the organization, its values, and the informal and formal structures of the work place by being properly introduced to it by coworkers (Taylor, Doherty, & McGraw, 2008). A successful psychological contract breaks down the traditional confrontational relationship between employer and employee found in the industrial society, and moves from a trade of purely work for money, to also include personal development. The modern worker does not just expect a pay check, but also expects to acquire new skills and competences (Bason, Csonka, & Ejler, 2003). That a breach of the psychological contract can have a negative impact on work behaviour is particularly critical in sports. If the athlete is not motivated to perform, it has a big influence on the level of performance in a competition: "If they're competing against someone of nearly equal skill, it will not be ability that will determine the outcome. Rather, it will be the athlete who works the hardest, who doesn't give up, and who performs their best when it counts. In other words, the athlete who is most motivated to win" (Taylor J., 2009).

Three central traits of the employee within this new psychological contract are 1) cynicism, as employees seek to rather quit before getting fired. 2) Work is seen as a personal project, where it is important to realize one self and to try out different challenges, meaning job mobility is seen as a positive. 3) A non-linear perception of career, where the goal is not necessarily a traditional promotion, but to be challenged, develop and learn regardless of the place in the hierarchy (Bason, Csonka, & Ejler, 2003).

Related to the idea of a psychological contract is equity theory, as was touched upon in the section about Employee identity. Formulated by J.S. Adams in the 60s, Larsen (2006) describes how equity theory is related to the idea that employees must experience that there is balance between what they give to the job (in form of time, effort, engagement, etc.) and what they receive (salary, challenges, status, etc.). More importantly, the sense of equity is strongly influenced by social benchmarking. If an employee has the perception that the ratio between giving and receiving for others is different from their own, this creates a sense of unfairness and the theory predicts that people who feel underpaid or undervalued by their employer will

perform at a lower quality (Larsen, 2010).

#### **4 Danish professional handball**

Danish professional handball is divided into a men's system and women's system. Each system has a top league, where the winner is named the champion. The mens' top league (Herre Håndbold Ligaen) consists of 14 teams primarily based in western Denmark (Dansk Håndbold Forbund, 2014). The women's top league (Dame Håndbold Ligaen) is played by 12 teams and the teams are also primarily based in western Denmark (Dansk Håndbold Forbund, 2014).

The male national team players based in Denmark earned between 22.000 and 50.000 DKK per month net in 2014 (Paaske, 2014). There are no recent indicators of the salary level on the women's side, but Storm and Almlund (2006) concluded that men are better paid than women, and according to Rasmus Storm this is still the case (personal communication, May 27, 2014).

Players usually started playing handball at the age of 7, while playing at an elite level started at the age of 15. In 2006, the average age for signing the first professional contract was 18 (Storm & Almlund, 2006).

Storm & Almlund (2006) find in their research that wages have gone up in the same time period, meaning player are not dependant on civilian activities, such as work or education. Consequently, they are spending less time on these other activities. The authors note that this could pose a problem for their future civilian career. They also note that many clubs have unstable financial situations making the clubs, and consequently the employees, financially vulnerable. Even though the data collected in Storm and Almlund (2006) is almost 10 years old, Rasmus Storm confirms (personal communication, March 5, 2014) that while key number are in need of an update, the overall conclusions and assessment of the risks and potentials in Danish handball made by Almlund and himself are still relevant and can be used to understand the nature of Danish handball.

Financial instability is still an issue in Danish handball, with clubs going beyond their means financially with bankruptcies and large deficits as a consequence. This is attributed especially to

clubs being aimed towards athletic success rather than financial stability (Chor, 2012). Troels Troelsen, a sports economist says about the Danish handball industry: “Handball clubs are seen as businesses. They are not. They are chasing the top positions and only have a slight eye for the bottom line. That is similar to a company only chasing market shares. The ends do not meet (Chor, 2012, p. 16).”

## **5 Findings**

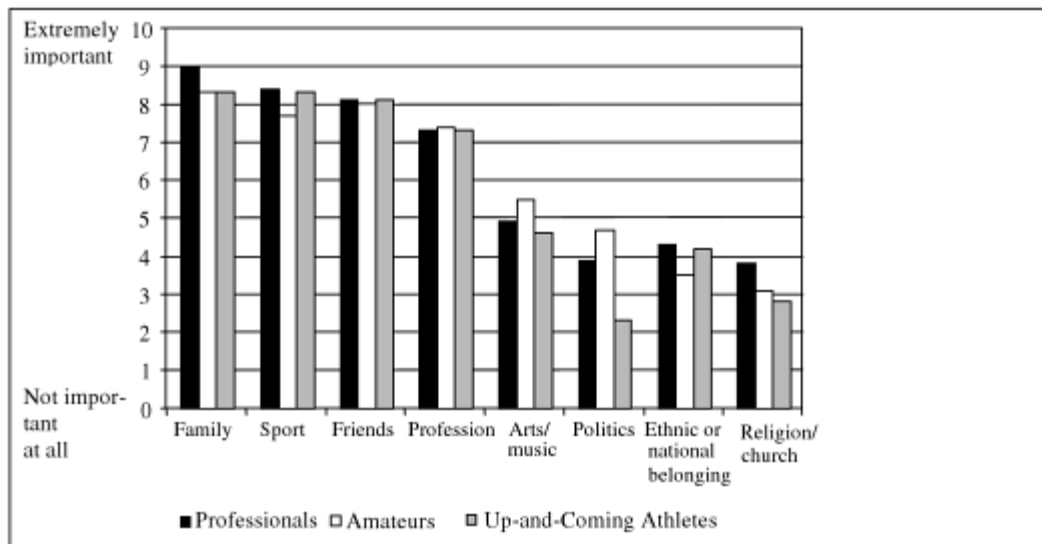
### **5.1 Research results**

In the following three sections, the findings are presented. Initially, a presentation will be made of previous research and information, which can be related to the topic of this thesis. This is done to build a foundation of knowledge on which the research stands. After this, a summary of the key findings of the expert interviews will be presented, as they do not just represent information and knowledge that has shaped the perspective on which the player interview have been conducted, but also contain knowledge that can be useful in the analysis itself.

#### **5.1.1 A search of the literature**

After going through internet and library resources for existing research and information, one initial conclusion is clear: Narrowly seen, no information is available in the public sphere about the attitudes and motivations of elite professional Danish handball players concerning their career. But also more broadly, it has been very difficult to find qualitative information about the attitudes and motivations of professional athletes in general. As such, the information gathered will be presented along with clear reservations about the applicability of the information.

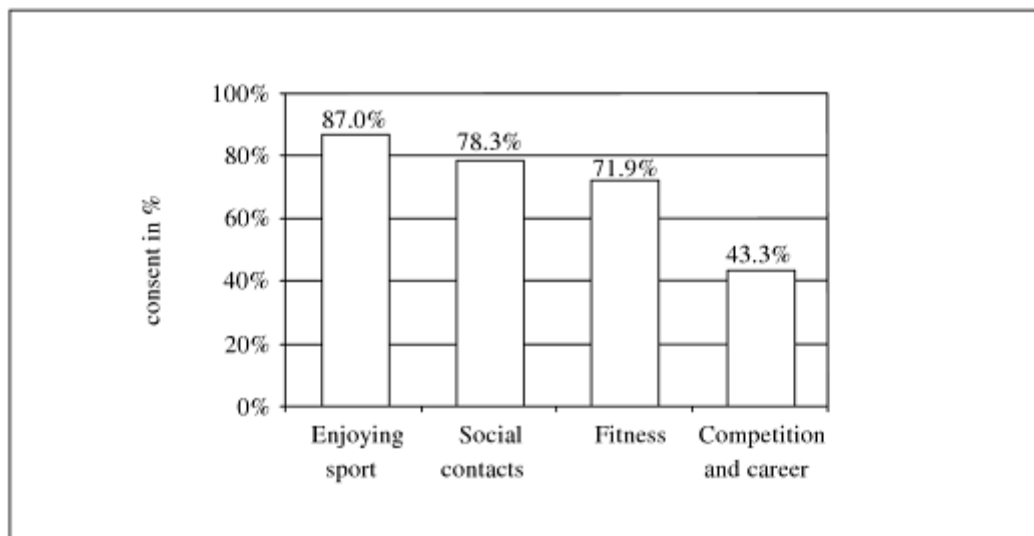
If the research question is broken into parts, the first part, which ask about the attitudes and motivations towards employment, deals with the players’ thoughts about themselves and their role as employees.



Significance of sport compared to other areas of life (n=1945)

**Figure 3 (Bergant, Hilscher, & Weiss, 2009)**

Figure 3 shows a survey of Austrian athletes, including handball players, showing the significance of sport compared to other areas in life. 814 professionals participated, showing that sport is the second most important area of the life only outranked by their families. The authors sum up that family, friends and sport are important to competitive athletes, with all other areas being subordinate. Thus athletic performance is observed as being a vital part of athlete's identity; however it is noted that professional athletes increasingly see their sport as a job, rather than a way of self-affirmation, as their careers progress. Figure 4 shows the motives for sport for the entire sample population, which included amateur and up-and-coming athletes, indicating that 'competition and career' is not an important motivational driver, however, it is noted in the text that for professional athletes this motive is the strongest. It is also observed that if one motive becomes dominant others become less relevant "if making money and career are the most relevant goals, then all other motives take a back seat." (Bergant, Hilscher, & Weiss, 2009, p. 159).



Sport motives of Austrian competitive athletes (n=1977)

**Figure 4 - (Bergant, Hilscher, & Weiss, 2009)**

In relation to what motivates professional athletes, in research based on two large unique data sets that cover 26 seasons in the North American National Basketball Association (NBA) and eight seasons in soccer, the German Bundesliga, substantial support for the idea that a relative income disadvantage is correlated with a decrease in individual performance was found. Furthermore, it is found that there are no sign that this trend is changing and, accordingly, employers must consider wage equity and motivation within the squad when building for success (Frey, Schaffner, Schmidt, & Torgler, 2013).

In Thuesen (2011), research is presented on the attitudes of Danes towards their ideal job. The attitudes are divided into three main categories: outer, inner, and social work values, with specific attitudes within each. Among the inner work values, it is especially significant to achieve something and to have an interesting job, more so than having a job that fits your skills. When it comes to the outer work values, a good salary and employment security is much more important than holidays, work hours and pressure at work. Social work values have a decreasing importance. Even though it is still very important to work with pleasant people, having a job, which is useful to society or prestigious, is not very important (Thuesen, 2011).

The second part of the research question, which asks about the attitudes and motivations towards employers, has a more extrovert focus, as it deals with the players' side of the relationship with employers.

In a research paper from 2010 on elite women's soccer, it was found that the primary motivations for changing teams are better training facilities and the opportunity to play at a higher level. A major point that reduces the relevance of these findings to this research is the fact that 73 % of elite female soccer players in Denmark are amateurs (Ottesen, Nielsen, & Brandt-Hansen, 2010) and as (Frey, Schaffner, Schmidt, & Torgler, 2013) pointed out, there are different motivations between professionals and amateurs. Because Danish handball has undergone a rapid professionalization since the early 1990s, this makes comparisons with elite female soccer less useful. According to Storm and Almund (2006), the number of professional handball players in Denmark rose from 84 in 1993 to 722 in 2005.

Employer branding is described as "the process of generating appeal, creating an identity, communicating that identity and ensuring that the identity remains authentic and true. It's about ensuring that your organization is known, respected and considered to be a great place to have a career and work" (Employer Branding Today, 2011) It continues to describe, how employer branding is about creating and communicating corporate culture vis-à-vis the desired target group of current and potential employees. Neuling (2011) is the only work uncovered which deals with employer branding specifically in the sports industry. It differentiates itself from the scope of this thesis by investigating employer branding from a management perspective rather than that of the employees. The analysis in Neuling (2011) is based upon four interviews of representatives of three different parts of the German sports industry: Two interviews with representatives of Bayer Leverkusen, an elite professional soccer club; one from the German Olympic Sports Confederation, and one from Adidas, one of the largest makers of sports apparel in world, which is based in Germany. The thesis describes how these three parts of the sports industry think about and utilize employer branding, and the findings are that the only part that actively works with it is Adidas, which is the part of the industry furthest away from the active

performance of elite sports. The others did acknowledge that aspects of employer branding where being uses, without this being a conscious choice. All experts saw employer branding as a tool that could have positive effects on their parts of the industry, especially those from Leverkusen and the German Olympic Sports Confederation, as their product is not specifically driven by a material good, but by services performed by people, which stresses the need for employees of a high quality. They did also stress that if employer-branding strategies were to be implemented, they had to consider the individual organisation, as they do not believe an employer branding strategy for the general sports industry would be applicable to all. One area pointed out is a clash of culture between employees with professional backgrounds and those with a background in the volunteer association of the organisation, and that an employer brand would need the ability to appeal to both. It must be noted that a separation is not made between athletic and administrative employees (Neuling, 2011).

The third and final part of the research question, what makes some employers more attractive than others, is closely related to the second part. This is because it asks how these attitudes and motivations towards employers come into play, when the players' are able to choose between employers.

Sclesinger and Nagel (2010) point out how sports give people the ability to make their hobby into a job, thus the industry can offer something more than just traditional motivational factors such as autonomy, variety, flexibility, and self-development. They also stress that in sports, monetary compensation is closely tied to the recognition of effort and as a symbol of success and importance to the organization and the team. As the strive for top performances continue in an increasingly professionalized sports, there is increasing attention towards team dynamics and motivation in professional sport, to optimize performance and minimize failure (Sclesinger and Nagel, 2010). Based on their own research, the authors identify four factors, which are relevant in order to create a culture in professional sports teams that contributes to successful performances:

1. Athletic success as a common goal - Only when all team members share a common vision of what success is and how to achieve it can top performances be achieved.
2. Personal relations - While mutual respect, open communication, a spirit of collaboration, and team spirit are important, practice sessions also require the players to see each other as opponents to push each other to better performances.
3. Hierarchies and casting of roles - Other than the formal hierarchy, where the head coach is on top, informal hierarchies, where the leading player functions as an extension of the head coach, has the authority to guide the team to success through an informal hierarchy, and can be relied on for guidance in high pressure situations. Due to the fact that sports teams have more players than will be utilized in games, long term success also depends on all team members understanding and being content with their role within the organization.
4. Monetary incentives - The authors point out that salary and compensation influence the acceptance of formal expectations and demands from the organization. Monetary incentives can help stimulate individual goals and motivations; however, large internal differences in compensation can also have a negative impact on the cohesion of the team.

### **5.1.2 Interviewing experts in the subject**

#### ***5.1.2.1 Summary of interview with a player advisor (PA)***

According to PA (Appendix 3), players in the category being researched do think about their professional handball career as a job and not just a hobby, although there is an appreciation of the fact that their hobby has become a job. Private-lives are influenced by work experiences, but for many it also works as a free space. Being a handball player is a big part of their identity, especially due to others framing them as such. In their everyday work-lives, the primary motivators are personal success, the drive to become better, and other people recognizing that success and effort. Motivation is personal, and if they cannot be combined, personal success is more important than that of the club. Achieving sporting success is also a big motivation, as achieving it justifies the sacrifices made to get it. PA believes that inequity can negatively



influence team chemistry, but elite players can only reach elite level if they are primarily motivated by own performance and are not demotivated by inequity. Support from the family is important as the nature of the job does not allow for a flexible work schedule, and the responsibility for work-life balance lies on the family. The size of the wage is very important and the major factor when considering whether to stay at the club or move to a new one, it is not a daily motivator. Other factors that influence decisions on employer choice are sporting success and geography, the latter especially if the player has a family to consider. In PA's experience other factors, such team chemistry, having grown up in the club, and being involved by the coach in the decision-making process are things that these players respond positively to, but all of these other factors are clearly secondary to wage. PA saw only clashes between family wishes and the geographical location of a team as something that reduces the wage's importance. Successful socialization is a mix of greeting new players with open arms, of challenging them to prove their worth on the team, and thus gain the trust of the others.

#### **5.1.2.2 Summary of interview with a club executive (CE)**

According to CE (Appendix 4), there is a tendency that handball is more and more considered a job due to the increased professionalization of the sport. Work influences private life due to the passion involved with the job and the constant evaluation that comes from results, and handball is their identity because it is also their hobby. Players put their own career first, but are aware that they need the club to succeed, and because it is both a hobby and a passion, players are ready to do what it takes to succeed. What motivates players is getting better and evolving as athletes, and money is not a daily motivation. One of the biggest motivations is recognition, and the people who matter are the coach and the teammates. Other motivations are success and an important role. Ambitions are good, but need to be realistic. CE acknowledges that jealousy can exist in a team, but also believes that maximum motivation can only come from the players motivating each other and not from management. Secondly, career is increasingly important and uncertainty about this is a stress factor, and having peace of mind about this helps daily motivation. CE believes that family is important, but not more so than in other jobs. Money makes a club attractive when offered a contract, but also peace of mind in terms of the financial stability of the club and the players' careers. Players will compromise with wage to get peace of mind, but

not by much. If everything else is sorted out, the biggest thing that can make a player switch is the sporting perspective. If players at this level are to move away from a good situation it requires either a large pay increase or the chance for sporting success. Geography matters a lot, especially in relation with educational options, and if a club is in a geographically poor location, some players will not even negotiate regardless of salary. For the switch to be successful, alignment of expectations is vital. This also applies within the squad, where respect for differences is important. Finally, authenticity in the interaction between players and between clubs and players is important for motivation. Recognition does not work if it is not seen as sincere.

### **5.1.2.3 Summary of expert interviews**

Both experts see the players treat handball increasingly as a job, rather than a hobby. However, it is seen as a privilege that hobby and job can be combined. PA places more importance on both family and wages than CE, but both agree that wages are not a motivator in the daily life, unlike recognition from their coach and their teammates. Both also agree that possibility for sporting success and development is something that can motivate a player, both daily, but also to either stay or leave depending on the situation. When making a career decision, PA believes wages to be the most important while CE places a bigger emphasis on peace of mind, both financially and sportingly. Both PA and CE agree that geography plays a big role for attractiveness, but while PA emphasizes family, CE mentions education. PA and CE mention different things for successful socialization, with PA mentioning an open-armed approach, where CE emphasizes mutual respect.

### **5.1.3 Conducting interviews – summaries of meaning condensations**

#### **5.1.3.1 Player 1 - Born 1987, male**

Handball does not feel like a job for Player 1 (Appendix 5), except when he is doing things that are not motivating. It is more a hobby than a job, and because of that the up and down periods at work are taken home. Player 1's own career is more important than the club's. Handball is a big part of his identity, especially because others see him in that way. At work, he does as he is told,

but would do more than required, if he thinks it is needed. His motivation comes from the kicks and experiences he can get from handball. He aspires to be better, have success, and earn more money. Money matters because the handball career cannot last forever, and it forces him to give up other things, but it is not a daily motivator. Performance-reward equity is important, but inequity is not a demotivation. Rather inequity motivates to perform more. Recognition means a lot, especially when it comes from the coach and teammates. Being the best and striving for perfection is a motivator for him and he measures himself both against others and himself. Having an important role is significant for his motivation as that means being one of the best, being listened to, having authority and responsibility. A guiding and explaining coach, rather than a directing coach, is more motivating for him, and he likes to be included in decision-making. The balance between handball and private life is important. Handball is a big part of his life, so he prefers to limit how big a part it has outside of his job. Having a girlfriend, who also plays handball professionally, helps with understanding. Outside of handball family, friends, and education are important. Due to the nature of the job, handball has to be the most important, but when possible, he prioritizes the others. It is very central that the club lives up to promises and expectations. He sees it as a contract. The role on the team is significant in terms of what makes a new club attractive, but also the level of the club, salary, and the financial stability of the club. Financial instability makes clubs very unattractive, while ambition is very attractive. If he is in a poor current situation, role and playing time is more important at a new club, but currently, development and role is more important than money. This might change at later stage of the career. For Player 1, money means peace of mind and is also a kind of recognition. He is not currently taking an education, but if he were, he would prioritize club flexibility. Most significant things that makes a club attractive when it offers him a contract is the role they offer, the ambition they show, and the salary they offer. He would switch clubs to get new experiences, more success, and a bigger salary. If he is to stay at a club, it is important that it is evolving, that there are ambitions, and that there is still an important role with matching salary. Salary should match the quality of the player. When at a new club, it is central that the club helps with the practical things and is proactive about helping. Within the squad, it is important that colleagues respect that you are new and that he himself is open towards new teammates.

### **5.1.3.2 Player 2 - Born 1986, male**

For Player 2 (Appendix 6), handball is fun and a hobby, but the limitations it puts on life reminds him that it is also a job. Right now, he plays because it is fun and does not think a lot about the money daily, so it is more a hobby. Also, he has a very understanding girlfriend and family, making it easier to balance career and private life. Player 2 believes that players must think about themselves in the right situations, and that clubs are doing the same why his own career is more important. Handball is not a big part of his identity. He focuses on his family and his network where he is not a handball player. He sees himself as a hard-working person and does what it takes to succeed, and what motivates him is improvement and becoming better. Recognition from the ones near to him, his girlfriend as his coach, is important. He does not care what some guy on the street says. He dislikes when non-performers are rewarded, as it creates a bad culture, and when he sees people being rewarded without effort, it motivates him to confront the non-performers. He is motivated by a big role and wants to be one of the best. The size of the salary matters, but he would compromise with wage demands for a bigger chance for success and as soon as the contract is signed, he does not think about salary. It is important for him that the coach has good people skills and does not just direct, but also guides and listens to players and recognizes that they might have something to offer. It is very central for him to have time for other things than handball, as he would go crazy if it was only handball all the time. He also points out, how the daily life at the club will not be good if things are not mostly as they were promised. This is also linked to a need to be satisfied to perform, and he thinks that he would not be satisfied if reality was not as expected and as promised, and it would likely influence motivation. Biggest motivators are work place satisfaction, a feeling of professionalism, and development. Outside of handball, family and friends are the most important. They matter a lot to him. Early in his career, he prioritized getting an education so he could focus on handball now. Right now things work well together, but if handball and private life collided, he would choose to change his career. The size of the salary matters, but mostly because it shows ambition. The club also needs to be professional, and he wants the entire set-up to be at a high level. He has an idea of his own worth, and if the clubs suggests a wage that is a lot lower, that for him is a sign of lack of recognition of what he can offer. He wants the club to understand that there is a life beyond

handball and makes sure to include that in the contract. What makes a new club attractive is money, the ambition of the club, and that it has a good organisation. It makes a club unattractive if it does not reward players who perform, especially those who have grown up at the club. He wants to develop as a player, so he would accept a little less to get more playing time and a big role. Earlier, while studying, he compromised with money to get education sorted. Now he is ready to take more chances. What drives him to stay or go is a matter of ambition. He wants to develop as a player and win titles, and wants to be at a club that have the same ambitions. Within Denmark, he is quite flexible geographically, but as his girlfriend and family are important, if she said no to a place, he would reject the club. To make a successful switch, it is important that promises are kept, and he thinks openness and humility are important for both himself and teammates at a new club, and to give everyone a chance in spite of bad impressions from games against each other.

#### **5.1.3.3 Player 3 - Born 1988, female**

Player 3 (Appendix 7) feels privileged to work with something that is basically just fun for her. Wins or losses influence her a lot, but to a lesser degree as she is getting older. Having an identity outside of the sport helps. The longer time she has been a professional, the more she thinks about her career as a job. She is very team oriented and needs the team to succeed to be happy - daily. She will always do what she feels is right as an individual. While happy at her current club, there is no special emotional attachment. Playing handball is a big part of her identity, because it has influenced her life a lot, as to where to live, and how much she can see her family. She believes you cannot reach the top, if you only do what is asked; you need to do more. What motivates her is success, getting victories, and doing so on a great team. Recognition is important, because of all the time put into the job. Player 3 gets annoyed and demotivated, when teammates get recognition without effort, but to a lesser extent with age. The most important recognition comes from teammates, the coach, and family. The press and others, who rarely see her work, are not important. With age and increased professionalization, it is easier to ignore irrelevant critique. Having a big role is recognition of the work she has done throughout her career. She is happy that handball can pay her bills, but does not think about her income at practice and during games. For her, a coach should recognize a job well done and explain how to improve - communication is key.

She does not need to be included in all discussions on strategy and tactics, but it is important that if she says something then it is considered. Part of having a big role is being heard. She is motivated by feeling comfortable at a club. With age, it becomes increasingly important to be a whole person, where handball is not the only thing in her life – starting an education was an important part of that. She expects she would lack motivation, if reality was not as expected or promised after a move to a new club. Her biggest daily motivators are acceptance, fun and winning. The most important things outside of handball are her boyfriend, family and getting an education, so she has options when the handball career is over. Handball is important in the short term, but it is only a job. While being strongly committed, it is not more important than other things. She accepts that it is a premise of playing professional handball that the sport has to come first. While the pay has to be right, it is very central that she gets an important role and that the club believes in her ability. During contract talks, it was significant for her to get the club's approval of her studying. While she would want as much money as possible, the main goal is to be able to live comfortably. When considering a club and a contract, it is important that there is room to also thrive in her personal life. What makes a new club attractive is faith in her ability, an important role and that the team is playing for top positions. The only thing that could motivate her to leave would be to take a step down in her career and move back to her hometown and family, and have a stronger focus on her studies. What motivates her to stay is a very good situation, where she has a good coach, a good role and can combine it with studies. Geography matters, as she would only move if it was to her own hometown or that of her boyfriend. If she moved, it would be a decision based on her private life rather than her handball career. She puts emphasis on the player's role in making a switch successful. The club should sort it out, so the player can focus on playing handball. The player should be extra focused to show that there is commitment, while the teammates need to be open and welcoming, especially if the new player does not have a network in the city. It is important for the player to participate in social events in the beginning.

#### **5.1.3.4 Player 4 - Born 1984, male**

At its essence, Player 4 still considers handball a game, but increased professionalization has reduced this factor, as professional behaviour is more necessary. For Player 4, personal life and

athletic success is closely related. He explains how poor performances and lacking motivation created a vicious cycle at a previous club, while at his current club, he is experiencing the opposite. He hopes that personal and club success can be combined as collective success can motivate a bit, even though he has not performed well himself. It is significant for him at this stage to be playing and to have responsibility on the team, so he would not accept a minimal role to help the club. Handball is a big part of his identity. This is based on how others perceive him, but also because this job forces him to be mobile and move around. During games, he gives everything he can, whereas in training his actions are more aligned with expectations. He is very motivated by what he finds fun and interesting, and is very emotionally influenced by what happens on and off the field, and is thus demotivated by having a marginal role. Recognition and approval from his coach and teammates motivates him to perform, while that from fans does not matter much for motivation. It partly influences his motivation when teammates do not perform as much as expected, especially if it is a player he has high expectation for. If that is not the case it does not influence it much. When the team has sporting success, it has a big impact on increasing motivation further, while extended periods of poor personal performance influences motivation negatively. Money matters, but at this point he places a bigger emphasis on family life, and it has no influence on daily motivation. Salaries usually come with increased responsibility both on the team, but also towards sponsors. Player 4 is motivated by a coach that allows players to use their creativity and listens to them. He explains how poor man-management from a previous coach was a big part of lacking performance. At the current stage of his career, it is very important for him, to be a place where the family is happy and he can pursue an education. For Player 4, it is very important that reality lives up to promises after changing clubs and explains how at a former club, this was not the case and how this was very demotivating. His biggest motivations are to have a good family life, which helps him perform, and a good training environment with happiness and positivity. Handball is important to him, but it is also very important that family and education can thrive. If either does not work, it influences the others. He accepts that the life of a professional athlete means saying no to a lot of things. For his private life to work, it is important that his girlfriend also understands and accepts this. All things equal, money matters most. But he does not want to play for a coach with a leadership style that does

not motivate him. He wants to be at a club, where he has the space to be a father and a student as well. Money is important and if the salary is “insanely” high, he could be able to accept other shortcomings, such as geography. What motivates him to stay is continuity and evolving with a successful and ambitious team. What would motivate him to leave is not feeling comfortable/being unsuccessful at the club or if his girlfriend is not comfortable in the area. It is very important that the club does things to make both the player and the family welcome, outside the club and on the team. Player 4 sees it as very important to come with a proactive attitude socially towards his new teammates, and to show that the club made the right choice in bringing him in. He thinks it is important that also the new team members take an active approach to welcoming new players.

#### **5.1.3.5 Player 5 - Born 1988, female**

Player 5 (Appendix 9) is very happy to be able to make a living doing something she dreamt of as a child. She knows it is a job, but it feels like a hobby. She also needs comfort to perform and poor performances are brought home. Handball is a big part of her identity, but she values doing other things, such as taking an education, so it is not the only part. It is important for her to develop as a player and as such, she would place her own success over that of the club. She is very motivated by improvement and optimization, but also about being happy with what she does, and she will do what it takes to be better and to succeed. She appreciates the culture on her current team, where it is possible to talk to each other if she sees lack of effort, and fears it would affect the team negatively if there was not that kind of open culture. Recognition and open communication is important to her, but it is primarily the recognition from teammates, coaches and family, which she values. She does not rate the recognition of fans and media highly. Having a big role motivates her, because she likes the trust and faith that it shows her. She does not think about salary daily, but it matters that she can make a living of it. Further, she does not care about what others on the team earn. It motivates her a lot when the coach allows her to come with input and express her opinions. It is very important to her, to be able to do other things than handball. Time to also be a student and a family person motivates her. Family and friends are important because they are the people that know her outside of handball. She enjoys having the freedom to enjoy those. On the one hand, handball is very important, but not as much as other things. She accepts



the inflexibility and odd working hours of the job as a lifestyle and makes the most of it. What makes a club attractive is very much related to handball: Players, the coach, the plans and ambitions for the club and for the player. Salary matters, but other issues, including geography, need to match too and a high salary would not make her compromise. She believes in being a whole person and that the club should allow the players to be so. She would be very sad and disappointed if reality at new club is not as expected. To leave would be for a new role, an exciting project and new challenges. To stay requires continued well-being, and development and challenges for the team. It is important that there is a culture for wanting to improve on all parameters. When changing clubs, she stresses that the club must live up to the promises made, while both herself and the new teammates must show openness to each other.

#### **5.1.3.6 Player 6 - Born 1984, female**

For player 6, the realisation that handball is a job has come/increased with age and the rate of club bankruptcies. She wants the club to be successful, but is also aware that she needs to be happy herself in order to perform, and thus places herself before the club. Handball is a big part of her identity and she will whatever it takes to succeed, but with age she wants to prove herself as more than a handball player. Her primary motivation is that she loves handball and wants to improve as a player and be part of great project. She does not like it if players are rewarded without performing, as reward without performance demotivates her. Recognition motivates her, and that from coaches and those near to her matters most. Growing older, she wants a role where she can pass on the experience she has. She has not had a job or education simultaneously with handball so the size of the salary matters. She gets a small salary, so performance bonuses motivate her. She wants a coach that is focused on motivating and developing the players to be better. Having an important role means being a leader and having the ability to guide the team. It is important for her that the coach uses her experience as input. Handball has always come first, but family is prioritized when possible. It is a big demotivational factor if things are not as promised, and it takes good teammates to regain motivation. Her biggest motivations are development, that she does something she loves, and the money she earns. Family, husband and friends, and having something outside of handball are very important. Because she never studied, it was never difficult to balance private life and handball. What makes a new club attractive to her

are the project, the culture at the team, and most importantly that it puts her in position to play on the national team. At this stage in her career, salary matters less, and her husband's career is also a big factor in her own career decisions. In her most recent contract, other things mattered more than money, which was more important earlier, but even then sporting development and getting on the national team was, and still is, most important. She thinks club flexibility towards players and their private life is good, but if it shows too much flexibility, it is a sign of unprofessionalism. The club's attitude towards the balance between handball, family and other things in the private life is not significant. What makes a club attractive is that the offer works for her and her husband as a couple, that she can develop and continue to get on the national team, and that she is able to contribute with something new. Whether or not she is motivated to stay or go, is dependant on if she thrives and can see a development in the right direction and that she can achieve something. Consideration of her husband makes changing clubs less likely. Even though she is less likely to change, lack of respectful treatment would make her leave. She would be a lot more geographically flexible had she been single. Only an offer that increased the total of her and her husband salaries would make her consider a change. When moving to a new club it is very important that the club is helpful with relocation, and Player 6 thinks that it is important that both herself and her new team members make an active effort to socialize to make sure that the new team member feels welcome.

## 6 Analysis

### 6.1 Reflections on the interview process and the findings

As pointed out in section 2.3.6.1.3, what can negatively affect the reliability of qualitative data based on interviews are unintended leading questions and that different wordings of the same question can result in different answers. In hindsight not enough attention was paid to especially the last part, but given that the consistency and similarity of responses, it is judged to not have affected the findings negatively.

## 6.2 Player 1

### 6.2.1 Theoretical analysis

Player 1's attitude towards being a professional handball player is that mostly it does not feel like a job, and he finds it funny that he is being paid for something he wants to do so badly anyway. Since it is also a big part of his identity and he is ready to do more than required in order to succeed, this makes him very similar to both the primadonna and the performance tripper archetypes and very unlike the wage earner. Just like the primadonna and the performance tripper, work is the primary source of satisfaction and identity, which became especially clear when he was asked about the influence of athletic performance on the private life: "It probably has big influence. Right now I am injured and I can feel. I am missing something" (Appendix 5). This is supported as he goes on to explain how his identity is shaped by him being a handball player as, everywhere he goes, even at home with his family, he is seen very much as the handball player. However, there is a certain trait about Player 1 that is better matched by the pragmatic or the wage earner: When he is not playing games or training, he really does not want to think about handball: "When I am off-duty, I really want to just be off-duty. That is. I do not want to talk too much about handball. Come back home and my dad starts squabbling about how I have played and such. I would rather not do that, because I just talked to 20 different people about that at the sports centre" (Appendix 5). While understanding that playing professional does make special demands on the time and availability of Player 1, which he accepts, he does prioritize his private life highly as much as he can.

Since that which motivate Player 1 are the kicks and experiences he can get from handball and that he aspires to be better, have success, and earn more money, this makes him more similar to the performance tripper than the primadonna. His motivation to perform comes from a desire for personal success rather than to make a difference for someone else: "Well I just think I would rather, that is, I would rather have success than the club" (Appendix 5). Recognition from his coach and teammates for his performances are important to Player 1, making him fit both the primadonna and the extrovert performance tripper who both thrive on recognition. He also has a strong inner drive to succeed, which would make him more similar to the introvert performance

tripper. Eventually he is mostly an extrovert performance tripper, because the motivation he takes from getting an important role on the team or a high salary is because these are also ways for the team to recognize his skills and performances (Appendix 5).

In the categories of employees identified by Barrow & Mosley (2005), Player 1 is similar to the career oriented. Player 1 is not only enjoying working with something he enjoys doing, but is also motivated by having an important role and having authority: “An important role that is, that people are listening to me, when I say something and that I have some authority. Well, and that people are giving me responsibility. I am also good at taking it myself, that they like trust I can also do it well or do it well when it intensifies” (Appendix 5).

Furthermore, he is motivated by a coach that explains, motivates, and listens to him, when he has something say, giving a better understanding of how his performance is judged, as is the case with a career oriented employee. Being career oriented also matches how Bason, Csonka, & Ejler (2003) describe the modern worker being more cynical about the career, and the job being a form of self-realization.

Considering the dimensions of attractiveness presented by Ewing (2006), Player is mostly attracted by economic value and development value. This is based on what he places as the three most important things for making a club attractive: “Well it is the role on the team. Whether I can see myself getting an important role. And then it is. Well. In my case it would have to be a better club than the one I was at before and that I hope will only go in one direction afterwards. And then it is economy, both my own, what I like get from the club, but it has also been very important to me that the club is financially stable, so I know you get paid every month” (Appendix 5). Both the ambition of the club and having an important role is related to development value. By playing and having an important role for a club that is ambitious and wants to achieve something, this will give him the career enhancing experiences that can help him achieve the personal success motivating him. How much he gets paid by a club that is financially stable is related to economic value as it covers the salary he gets and whether there is the job security he expects. What decides whether Player 1 is motivated to stay at a club or move to a new one, is based on similar values, though going to a club abroad would appeal to interest value through new and interesting

ways of working: “Well, new challenges, for a new club that is. A new culture perhaps, if it is abroad. A new language, and like starting from the scratch. A bigger club, Champions League, finals, more pay” (Appendix 5).

When it comes to retention, the psychological contract is also important for Player 1. When asked about whether it is important that reality matches expectation and what was promised, he even uses a similar expression: “It is more or less a contract you have entered into. That I think is important, that in general, if something has been said, then it should be done. So it is important” (Appendix 5). When it comes to the socialization process when starting at a new club, Player 1 finds it important that both his teammates and himself make a special effort out of getting to know each other to make sure he blends into the team. From the clubs’ side he expects them to be proactive about helping him settle in.

When it comes to equity, it is important to Player 1 that he is rewarded according to what he gives to the job. Here, he specifically point to the consequences playing professional handball has on his private life: “I am also of the opinion, that my handball career is limited, it is, and I set aside a lot of other things, so, so I would like to get as much money out of this as at all possible” (Appendix 5). He also think that there is balance between reward and contribution on the team, but if he sees a teammate who, in his eyes, is not contributing as much as he is rewarded, is it not a demotivation for Player 1, but motivates him to perform even better.

### 6.2.2 Part conclusion

When it comes to describing Player 1 and the attitudes and motivation he has in relation to his career, it can mostly be boiled down to one word: Success. He is, first and foremost, a handball player, both in terms of identity and when it comes to motivation. He wants to win games, become a better player, and win titles, and he will do all it takes to achieve it. Along with these ambitions, there is a certain level of individualism at play as well. If he is forced to choose, his own career matters more than his club does, and he is motivated by a club where he has authority and is being listened to. Given how much his identity is based on handball, how committed he is to succeed, and how he thrives on recognition, Player 1 is best described as a performance tripper, which is also shown by him being a career oriented employee. However, it

should be noted that like the pragmatic, his family life is very important to him and he wants to limit handball in his free time. What makes a club attractive to him is also very much about developmental value as it is important for him to be an important player on a successful team, but also economic value, as he values both a high salary and the job stability that comes from financial stability. Both developmental value and economic value can be linked to him being an extrovert performance tripper, as both are ways of the club to recognize his skills. After having moved to a new club, Player 1 stresses the importance of the club not breaching the psychological contract by failing to live up to his expectations and the promises made to him. He also expects that everyone – the club, his teammates and himself – to take an active approach to socialization and integration into the organization. This is part of ensuring the positive experience that is part ensuring person-organization fit. It is important for Player 1 that there is equity between performance and reward, though he is not demotivated by non-performers who are still rewarded.

### 6.3 Player 2

#### 6.3.1 Theoretical analysis

Player 2 enjoys his job and it is motivating for him that he is living out dreams he had since he was a boy. But he is also very much aware of the downside of being a handball player: "So there are other costs for us there, and it, it takes some liberty away from us at the moments when our partners and families might have time for us" (Appendix 6). Combined with the fact that being a handball player is not a big part of his identity, because he has a strong network outside of handball and enjoys just being a family man, this makes him very similar to the pragmatic archetype. His awareness of the downsides of the job suggests a pragmatic approach to the job and the balance between family and job is important: "If everything had to be about handball all the time, I would go crazy. You also need to come home and wind down, and be with the family" (Appendix 5). In the archetype, the pragmatic is not very willing to make sacrifices, which seemingly would contradict Player 2's own description of his job, but he also points out that he is in a good situation now, where his sacrifices are limited: "As it happens, it is working really well with my private life, my girlfriend, all that, family, friends. It works really well with the handball,

but it is clear, that if there was something that did not work, then it would be the handball I would scale back” (Appendix 6).

Player 2 identifies work place satisfaction, professionalism and development as the three most important motivational factors for him (Appendix 6). That these are his primary motivators further supports that he is best described as a pragmatic. Work place satisfaction and a dislike of social hierarchies. His statement that “there should not be a hierarchy, that is between the young and the old and how big roles you have” (Appendix 6) fits the pragmatic’s emphasis on social relations in the workplace. Just like the pragmatic, Player 2 also strongly dislikes when people are rewarded without effort and it motivates him to confront the non-performers. That he places work place satisfaction and professionalism over development is also in alignment with the pragmatic. The pragmatic also cares about her/his job, but the other things are more prominent.

However he is also similar to the performance tripper with traits of both the introvert and extrovert type. On one hand, he has a strong internal drive: “So it is some of that, that I can see there is progress and that I can be better, that motivates me a lot” (Appendix 6), but on the other hand, recognition also matters a lot to him: “So it does mean a lot, that especially the closest to you, for example my girlfriend at home and my coach and things like that. At some level, I do not care if there is someone downtown saying good job or others that might not be close to, what opinions they have. It is important to me, like to get recognition of those nearest. Coach, team members, girlfriend at home. It is the be-all and end-all, also because you can be very mentally strong, but you still need other’s recognition” (Appendix 6). Both when his motivation comes from himself and others, he is a hard-working person and does what it takes: “So I am someone who goes in 100 %, wholeheartedly in an effort, because the day I do not do that anymore, I will quit handball, because I do not want to subject myself or my teammates to that” (Appendix 6).

Another area, where Player 2 is similar to the performance tripper, is his emphasis on his own career and success rather than that of his club. While the two things are not always in conflict, he puts himself first: “You do not see a lot of people advance, just by being nice personalities and mostly thinking about others, that is, many of those who advance, it is obviously because they thought about themselves in the right situations. To evaluate where it is best for you, where is it

best for me to play and stuff like that, and you have to think about that the clubs think like that as well” (Appendix 6).

These attitudes towards his career and his employer also makes Player 2 career oriented in Barrow & Mosley’s (2005) employee categories. This further supported by his motivation to work with his skills to become the best and to have an important role on the team. The type of management style that he prefers also fits the career oriented. It is important for Player 2 that the coach has good people skills and not just directs, but also guides and listens to players and recognizes that they might have something to offer (Appendix 6). Bason, Csonka, & Ejler (2003) describe how modern workers are more cynical about career and more individualistic and this matches Player 2’s belief that players must primarily think about themselves in the right situations, because clubs are doing the same and therefore his own career is more important than the club (Appendix 6).

When it comes to what make a club attractive, the dimensions Player 2 focusses on are economic value and development value: “Just because I think the other things are in order, then it is clear the economy ranks first to start with right? And then it is development, at that I can see the team wants something, team members, coaches want something. That is what I see coming second” (Appendix 6). The economic value is based upon his emphasis on pay, but also on job-security “When I play handball, I should not run around and think about all sorts of other stuff, like is the salary coming on time?” (Appendix 6). His emphasis on salary is not just based on economic value, but also on development value: “It is not just what I can get, but also more that, that they can attract players from the highest level, that means we will have a great team” (Appendix 6). It is also based on desire for the club to recognize his skills: “If they just undercut me in terms of what I think my market value it was, then I would also think that it was unprofessional of them” (Appendix 6). His development value dimension comes from not just the things already mentioned which were tied to economic value, but also the athletic dimension. He wants to be a good player on a successful and ambitious team, and to some extent he is also ready to compromise with his economic demands to achieve that: “Perhaps I would rather play for a better team and have a bigger chance of winning something and perhaps forgo a some salary, but



I would still like to get the highest possible salary I can get” (Appendix 6). He does mention a third thing “all the other fundamentals, good organization, that comes third” (Appendix 6), but due to the breadth of the reply this does not fit into the dimension of attractiveness, but within this, respect for family and private life from the club is included. Another dimension of attractiveness is geography, but he is quite flexible on that variable, unless his girlfriend vetoes, because, as noted earlier, his family is very important to him, so it is important for him that the family is also happy (Appendix 6).

If the reality at a new club does not live up to expectations and promises, this is very problematic for Player 2: “If you are going to thrive somewhere, then you would like it to be in the way, the premises you were promised” (Appendix 6) and adds that it could very likely influence his motivation if there was a big violation of the psychological contract. This is also part of the socialization process. Trust is important to him, so to make a successful switch to a new club it is important that promises are kept. Personally, he believes that being humble and giving everyone a chance is key, even though he has a bad impression of them, and he expects the same from his new teammates (Appendix 6).

That there is a balance between performance and reward is important to Player 2. He has seen other players playing for their childhood club being undervalued financially compared to the players brought in, in spite of them having given a lot to the club and he dislikes that development (Appendix 6). As noted earlier, he also feels disrespected if a club offers him a salary that he believes to be well below his perceived value and gets a negative attitude towards that club. He dislikes when non-performers are rewarded, as it creates a losing culture on the team and it questions whether the club is the right place to be, but it will also motivate him to confront the non-performers: “You are not stronger than the weakest link and if others go in and still recognize what has been done and reward that and I do not think it is good enough, then I will also tell them and I do not want to be on a team, where it is like that” (Appendix 6).

### 6.3.2 Part conclusion

Player 2's attitudes to his career are very similar to that of the pragmatic. Handball is not his primary source of identity and satisfaction, and should his family life and his job collide he would

not hesitate to give compromise with his career. What motivates him is similar to both the pragmatic and the performance tripper. The pragmatic in him is influenced by social relations in the work place and the sense of professionalism at the club; while the performance tripper in him has a strong ambition to succeed, motivated both by an inner drive and recognition from others. Being a pragmatic is also linked to him being a career oriented employee, whose focus is on his own career and development. Being a pragmatic also matches what attracts him to a club as both economic value and developmental value are tied together. A good salary and job security is important, but is not just a matter of money but also recognition of his skills and performances. At the same time he would also be ready to compromise with his economic demands a bit if the right possibility came from a developmental value perspective. If the psychological contract is breached it is likely to influence Player 2's motivation because he places a high value on trust. The other important part of the socialization process for Player 2 is that everyone in the squad has a positive attitude towards each other. Equity is very important to Player 2 and he is very negative towards clubs not rewarding performers good enough, especially if they have grown up at the club. Rewarding non-performers does not influence his motivation, but it does make him question his commitment to the club.

## 6.4 Player 3

### 6.4.1 Theoretical analysis

Player 3 feels privileged to work with something that is basically just fun for her. This attitude, as well as the fact that she find being a handball player is a big part of her identity, created by a life style centered around handball (Appendix 7), makes her very similar to the primadonna archetype, given the importance her job, handball, has as a primary source of satisfaction and identity. While handball is still the primary source of satisfaction and identity, and wins and losses influences her a lot, she finds it increasingly important to limit this and have other things define her identity: "It has been important to me to have something else, to study on the side, it has been important for me to have something, to be able to switch off, because it takes up so much space, because there are so many emotions in it for me" (Appendix 7). This and her emphasis on her family, gives her similarities with the pragmatic, and the importance of work-life

balance for that archetype. She is happy to perform and give all she can and she sees it as a necessary attitude in handball: “You have done that all the way to get here, so you have contributed a little bit more than the other, because there are many that were good, when you were 14-15 years old” (Appendix 7).

When it comes to motivation, Player 3 is similar to the prima donna. She is driven by winning and success and, while she appreciates recognition for her performances, it is that of her coach, teammates and family that matters: “So it is mostly those near to me who can actually change things, it is not those, for example the press, who see me, every third week on TV” (Appendix 7). She points out how the recognition for her work is important to her because she has invested so much time into it (Appendix 7), and this suggests that the recognition is more about giving meaning to the job than a motivator in itself, as it is for the prima donna. The communication she wants with her coach supports this: “Well, it is a combination of something; this is what you can do better and then some recognition, so recognition from my coach is important to me” (Appendix 7). Further backing to Player 3 being a prima donna comes from her strong values about what is important to her: “It is not important to me that everyone knows me (...) it is important to me that I am happy with what I am doing and that I can answer for what I am doing” (Appendix 7). In her motivation, she also has a similarity to the pragmatic as she also stresses the social relations on the team through the need of feeling accepted on the team and having fun.

In the categories of employees identified by Barrow & Mosley (2005), she can be described as the ambassador. This is because she is very committed to both her current employer and her own career. She is very team oriented and needs the team to succeed to be happy and motivated. At the same time, she notes how she will also do what is right as a person, but points out: “I am happy to be here, so as long as I am under contract here, then I will put CLUB<sup>1</sup> first” (Appendix 7), making an ambitious, yet loyal employee as both the Ambassador and Player 3 are motivated by success and moving the team forward.

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<sup>1</sup> Club name removed for anonymity

What primarily makes a club attractive for Player 3, is that it 1) has faith in her ability, 2) has an important role for her, and 3) is a team playing for top positions (Appendix 7). One could argue that all three can be placed within development value on the dimensions of attractiveness in Table 2. Faith in her ability matches recognition of skills and self-worth, but having an important role for her can also be seen as recognition of her skills, and finally being a team playing for top positions can be seen a career enhancing experience for her. The latter is very important to her and is a very big factor in her career decisions: “I do not want to spend as much time on it as I do now, if it is not play for medals. Then I would rather study full time” (Appendix 7). The economic dimension is not that important to her. The salary needs to be decent, but it is the other things that are important. As long as she is comfortable financially, she is happy. She is very motivated to stay at her current club, because it is a very good situation, where she has a good coach, a good role, and she can combine it with studies, and the biggest thing that could motivate her to leave in her current situation would be to move closer to her own or her boyfriend’s family (Appendix 7).

When it comes to the psychological contract, it is very important for Player 3 that reality at the club matches what was promised and expected. If they do not match, it makes for a bad start and if the issues are not solved it can have a negative impact on her performance and motivation: “you perhaps feel they have not kept their side of the agreement and then you think, why should I keep mine? Why should I perform? Why should I go the extra mile for you, when you did not do it for me?” (Appendix 7). When it comes to the cynicism of the modern worker, there is a bit more balance with Player 3. While her own career and personal life is the most important thing for her, she does express an attitude of being loyal to a club while she is under contract there (Appendix 7).

In the socialization process, Player 3 puts an emphasis on her own role. While the club “should ensure, that for example the apartment you are going to live in is in a good condition, well all sorts of things around, so the only thing you have to think about is handball” (Appendix 7), she talks about coming with extra focus and a desire to show that the club made the right decision by hiring her. The same proactive attitude applies towards her teammates. As a new player, you

cannot expect your teammates to integrate you if you do not make an effort yourself: "the squad should greet you, but you also have to be open to receive it" (Appendix 7).

It can be demotivating when she sees a teammate who does not contribute, but then she confronts that teammate. However, since she cannot influence what others think about players she does not spend time worrying about if they get recognition even if she feels they do not deserve it. Earlier, it did annoy Player 3 a lot when she saw teammates get more recognition than her in spite of not playing better than her, "but it is not something I notice anymore, because it is not important for me. Because I have the recognition from those near to me" (Appendix 7).

#### 6.4.2 Part conclusion

When it comes to identity, Player 3 is split between being a primadonna and a pragmatic. On one hand, handball is the primary source of identity, work performances affects her private life a lot, and she is ready to give what it takes to succeed, and on the other hand, she has a strong need to build an identity outside of handball and is aware of the work-life balance. Her motivational archetype is a primadonna who is motivated by success and recognition of her contribution, but like the pragmatic her motivation is also influenced by social relations. This mix of individual strive for success and being team oriented, as the primadonna is, matches that her employee type is the ambassador because she is committed to both her current employer and her own career. This motivational pattern is in sync with the fact that she is strongly attracted to an employer with developmental value. For Player 3 it is about succeeding and being recognized for it, and then money comes afterwards. Since her employee type is the ambassador, who is committed to the employer, this explains, why a breach of the psychological contract has such a big negative influence on her and her motivation. This employee type also explains her attitude of commitment to her current employer. Her focus on handball in her motivation can also explain why she, in the socialization process, expects her employer to sort out things to help her focus on her performance, and also points to the need for her to enter the club with a focus on performance. It is important for Player 3 that there is equity between performance and reward as shown by her motivation through recognition. It can also be seen by the demotivation it

creates when her teammates do not perform. However her sense of equity is not influenced by a sense of others is getting too great recognition relative to performance.

## 6.5 Player 4

### 6.5.1 Theoretical analysis

For Player 4, handball is a big part of his identity. This is based on how others perceive him, but also because this job forces him to be mobile and move around (Appendix 8). He really likes and enjoys playing handball and will give everything he can during games, but being a professional has changed his attitude towards playing the game: “Well the thing is, it is a thing with you doing something you really like. Most people wishes to spend as much time as possible on something they think is cool, and as a professional handball player, you have the opportunity to play handball every day, which you find fun and enjoy. However, as it is professional you get the same everyday problems, which everyone gets on their, that are not super cool to do, which in my case is handball, because there also are demands that you always come and always do your best. You can say that the professionalization that comes with earning money also sets up demands that perhaps take away the sense of play, which can exist in for example sport” (Appendix 8). This point is especially highlighted with how he sees it affects his family: “I cannot opt out of handball if it is my son’s birthday” (Appendix 8). Work-life balance is very important to Player 4, and it is for this reason that he is very similar to the pragmatic archetype. It is important to him that his handball career can happen in collaboration with other things important to him: family, study and surroundings and as he points out: “I would not be happy if the other things did not work, but I also would not be happy if the handball did not work” (Appendix 8). The passion for the job, but simultaneous unwillingness to let it have too high a cost outside of the job is a very central feature of the pragmatic archetype. The pragmatic archetype cares a lot about equity and equal reward for equal contribution. When asked about how he feels about a teammate not giving all he can, while still being rewarded and recognized, Player 4 answer that he is mostly demotivated when it is players he has expectations for, who does not perform (Appendix 8). It is also important for his motivation that his own performances are recognized and rewarded: “I need acknowledgement and approval from my coach and my teammates, so it is part of lifting me up

and giving me confidence in the moment of performance, and there you can say this thing about confidence matters a lot to me. Self-worth and confidence is part of building both desire and motivation” (Appendix 8). While this strong need for recognition could imply an extrovert performance tripper, his talk of self-worth and confidence suggests, that he is more primadonna-like, given that the recognition is more about creating meaning, than just a desire to be the best and recognized as such. This is also supported by Player 4 being very emotionally influenced by experiences at games and practice sessions (Appendix 8), showing an attachment which the performance tripper does not have.

Player 4 is mostly similar to the career-oriented group defined by Barrow and Mosley (2005). At this stage in his career, he wants to be playing and to have responsibility on the team, so he would not accept a minimal role to help a club. It is very important to him to have an important role, to develop, and to be included in how the team works. If the coach is a poor communicator and does not treat the player with respect, this has a strong negative influence on his motivation (Appendix 8). These traits match the motivations attributed to the career-oriented group.

The dimensions of attractiveness, that matter the most to Player 4, is interest value and social value. The importance of interest value is based on how important it is for him to have a good coach with a coaching style that is inclusive and open, and how much the opposite situation would discourage him from going to a club: “I would say that it is probably his, the coach’s leadership skills that would matter quite a lot to me” (Appendix 8). Social value is based on how much he values the training environment, which he also places as a big daily motivator: “If you are going to a good place, where there is positivity and desire to improve, it is also very motivating, but again, if you are going to place where there is a depressed mood, then your mood will quickly be accordingly” (Appendix 8). Other factors influencing attractiveness are consideration of his private life; “I have gone after a place where I also have room to be father and a student” (Appendix 8) and the geographical location of the club. However, as Player 4 points out, economic value is also a factor, and money can compensate for his other wishes, but it takes a lot: “Yes, the salary can do that, but we are talking a doubling or tripling of my current salary, if I am in the level I am in now, I am not mobile. It can make me more mobile and flexible

than I am, but we are talking about a big change needing to happen” (Appendix 8). Things that motivate him to stay at club are experiencing continuity and evolving with a successful team that also has ambitions. The biggest thing that would motivate him to leave the club would be not feeling comfortable or being unsuccessful at the club, or if his girlfriend is not comfortable in the area (Appendix 8).

For Player 4, a breach of the psychological contract is a very important issue. It is very important to him that reality lives up to promises after changing club. At a former club, they did not live up to many of their promises and this was very demotivating for him. If and when the psychological contract is breached this is when the cynicism of the modern worker comes through in Player 4 with his willingness to move, if he and his family are not satisfied with the situation. It is important for him that the situation is good, and he will move clubs to ensure that he has that (Appendix 8).

In the socialization process, it is very important that the club does things and take active approach to make both him, as a player, and his family welcome, both outside the club and on the team. He also finds it important that he, as a player, shows up with the right attitude from day 1: “I also think it is important that you go in and show that you are qualified and have what it takes, so you are not underestimated and get a bad start” (Appendix 8). He also expects both himself and his teammates to have an active approach to getting to know each other, and he makes sure to talk to everyone, when he goes to a new club.

Player 4’s perspective on equity is that it is very important to be recognized for his performances: “I need acknowledgement and approval from my coach and my teammates, so it is part of lifting me up and giving me confidence in the moment of performance, and there you can say this thing about confidence matters a lot to me. Self-worth and confidence is part of building both desire and motivation, but you can also say, give resources to contribute with an extra and better performance” (Appendix 8). In other words if Player 4 gets the recognition he feels he is worth, it will have the positive effect of making him a better player. In relation to his teammates, his focus is on their contribution rather than reward, and he gets demotivated, if players, he has high expectations for, do not live up to them.



### 6.5.2 Part conclusion

While handball is a big part of his identity and he is very committed to his job, Player 4 is very much a pragmatic. He is very aware of the work-life balance and says he cannot perform if his private life is not in order, and he is aware of not letting his job have a too high cost for his family life. His motivation is in part pragmatic, which is influenced by teammates not performing to expectations, but also a primadonna, who needs recognition for his performances to create meaning and happiness. He is a career-oriented employee, as he has strong ideas of what he wants from an employer and is ready to move if he does not receive it. It is the interest value and social value that he seeks: a coach with an open leadership style, a good social environment at training, room for his private life, but also a club with ambition, are aligned with him having traits of both the primadonna and the pragmatic. On one hand his primadonna-self wants an ambitious club with a coaching style that helps him succeed and give meaning to his working life, but on the other hand, the pragmatic in him needs a good social life on the team and respect for his personal needs outside of his job. His primadonna-style meaning-seeking also explains why a breach of the psychological contract is very important to him. If the club is breaking promises this fails to give meaning to the job, making him demotivated and, along with his cynicism about his work, he will be ready to leave to find a better employer. The pragmatic's focus on work-life balance also shines through in the socialization process, where Player 4 does not just expect the club to help himself settle in, but also his family. However he also shows a devotion to and pride about his job, similar to the primadonna's strong values and ideals, with this desire to show his commitment and qualifications during the socialization to show a person-organization fit. His views on equity are on line with that of the pragmatic, as he needs recognition of good performances and dislikes when others' contribution and recognition does not match. His focus is on their lacking contribution rather than a too high reward.

## 6.6 Player 5

### 6.6.1 Theoretical analysis

For Player 5, her job as a handball player is a big source of identity and satisfaction for her: "I am just really happy that it is what my everyday consists of. I think it is awesome to have the

opportunity to, the game you care about so much and love to play, that you can live of it and that I do not have to work full time on the side” (Appendix 9). Because the sport is something very important to her, this means she is also personally affected by her team and her own performances (Appendix 9). But while handball is very important to her, she also stresses the importance it is to her to have also been a student simultaneously and to get a break from her job: “I have really benefitted from that, so everything is not just handball” (Appendix 9). Given how important the job is for identity and satisfaction for both Player 5 and the primadonna archetype, at first this makes that a fitting description of her, though the need for a break from handball also shows traits of a pragmatic.

Player 5 identifies the primary motivators in her daily work life as 1) getting better and 2) having a good social life on the team (Appendix 9). This makes her similar to the pragmatic archetype, which places a high value on the social relations in the work place. However, unlike the pragmatic (or the wage earner) it is not important to her if there is someone on the team that has a smaller role, but a bigger salary than her: “Well I kind of find, the economics of it that is something I negotiate and that is something she has negotiated and so it is. We play on the same team and need this to work; I think my motivation would be the same” (Appendix 9). It is important for her that her teammates contribute and she appreciates that her current team has a culture, where you can confront each other, if you do not feel others are doing so (Appendix 9). Her motivation to improve is based on desire to not be complacent and: “to make sure to set some small intermediate objectives that you can achieve ongoing, and still set some big goals, so you, that is the way you are working toward” (Appendix 9). Her getting motivation through succeeding her own goals and ambitions suggests that she is driven internally, like the introvert performance tripper. It is also important to her to be recognized for her performances and to receive the recognition: “It matters a lot, it is part of giving me faith, part of lifting things up I think, that you also feel you have the support and faith from both the coaching team, but also your team members” (Appendix 9). These words about her motivation reflect an attitude more similar to that of the primadonna archetype, which uses recognition to give meaning to the work. This is also supported by that the fact that recognition for her is about feeling supported: “It does not matter much to me with the fans and the media. It is more those near to me, that matter really

much to me, that you feel they are behind you” (Appendix 9). Player 5 also points out how having room for studying and being with her family motivates her as handball player, giving her similarities with the pragmatic archetype, but she also stresses that handball is a clear first priority, which clashes with the pragmatic’s limited desire to make sacrifices for the job.

Of Barrow and Mosley’s (2005) four employee types, Player 5 matches well with the career oriented. It is important for the career oriented to work with his/her skills every day, and Player 5 echoes that sentiment as she points out that it is important for her to develop as a player and, if she does not get the playing time and role she needs for that, she will not stay at the club (Appendix 9). Just like it is for the modern worker, (Bason, Csonka, & Ejler, 2003) work is seen as a personal project for Player 5, making it her own self-realization and challenges that are important. Player 5 also points out the importance of ongoing communication about how the team is playing from the coaching staff (Appendix 9), which also mirrors the career-oriented employee’s desire to have a clear understanding of how performances are evaluated.

Player 5 identifies the training environment, the squad and the coach, and that the club has a good reputation as the most important dimensions of what makes a club attractive for her. The training environment, the squad, and the coach are all related to interest value, as she describes how a good training environment is about a good attitude towards training and a dedication to optimization (Appendix 9). Economic value is relevant for Player 5, but the other dimensions are more important: “The situation I am in now, I want a big role and I do not want to be third party or the third pick and then hardly play and then get a good salary. I do not want that now” (Appendix 9). She also points out that even a very high salary, no matter if it was a foreign or a Danish club, could not make her comprise with what she wants in a club: “What thoughts the club has about me in the future, what role I will get, what they expect with, is it three years ahead and how does those three years look like. What are their own expectations and plans in the club” (Appendix 9). This is related to developmental value, because it is about how they recognize her skills and the confidence they have in her, and whether or not she sees their ambitions as a way for her to get career enhancing experiences. Developmental value is also related to what motives her to both stay and leave, where an important thing for either decision is that she sees a

challenge, which is understood here as a career enhancing experience: “To switch it would be new challenges, a new role, exciting project, it would definitely be such things that would take up space to switch. To stay it would be that I am thriving, it would be that I think I have been happy for the years that I have been here, but there are still challenges here” (Appendix 9).

When it comes to the psychological contract, Player 5 points out the importance of it by explaining her emotional reaction in case it was breached: “I just think I would be so sad and disappointed if it is a false image being given, and then I stand there, having switched clubs, having uprooted everything and everything is new, and then it is something completely different I am coming to” (Appendix 9). The psychological contract is also a big part of the socialization process for her, which she sees the club’s most important role, when she moves to a new club, that it lives up to the promises they have made, while she expect from her teammates that they are welcoming. She also notes that if they live up to that she also needs to contribute: “But it also places heavy demands on me, I should come with open arms, soak everything in and come up with what I can offer, you have to step into character, I think” (Appendix 9).

For Player 5, the important thing about equity is that she is recognized for her contributions and performances: “It is not like I need be praised to the skies, but just the thing, at know that that was good, good scored, or good tackle, something, awesome attitude” (Appendix 9). It also matters to her that the recognition is immediate and does not come a long time after the contribution. As noted earlier, she does not engage in social benchmarking financially, and when she confronts another place over the performance it is because that is lacking, not because they are given too much recognition in her eyes (Appendix 9).

### 6.6.2 Part conclusion

Player 5 identifies strongly with her job and draws a lot satisfaction and meaning from it, making her a strong primadonna, although she does also have significant traits of the pragmatic, since she points out how it has been important for her identity to be not just a handball player. In her motivation, she is pragmatic due to the motivation she gets from social relations in the work place, but primarily she is a primadonna, as her motivation is based on a recognition that helps her give meaning to the job. Just like a primadonna, Player 5 also has a great willingness to make

sacrifices for her career. This willingness is limited to her own career and not her employer, as her own development and goals are important, which is also why she is a career-oriented employee type. This again is similar to the cynical modern worker. Her clear focus on her own career also gives her strong ideas and values about how she wants to work. The things she highlights are aspect of the training culture and the relationship to the coach and the members, which are part of interest value and developmental value. The fact that she has these strong values and is not ready to compromise on these in spite of a salary also support that she has strong primadonna traits. The strong values are also visible when she explains the disappointment and demotivation she would have, if the psychological contract was breached. Furthermore, that it is not breached is an important part of the socialization process, along with a strong desire to prove herself and to integrate her into the group. For Player 5, equity is about receiving the recognition she deserves immediately, and she measures others by their performance rather than their reward.

## 6.7 Player 6

### 6.7.1 Theoretical analysis

Player 6 has a pragmatic approach to her job. While she loves what she does, she is also very much aware that it is a job, due to the insecurities of the profession: “Well, I think you become a little more aware about it being a job, the older you get. Of course I am incredibly happy that I can engage in my hobby as a part of my job, but I think it gets special, it becomes very distinctly a job, when clubs go bankrupt, because it is your way of living” (Appendix 10). This dynamic between hobby and job is also shown by that fact that Player 6 on one hand is very affected emotionally by performances “because it is a sport of emotions and thing go up and down. Well I can sit and sulk at home when we have lost” (Appendix 10). On the other hand, she is aware that to succeed in her career she needs to do what is right for her as a person, placing her own needs before those of the club, even though she hopes that success for herself and the club can happen simultaneously (Appendix 10). On the other hand she has no problem with working hard and doing more than expected “because in the end it will only benefit myself” (Appendix 10). These attitudes reflect the cynicism of modern workers, who are very focused on their own career

needs and desires (Bason, Csonka, & Ejler, 2003). Playing handball has been a big part of her identity - an experience enhanced by the fact she never worked or studied on the side –and with age she has realized she wants other things than handball to define her: “I can also feel now as I am getting older that I also need another side of myself that is not the handball player. But also that PLAYER 6<sup>2</sup> can do this and this and not just play handball” (Appendix 10).

Player 6 is career oriented in Barrow and Mosley’s (2005) employee types. Having an important role, where she has authority to pass her skills on and being relied upon to perform and to “take the important shots and when you play, it is 29-29 and then take the decisive shot, I enjoy that kind of role” (Appendix 10). If she cannot have this kind of role, she is ready to take her skills elsewhere, as noted previously. It is that emphasis, which places her within this employee type.

The things Player 6 identifies as the primary motivators are 1) Athletic development 2) doing something she loves, and 3) money. Her motivation to develop as an athlete is closely related to her desire to play on the national team, which will not only give her further experiences and development, but also recognize her skills and performances as a player. And recognition does matter to Player 6: “First and foremost it is that from my coaches and those I care about. That is what matters the most” (Appendix 10). This recognition should also come through an important role on the team: “I think I thrive with it and I would really like to have it. Well also with the experience I have gotten and as you are getting older, I want to go out and like get the big role and fill out a role and if I cannot, if I cannot fill it out, then I think it would be really difficult for me to be in that club context, then I think would find something else” (Appendix 10). Being driven by others recognition of her performances and talent makes Player 6 similar to the extrovert performance tripper. It is also important for her that others, who in her eyes are not performing, are being rewarded and recognized as it motivates her: “I know how hard I have worked and then you can see someone who perhaps has not worked as hard, It gives you a really bad feeling” (Appendix 10). This belief in an equity that is based on social benchmarking as the quote shows, is also related to how money is part of her motivation. In order to have a salary that she is happy about, she needs to active performance-based bonuses and this creates a motivation

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<sup>2</sup> Name of Player 6 removed to ensure privacy

for her: “I would be lying if it did not also affect you to really perform extra for me to get those bonuses” (Appendix 10). Being motivated by doing something you love doing, combined with the desire for recognition, there is an argument to be made that Player 6 is a primadonna, however, given the fact that monetary rewards also play a part in her motivation shows pragmatism, making the pragmatic archetype the better description of her.

The thing that is most important for what makes a club attractive for Player 6 is only partially included in Ewing’s (2006) dimensions of attractiveness. A club is only attractive for her if being at the club works for both her and her husband. The consideration of her husband’s career is in part a dimension of economic value – an offer where she and her husband combined would earn more money could motivate her to leave – but it is also a consideration of her private life. “I do not think I want to try more clubs, I think I have tried what I wanted, so it would really take a lot if I was to move” (Appendix 10). However her career as an athlete is also very important, so a club that has confidence in her, recognizes her skills and gives her a role that reflects it, and most importantly, can give her the career enhancing experiences that can help her with her national team ambitions: “I always look at what can keep me on the national team” (Appendix 10). The last thing she points out as an attraction factor is being part of a project and the ability to be part of something new in which she can play a big part. This is a mix of, on one hand, interest value, because of her attraction to an exciting work environment and novel work practices, and, on the other hand, application value, because it gives her an opportunity to apply what she has learned throughout her career (Appendix 10).

The psychological contract is very important for Player 6. She explains how, at her current club, there were promises not kept: “players have been promised who are not coming anyway and that has been incredibly disappointing” (Appendix 10) and how it negatively influenced her motivation “who is it I am supposed to fight for” (Appendix 10). Player 6’s experiences show how important the socialization process is “when you get know some girls, you start to want to fight for them and then the motivation slowly comes” (Appendix 10). Other than keeping its promises, Player 6 also finds it important that the club is helpful with relocation and, in relation to her teammates and how important they are, she highlights how it makes a big difference when both

she and her new teammates take an active approach to socialization and the integration of the new team member.

### 6.7.2 Part conclusion

In many ways, Player 6 could be a primadonna. She has a love for her job, which affects her emotionally and is a big part of her identity, and she is ready to do what it takes to succeed. However, the experience of job insecurity, and a growing desire to add other things than handball to her identity, suggests that she is a pragmatic instead. She has a cynical approach and pragmatic approach to her job, placing herself first, even though she ideally wants both her club and herself to succeed. What motivates Player 6 shows, both why she could be a primadonna, but is more so a pragmatic. One of her biggest motivations is to play on the national team, which comes from a desire, not just to get further experiences and development, but also as recognition of her skills and performances. These are values based on her profession, but given she is also motivated by money shows a certain pragmatism. Just like the pragmatic, Player 6 also cares a lot about being rewarded fairly, and is demotivated when others who are not working as hard is still rewarded. This pragmatism is also shown in what make a club attractive for Player 6. In part, she will go where she can be successful as a handball player, so she can play for the national team, but the salary and the consideration of her husband and his career also has big influence, meaning that she is less likely to sacrifice in order to achieve her professional goals. The importance of the socialization process, the person-organisation fit, and the psychological contract's importance for these are shown by how demotivated she was by the club's failure to live up to its promises, and how it was her teammates and their integration of her into the team that motivated her to perform nonetheless.

## 7 Discussion

Hein H. H. (2009) describes the pragmatic as being very similar to the primadonna, with the defining difference being the willingness to make sacrifices for the job, which is bigger for the primadonna. This close relationship between these two archetypes is shown very well in these handball players' identity and motivation. A main difference between the pragmatic and the



primadonna (and the performance tripper) is whether the job is the primary source of identity. All players, except for Player 2, talks about how their performances affect their private lives and vice versa, and how being a handball player is a big part of their identity. As Player 1 puts it: “When you play well the spirits are high, but are we in a down-period and things aren’t going, then I also think you take it home every day” (Appendix 4). It makes sense that handball is a big part of their identity, as handball was a part of their lives a long time before they became professionals. Also the inflexible nature of the job forces them to often prioritize it over the family and it requires a very understanding family to thrive. Further, when they meet new people, they are often framed as ‘the handball player’, but at the same time, all of them also explain, how it is important to take breaks from handball and to not only be ‘the handball player’ and have other things in their life, so handball does not dominate too much.

Considering how handball is part of the players’ identity, there is a general attitude towards their career among the six handball players that they love their job and appreciate the opportunity to have turned their childhood hobby into a profession. However, within this appreciation, all of them are aware that turning a hobby into a profession also changes their relationship with the hobby. Player 6 describes it this way: “Well, I think you become a little more aware about it being a job, the older you get. Of course I am incredibly happy that I can engage in my hobby as a part of my job, but I think it gets special, it becomes very distinctly a job, when clubs go bankrupt, because it is your way of living” (Appendix 10).

When it comes to what motivation that makes them perform, all of them generally agree that they will not just do what is asked, but what is needed, especially when it comes to the game situation. Player 5 explains that there is an expectation that players do what is needed and give their all and something extra. Their motivational patterns can be divided into two types. Two players, Player 1 and Player 2, are primarily performances trippers, while there are four players, Player 3-6, who are balancing between being primadonnas and pragmatics - “Pragdonnas” in other words.

The biggest difference between Player 1 and 2, and Player 3-6 is that the latter group, the “pragdonnas”, are much more motivated by searching for and finding meaning. It is the recognition they get from those near to them, family, friends, but especially from the teammates

and the coach, that helps give meaning to their job. The importance of this search for meaning can be linked to the sacrifices the players must make in terms of family and other things in their private life, and this argument is best supported by Player 3: “You should be recognized in what you do, because you spend so much time on it” (Appendix 7). The same four players are also markedly pragmatic as work place dynamics influence their motivation a lot. Either in form of social relations between the players on the team, or in form of disappointment stemming from teammates not contributing enough relative to how they are rewarded and recognized. This is arguably the main difference between the groups, as Player 1 describes how it actually motivates him even further, and Player 2 may get annoyed, but confronts the non-performers, instead of losing motivation. The inner motivation is also much stronger in Player 1 and 2, who, while acknowledging the value of recognition of their skills and performances, talk highly about how it is their personal desire to be the best that drives them forward.

It should not come as a surprise that all the players, except one, show the career-oriented employee type. As Player 3 points out, you can only succeed if you do more than expected, and you have to be ready to do what it takes to succeed. Accordingly, it simply seems unrealistic that players could reach this level without being ready to place their own career ahead of their employer. Working in an industry where financial instability is the norm rather than the exception could also be an explanation of why the players’ attitudes towards employment are focussed on themselves more so than their employer. When asked about what influences them to stay at a club or move to a new one, there are nuances, but their ability to be a big and important part of a successful team, where they can also have personal success is something that all touch upon. While one player, Player 3, is not career-oriented but an ambassador, does not take away from the general points, as the ambassadors are also very much focussed on their own careers, they just have a stronger commitment to their employer than the career-oriented. Eventually all players agree, that, at this stage in their career, their own career is more important than the success of the club, if they have to choose. However many of them stress that they strive to combine the two; Player 6 notes that often when things are good for the club, they are also good for her, but all agree that they have to do what is right for themselves as individuals.

When expressing their attitudes of what makes a club an attractive employer all players come back to the same thing: It is important that the club is interesting for them as athletes. These are talented players and want to play a role on the team that reflects that. The primary dimensions of attractiveness named by the players are all related the content of their job, handball, either in form of developmental value, interest value, or application. This shows that being attractive from a handball perspective is POD for the clubs. It is the quality of what the clubs can offer the player from handballing perspective, which separates them from other clubs. Everyone, however, acknowledges that money is also an important factor. Player 2 says: “If they just undercut me in terms of what I think my market value it was, then I would also think that it was unprofessional of them” (Appendix 6). However, only half of the players point to economic value as a primary dimension of attraction. This can probably be explained by the fact that it is difficult for a good salary to compensate for a situation, where the family does not thrive in the city, or the player has a marginal role on the team and is as such not able to contribute to the team and develop as a player. In the words of Player 4 when asked if money can compensate for his other wishes: “Yes, the salary can do that, but we are talking a doubling or tripling of my current salary, if I am in the level I am in now, I am not mobile. It can make me more mobile and flexible than I am, but we are talking about a big change needing to happen” (Appendix 8). The salary level for elite professional handball players helps explain their attitudes towards money. While 50,000 DKK net per month is a good salary, especially for people who are still young, it is not a salary, which will make you rich, nor will it ensure you financially for the rest of your life. Furthermore, playing handball professionally postpones the moment, when their second career in the regular job market can begin. This shows that economic value can be seen as a point of parity. While it is not something the clubs can use to differentiate themselves, it is a dimension where they must be able to offer their target group – the players – a salary, which matches their own idea of worth.

Family is indeed an important consideration and most of the players talk about how the wishes and situation of their partner also affects their attitudes towards an employer, and whether it is an attractive option for them. Player 2 says: “If we came to that, then I have also said, that I am in a place in my life, where it is important that my family is happy and content, for them to function I need to function. So I would choose, if she said that she absolutely did not want to and it would

mean that we did not see each other very often, I would say no” (Appendix 6). This makes the wishes of the family another POP for the players. Their individual wishes and situations concerning their family will determine if the club will be able to be attractive to the players at all. On the other hand, the players also place a lot of the responsibility of work-life balance on their families and partners, as they need to accept that the players have a job, where they will have to say no to family events and which will have to be the first priority. Player 3 explains how much it matters to have that acceptance: “If you stop and think about it too much, then it will probably start to be tough. But I think, that I, when I am off-duty, then I spend the time I have with the family, when I can be there or at the university. That is just the way it is” (Appendix 7).

Having a good person-organization fit is an important part of retaining the employees you, as an employer, have attracted, and, as mentioned in the theory, the psychological contract is important as this is expectations towards and promises from the club that player holds. Every single player interviewed express a very negative attitude towards a breach of the psychological contract. If the breach is serious enough, it is something that demotivates the players and makes them question their commitment to their employer. While all employers are likely to prefer having motivated employees, it is particularly important in an industry where margins between success and failure can be thin, and where motivated employees can often be the deciding factor between these two. In order have motivation, it is thus important for clubs to understand how their actions influence players’ motivation. Player 3 explains very well why a breach of the psychological contract is critical: “you perhaps feel they have not kept their side of the agreement and then you think, why should I keep mine? Why should I perform? Why should I go the extra mile for you, when you did not do it for me?” (Appendix 7). This shows a great risk if clubs try to attract players by exaggerated promises and allowing players’ expectations to grow too big, and then fail to live up to these promises and expectations.

What plays a big part in the person-organization fit as well, is the socialization process, as the new employee will better understand the organisation and its structures when introduced to it by the new coworkers. On this topic, the players agree that their new coworkers are important for settling in at a new club. Especially Player 6 points out, how it was her teammates that helped

her regain her motivation after her club breached the psychological contract by breaking important promises. They do also place a noticeable responsibility on themselves to prove their worth, both to the club and their teammates, and as Player 3 points out, integration into a new squad is a two-way effort: "the squad should greet you, but you also have to be open to receive it" (Appendix 7).

Further, equity has proven to be an important issue for all players, as it is important for their motivation to have their skills and performances recognized, and because of that, it is especially important for them to have an important role; a reward in context of their career and what they have achieved: "It is important to me to have an important role also with the age I have now. I have, I have done my duty on the bench" (Player 3, Appendix 7). Even though economic value is not the biggest dimension of attractiveness, this does not mean that money does not matter for the players. As Player 4 points out, "All else equal and the framework is as it should, then it is obvious that in relation to the pay, then I will go after a club (..) where the salary is highest" (Appendix 8). As Player 2 says, it is also about having an idea of your own worth, and if the club suggests a wage that is a lot lower, then it is seen as lack of recognition of what you can offer. The salary negation is about not being underappreciated or undervalued: "If they just undercut me in terms of what I think my market value it was, then I would also think that it was unprofessional of them" (Appendix 6), and such an approach from a club will negatively influence players attitudes towards them. Equity theory predicts that people who feel underpaid or undervalued will perform at a lower quality. All players, however, except for Player 6, say that their pay does not influence their daily motivation. It does seem likely, though, that a feeling of being undervalued is likely to influence attitudes towards employers and whether the players stay at the club, as they value recognition and salary is tied to this.

The players do not seem to engage in social benchmarking on the reward side. The focus is on other players' lack of contribution, not on "over-sized" rewards, recognition from the employers, and giving too large rewards relative to contribution. This does not seem to affect the players attitudes towards their employers. Player 5's attitude towards this topic is likely the explanation: "Well I kind of find, the economics of it that is something I negotiate and that is something she

has negotiated and that is how it is. We play on the same team and need this to work; I think my motivation would be the same” (Appendix 9). Because this diverts from how equity predicts employees react, this could explain why it is difficult to say something definite about how the players react to other players, who are underperforming and not as engaged and contributive as their reward and status would imply. While everyone dislikes it, some are demotivated; others get motivated to confront the non-performer, while one player actually gets more motivation from it. However nothing conclusive can be said.

Finally, the attitudes all players have towards employment and the employers can be said to fit Bason, Csonka, & Ejler’s (2003) description of the modern cynical worker. While they hope to combine personal success and that of the club, the players are generally not willing to play at club, where economic value is the only dimension, where it lives up to their expectations. On the contrary, they are more likely to compromise with economic demands if that ensures athletic success, playing time, an important role, family considerations, or other things. All players express a readiness to move to a new club – a cynicism towards their employer and job mobility as something positive - especially if their personal athletic ambitions cannot be full-filled at their current club. For the modern cynical worker, self-realization is important and this matches the handball players’ readiness to compromise with economic demands relative to handball ambitions, because such compromise would be a hindrance of them realizing their personal desires and objectives within the sport. While money is certainly a factor, this is not the primary reason why they are in this line of business: “I do not play handball to make money or anything. I play handball because I think it is fun and because I think it is an awesome job. I am happy to play handball” (Player 4, Appendix 8).

## 7.1 Comparison to expert interviews

In the following section, the analyses of the player interviews will be compared to the two expert interviews. This is done to get an indication of how well the perception of the players’ motivations and attitudes by two people, for whom it is a big part of their job to understand these, matches the actual attitudes and motivations of the players. It should be stressed that this is an indication and not a clear-cut conclusion.

Both PA and CE have correctly seen how the professionalization of the sport has made it more into a job, but that there is still a sense of hobby and play around it. They also see handball as being a big part of the players' identities. PA points out that, it is especially due to others framing them as such, which is in alignment with what the players said. CE points to work influencing private life due to the passion involved with job, and this also matches the players' statements. PA and CE have also correctly identified that players are ready to put themselves first, in order to get success. When it comes to motivation PA points out the importance of sporting success, because it justifies the sacrifices made to get it, and this matches the four "pragdonnas" for whom meaning and family are very important. CE identified recognition, success and an important role, which also fit with what the all players said. PA and CE agree that money makes a club attractive; they disagree on how important it is. PA believes salary to be the most important by far, while CE sees a greater willingness to compromise to fulfill other wishes, and here CE is closer to how the players describe their attitudes. Both PA and CE have a good understanding of how the players see successful socialization, as PA correctly identifies how new players should be greeted with open arms and CE understand how it is vital that expectations are aligned.

Overall, the Player Advisor and the Club Executive seem to have a good understanding of how this group of players think. However, neither of them came really close to explaining how the players feel about inequity, though PA came closer by rightfully acknowledging how it could be a problem for team chemistry, when high-paid players are not contributing, something CE failed to touch upon. On the other hand, PA seems to overestimate the importance of economic value in the interview, though he does understand how the salary also works as a source of recognition. CE better expresses how it is being successful as a handball player that comes first, and that a high salary will come because of that.

## 7.2 Comparison to literature search

Figure 3 and 5 in section 5.1 show the things that are important to athletes in an Austrian survey. According to Bergant, Hilscher, & Weiss (2009) where the figures came from, family, friends, the sport, and competition and career are what is most important to professional athletes. These Austrian findings are similar to the attitudes found in this research, where the Danish players

have a strong focus on their own career and the development within it, while still striking a balance with their life outside of the sport.

The players' attitudes towards their careers match those of the general Danish population shown by Thuesen (2011). Just like them, his inner work values are oriented towards achieving something and to have an interesting job, and similarly, a good salary and job security is a lot more important than holidays, work hours and pressure at work. This is further supported by the nature of the job in of itself, where pressure is high and there is little to no flexibility with holidays and work hours.

What motivates elite female Danish soccer players to change teams are better training facilities and the opportunity to play at a higher level (Ottesen, Nielsen, & Brandt-Hansen, 2010). In spite of most elite female soccer players in Denmark being amateurs, there is still the clear similarity between this group and the soccer players, that the primary motivator to move is based on their attitudes as athletes. While other factors are at play for the handball players, it is striking that amateurs and professionals alike are similar in their identification as athletes.

Interestingly this set of athletes attitudes towards salary inequity does not seem to match the findings Frey, Schaffner, Schmidt, & Torgler's (2013) research that found support for the idea that a relative income disadvantage is correlated with a decrease in individual performance. Given the larger dataset in Frey, Schaffner, Schmidt, & Torgler's (2013) research this could suggest a different culture in Danish professional handball compared to professional basketball in North America and professional soccer in Germany. It is however also a possibility that there is a gap between the players' own perception of how wage inequity influences them and how it actually does.

What Neuling (2011) described about employer branding turned out to have little overlap with this research, expect for Player 2 pointing how he finds it unattractive that some clubs will give a higher salary to new players, rather than to players who have grown up at the club and perform at a similar or higher level. Neuling (2011) argued that there could be clash of culture between employees with professional backgrounds and those with a background in the volunteer



association, and Player 2's experience of a different valuation of those grown within the club and those brought from elsewhere suggest a similarity, however there is not enough data to support this. The definition of employer branding, "the process of generating appeal, creating an identity, communicating that identity and ensuring that the identity remains authentic and true." (Employer Branding Today, 2011), especially the latter part, about the identity remaining authentic and true, does resonate strongly with the demotivation that players experience when the reality at the new club does not match their expectations or the promises that were made.

Sclesinger and Nagel (2010) identified four factors, which are relevant in order to create a culture in professional sports teams, which contributes to successful performances. Firstly, athletic success as a common goal and a common vision of what it is. Compared to the findings of this research, this fits. These players are very ambitious about athletic success, but also point out how it motivates them that the coach explains and communicates what he or she wants them to do. The second factor identified is personal relations. The players in this research talk about how it is important during socialization to have an openness towards each other, but also about the willingness to confront non-performers. This matches the mutual respect, open communication, a spirit of collaboration, and team spirit combined with the players also needing to push each other to better performances, as identified by Sclesinger and Nagel (2010). The third factor is hierarchies and casting of roles, and the research in this paper confirms that an important role is a factor for the players, enough to be ready to move clubs, and this confirms how important casting of roles is. As shown by the relevance of an important role, it will have a negative consequence if the club is not successful at casting the right players for the right roles. Sclesinger and Nagel (2010) point out that salary and compensation influence the acceptance of formal expectations and demands from the organization. Based on these players, acceptance of expectation and demands going against their own desires requires a very large compensation. Sclesinger and Nagel (2010) also points out that in sports, monetary compensation is closely tied to the recognition of effort and as a symbol of success and importance to the organization and the team and this idea is confirmed by the research in this thesis.

## 8 Closing points

### 8.1 Conclusion

This thesis has sought to uncover attitudes and motivations of professional handball players playing at the highest level, towards employment and employer and what makes some employers more attractive than others. The conclusion will be split in three parts: Firstly, the players' attitudes and motivations towards employment; secondly, the attitudes and motivations towards employers; and finally, what makes some employers more attractive than others.

#### 8.1.1 The players' attitudes and motivations towards employment

Playing handball is a big part of their lives and all players, except for one, describe how it is a big part of their identity, and how it influences their private lives. That handball is such a big source of identification comes from a passion for the sport, but also the fact that handball has been their primary occupation for many years, even before it was job. Further, because of the public nature of the job, other people see them as “the handball player”. That being a handball player is a central part of who they are is also reinforced by the nature of the job requiring them to prioritize the job over family at times. When forced to do this, they are reminded that it is a job, because most of the players do not think of it as such most of the time, due to their love of what they are doing. Clearly, there is an attitude towards their career that they are ready to do a lot and give what it takes to be successful as handball players, but at the same time, there is also an attitude of wanting to add other dimensions to their identity than handball. Within the free time that they have, the players prioritize time with family and friends, and getting an education, and when doing this, they try to limit the presence of handball. While very passionate and committed to their career, they require time-offs and breaks from it, in order to maintain the very strong motivation they have as athletes to develop and improve skills, and win games and titles, that comes from that passion and commitment. So to understand the players' attitudes and motivations towards their employment as handball players, it is necessary to understand that it is a constant balancing act for them, where they happily put a lot of time, energy and attention towards their career and personal success, but also need other sources of identification in their lives.

### 8.1.2 The players' attitudes and motivations towards employers

As just concluded, the players are committed to personal improvement and success, which is also reflected in their attitudes and motivations towards employers. Because of their personal ambitions, the players are not ready to put the club before themselves. This is also related to the stage they have reached in their career. They are established players in the prime of their career and do not want to waste that time not getting the playing time and success, that they believe their qualities merit. It is important for the players' motivation, that their employers recognize their skills and performances. This need for recognition has three main dimensions. First of all, it is important that the coach acknowledges them, when they perform well, and guides them to perform even better. Secondly, it is important to have an important role on the team, as trusting them to be relied upon to perform during games is seen as recognition of their skills. Finally, recognition is also a matter of salary. While all but one player are not motivated in the daily life by the size of the salary, it does matter as a form of recognition, and the players' attitude towards their employer and their motivation to perform is strongly influenced by whether they feel undervalued or not by their employer. However their attitudes toward their employer are not affected by colleagues being paid more than their contributions merit; their motivation is affected by the team member's lack of contribution, not the oversized reward. It is also important that the employer lives up to the promises they make, and a failure do so will create a negative attitude towards them and diminish the players' motivation to perform. To summarize, the players' attitudes and motivations towards employers are determined by how well the employer recognises their skills and performances as handball players, and by its ability to live up to the promises it makes.

### 8.1.3 What make some employers more attractive than others

Salary is an important dimension of attractiveness for the players. As mentioned, the salary is seen as a measure of the employer's recognition of the players' skills and performances, and, if a club cannot offer them a salary that is within their valuation of themselves, they are not attractive. Accordingly, it can be said that the salary level in Danish handball is high enough to not make it top of mind, when defining attraction to the players, but low enough to still make it an important

part of the decision making process. This idea is also supported by Player 6, who points to a low salary as for why money is a motivation for her. But there are also other dimensions that determine if an employer is attractive, and for the players it would require extremely high salaries, if even that could do it, for them to compromise with those other dimensions. The other two dimensions, that is primarily relevant for the players, are, first of all, that playing for the club is attractive for them as handball players and, secondly, that playing for the club does not collide with their family lives. The handball dimension is more important than the family dimension. Handball players' families need to understand that if there is a game to be played, then that comes before family birthdays, parties, etc. That does not mean that family is not important, on the contrary, because the players are ready to say no to a club if their partner does not want to go there. But in the end, the players are exactly that: handball players. And that is why having big role, getting playing time, developing and improving their skills, and winning games and trophies is what differentiates one club from another as an attractive employer. The other dimensions, salary and family considerations, are only POP, as they primarily decide if a club is unattractive or not. They are reasons why players say no, while handball considerations are why players say yes.

## **8.2 Managerial Implications**

The main conclusion from this thesis that the employers should take into consideration is the psychological contract. There is less room for long term projects for employers in professional handball, due to the nature of the sport, where each week is a win or loss, which will affect the club the rest of the season. Sports teams need motivated employees and should as such optimize what they can to improve motivation. An important part of this is building a good employer brand for which living up to promises and expectations is vital. Building an employer brand, which does not match what the employee experience at the club, can as such reduce the players' motivation to perform, which makes it more difficult for the clubs to achieve positions in the league, which they aspire for.

The clubs should also be aware of how they use the dimensions of attractiveness to position their employer brands. By understanding that a low salary or an offer, which does not appeal to the

player's family considerations, are dimensions that negate their attractiveness on the handball dimension, which will help the clubs identify which players they are likely to be attractive to and can thus use their recruiting resources more efficiently.

### **8.3 Theoretical Implications**

The findings of this thesis has led to two areas where parts of the theory would require amendments and further research, in order to be able to explain the findings within this research.

The archetype model by Hein (2009) does not require change, but further dimensions and explanations. There is a lot of passion, commitment and identification with profession from the players, but they require breaks from the profession and have a need to find other sources of identification in order to maintain the passion and commitment that makes them primadonnas. The archetype model acknowledges that primadonnas are not necessarily workaholics, but given how important these breaks are for the players to maintain motivation, the model would benefit if this dimension was added to it, and the understanding of employee identity and motivation would improve.

Another interesting finding, which has implications for the theory, is the lack social benchmarking, when it comes to rewards. Equity theory predicts that if an employee has the perception that the ratio between giving and receiving for others is different from their own, this creates a sense of unfairness, and the theory predicts that people who feel underpaid or undervalued will perform at a lower quality. The players do react negatively to being underpaid or undervalued, but when they measure themselves against their co-workers, the measure is the performance of the co-worker, rather than the reward that the person receives from the employer, as the theory predicts. This phenomenon is interesting and warrants further research, and the argument for that will be presented in the next section.

### **8.4 Directions for Future Research**

Three observations were made during the research, which merits further investigation. The first observation was the description by Player 6 of how she lost her motivation to perform due to a breached psychological contract, but consequently regained her motivation due to her co-

workers and the culture on the team. Further research into such examples, and what it takes to regain motivation after a breach of the psychological contract, should improve the understanding of the impact of employer branding on employee motivation. Especially in professional sports, where lack of motivation has a great impact, such understanding and knowledge would be valuable.

The second observation made was how players failed to mention fans of the team a motivating factor, or even said the fans did not have any influence on their motivation. More knowledge about this could add to the understanding of the players as brand touch points for the clubs' consumer brands. If the players are working to improve the clubs' brands among the fans, there could be an authenticity issue if the players are not motivated by the fans' support, but need to do so in order create fan engagement towards the clubs' brand.

Finally, the discrepancy between equity theory and the attitudes towards it presented in this thesis warrants further research. . It is interesting that players are not demotivated by co-workers getting paid much more than they feel their contribution would suggest. Given that Frey, Schaffner, Schmidt, & Torgler (2013) found that professional athletes in teamsports in other countries performs worse when there is a large relative income disadvantage, this topic be the object of further research to uncover, whether the attitudes found in this research represent a different culture than among the athletes in Frey, Schaffner, Schmidt, & Torgler's research, if there is a gap between the players' perception and how they actually perform, or a third option.

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