Internal Brand Alignment: The Symbiosis between Internal and External Branding

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Internal Brand Alignment is the process by which an organisation ensures that its functional and operational groups are aligned to create and maintain a symbiotic relationship between its internal and external stakeholders, so as to consciously and consistently deliver the brand promise. This paper attempts to categorise and analyse select literature to arrive at - the influencing factors that govern its effectiveness and the cross-functional tools that enable its success - through a proposed theoretical framework. It also emphasises on the need for developing a measurement and review mechanism that can quantify the extent of internal brand alignment in organisations.

1. Introduction

New entrants & intense competition continue to create the need for improving the brand presence of organisations as well as fine tuning their brand focus. However there is always a gap between the external market dynamics and the internal people-management systems. In order to reduce the gap between the desired corporate brand identity and that perceived by the company's stakeholders (Vallaster & Chernatony, 2004; Aurand et al, 2005; Papasolomou & Vrontis, 2006), it is frequently pointed out that employees across functions and levels, play a crucial role.

While most organisations implement a number of operational enhancements to support their growth plans and build up a potential for business growth, they tend to fall short of streamlining their people and processes to translate this potential into increased revenues and competitive advantage. The factors that influence the success of both product and service brands have been postulated and established by numerous studies (Chernatony & Segal-Horn, 2003; Knox & Bickerton, 2003; Baumgarth & Schmidt, 2010)

Traditional people management systems tend to box people by internally focussing on enhancing and rewarding productivity. However, the connection with the market is better established by externally focussing on the customer and his experience with the brand. The need for a cross-functional approach that encompasses Marketing, Corporate Communication and Human Resource Management for effectiveness of internal branding efforts has been emphasised by Hatch & Schultz (2003), Mahnert & Torres (2007) and Aurand et al (2005).

The importance of facilitating a company culture in which employees live the brand, solve problems, make decisions, champion the brand internally and deliver a branded customer experience externally has been emphasised by numerous researchers including Harris & Chernatony (2001), Baumgarth, Schmidt, (2010) and Gotsi, Andriopoulos & Wilson (2008).

Hence, there is a constant need for *repackaging* not just the *brand* but also the *people* behind the brand! This article attempts to review key literature focused on internal brand alignment, study the models and constructs that define internal brand alignment, classify the industry-wise findings and hence arrive at specific areas for future research using the Grounded Theory approach.

1.1 Key Terms & Definitions

Internal Branding: Historically, branding initiatives have focused on external stakeholders. Branding work therefore focused on external communication and support which helped in creating a brand image and defining & delivering the brand promise to the customer (Tosti & Stotz, 2002). However, organisations soon realised that external marketing and advertising can attract customers, but the entire organisation comes to play when it needs to retain its customers in a continuously changing market. The rise of the service era shifted focus from the external-customer to the internal-employee. Branding therefore moved well beyond marketing. Its success was recognised to depend on ensuring that all aspects an organisation's business reflected and supported the intended brand. The role of one of an organisation's most valuable assets—people—and the concept of internal branding - began to gain acceptance.

Over the years, the very definition of Internal branding has undergone a transformation from being perceived as an internal communication effort of an organisation to inform employees about the customer expectations to being established as a strategic tool that enhances brand performance by bringing about a synergy between the marketing, human resource management and corporate communication functions of an organisation. Table 1, attempts to illustrate the movement of Internal Branding from the singular domain of corporate communication to a broader inter-disciplinary approach.

Table 1.1 *Internal Branding – Evolution of Perceptions*

Term	What is it	What does it do / achieve	Author(s)(Year)
Internal Branding	A set of activities	Intellectual and emotional staff buy-in into not only the corporate culture, but also the specific brand personality invoked within this culture.	Thomson et al., 1999
	A set of activities	Ensures that the brand promise is transformed by employees into reality to reflect the customers' expected brand experience.	Boone, 2000
	A set of activities	Ensures the congruence between internal and external brand messages.	Mitchell, 2002
	A set of activities	Assists an organisation in promoting the brand inside, namely to employees.	Ahmed and Rafiq, 2003
	Enabler of an organisation's success set by various communication activities.	Delivers the brand promise to meet customers' brand expectations.	Drake et al., 2005
	A set of activities	Achieve consistency with the external brand and encourage brand commitment and the propensity for brand championship among employees.	Mahnert & Torres, 2007
	A reflection of brand values	Realises of the brand promise internally and externally.	
	Concerted, inter-departmental and multi-directional, internal communication effort	Creates and maintains an internal brand.	

The target audience for internal branding therefore comprises the internal stakeholders or employees of an organisation. While majority of research studies focus on the customer-facing employees of an organisation, recent research has adopted a more holistic approach that recognises the role of employees across functions and levels, both at the customer interface points as well as in back-end functions that are either explicitly or implicitly supporting these interfaces.

1.2 Corporate Branding

Researchers have also recognized that the success of a brand is not only dependent on the perceptions and performance of the internal stakeholders but all stakeholders. The term Corporate Branding has therefore assumed prominence in the recent years and can be viewed as a culmination of external and internal branding efforts of an organisation.

Corporate branding concerns the systematic planned management of behaviour, communication, and symbolism in order to attain a favourable and positive reputation with all target audiences of an organisation (Einwiller and Will, 2002). Corporate Branding is hence an amalgamation of organisational efforts to communicate, differentiate, and enhance the brand vis-a`-vis key stakeholder groups and networks (Balmer, 2001). A Corporate brand is therefore an explicit promise between an organisation and all its key stakeholder groups (Balmer, 1998).

The target audience for corporate branding would not only include customers but also suppliers and vendors of products/services. Colin et al (2008) purport that while similarities in the brand attributes between an organisation and its suppliers help strengthen the brand, differences can also enable complimentary contributions to an organisation's brand.

Another target audience that contributes to corporate branding comprises the potential employees of an organisation. Balmer and Gray (2003) advocate that a strong, favourable corporate brand is a powerful "navigational tool" to a variety of stakeholders, which include not only existing employees and shareholders, but also potential employees (Foster et al, 2010). Moroko and Uncles (2008) suggest that an employer brand can be regarded as a psychological contract between an employer and employee. Hence, the concept of corporate branding also encompasses the domain of Employer Branding. Ambler and Barrow (1996, p. 187) state that an employer brand is "the package of functional, economic, and psychological benefits provided by employment, and identified with the employing company".

The following figure illustrates the focus and target audience of the internal and external components of corporate branding as an overarching concept that encompasses internal and external branding.
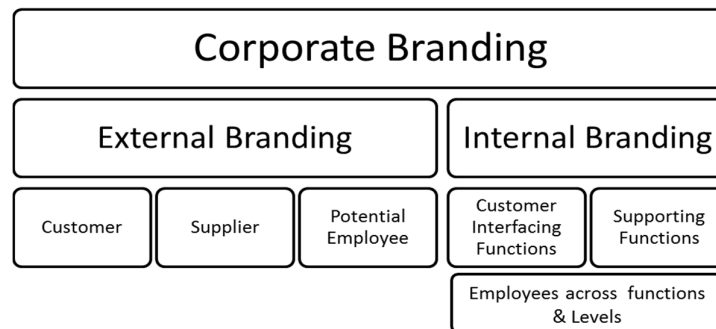

Figure 1 *Corporate Branding – The Holistic Approach*

2. Factors influencing Internal Branding

The following table enumerates the list of factors that literature has recognized as influencers for Internal Branding. The definitions are based on sources relevant to the terms.

Table 2.1 *Influencers for Internal Branding*

Focus	Term	What is it	Reference
External Stakeholder	Brand	A brand is a bundle of functional and emotional values which promise a particular experience to the customer.	De Chernatony & Horn, 2003
	Brand Vision	The brand's core purpose 'its reason for being '	Collins and Porras, 1996
	Brand Positioning	A brand's positioning defines what the brand is, who it is for and what it offers	Rositer and Percy, 1996
	Brand Performance	The extent of which a brand contributes to the business success of an organisation	-
	Brand Values	Guiding Principles which define how the brand differentiates itself to maintain a competitive edge.	-
	Brand Personality	A set of human characteristics associated with a brand	Aaker. J.L, 1997
	Brand Promise	The functional & emotional benefits that a brand offers to its customers	-
	Brand Equity	The value of a brand as a resultant of customers' cognitive and affective responses to the brand as well as financial performance of the brand owner.	Baumgarth & Schmidt, 2010
	Brand Image	The external stake-holders (customer's) current & changing perceptions of brand differentiation	McAlexander et al., 2002; Muniz and O'Guinn ,2001;

Focus	Term	What is it	Reference
Internal Stakeholder	Brand Commitment	Emotional Engagement of employees with a brand	Thomson et al, 1999
		The extent of psychological attachment of employees to the brand, which influences their willingness to exert extra effort towards reaching the brand goals	Burmann and Zeplin, 2005
	Internal Brand Equity	The value of a brand as a resultant of brand supportive behaviour of employees.	Baumgarth & Schmidt, 2010
	Internal Brand Involvement	The extent of willingness to know about the brand and act upon the same as a result of personal relevance of the brand	Celci & Olson, 1988
	Internal Brand Knowledge	Extent to which they are knowledgeable about the brand	Baumgarth & Schmidt, 2010
	Employee Brand Performance	The extent to which employees deliver the brand promise	Punjaisri, Evanschitzky, & Wilson, 2009
	Internal Corporate Communication	A process between an organization's strategic managers and its internal stakeholders, designed to promote commitment to the organization, a sense of belonging to it, awareness of its changing environment and understanding of its evolving aims.	Welch and Jackson, 2007
Internal & External Stakeholders	Brand Community	A community that transcends geographical boundaries and comprises of a set of admirers of a brand. From an external perspective it may comprise of all customers who share a relationship/experience with the organisation's brand, its product / service offerings or even with other fellow customers. From an internal perspective it may comprise of employees who share experiences about their organisation's brand.	McAlexander et al., 2002; Muniz and O'Guinn ,2001;
	Brand Identity	The visual & symbolic aspects of a brand that act as differentiators How managers and employees make a brand unique	Vallaster & de Chernatony, 2006 Harris & De Chernatony, 2001
Internal & External Stakeholders	Brand Identification	A sense of belonging with the brand	Punjaisri, Evanschitzky, & Wilson, 2009
	Brand Loyalty	Engaging in a relationship with brand and willingness to remain with the brand	
	Brand Reputation	A collective representation of a brand's past actions and results that describes the brand's ability to deliver value to multiple stakeholders (both internal & external). In contrast to a brand's image, which reflects current, changing perceptions, a brand's reputation is more stable and represents the distillation of multiple images over time. By encompassing the evaluations of all stakeholders, reputation provides a much more representative indication of brand performance.	Fombrun and van Riel, 1997

3. Interplay of the Influencing Factors

Numerous studies have explored the interplay of factors governing internal branding, postulated theories, developed constructs and models and elucidated the role of employees across functions and levels. This section aims to describe & analyse the interplay by drawing in from the constructs and models purported by some of the researchers.

3.1 The Brand Identity-Brand Reputation Gap

De Chernatony's Brand Management model conceptualises the internal brand building process as revolving around the identification and narrowing of gaps between a brand's identity and its reputation. The brand identity is conceptualised as an interplay of six basic components viz., Brand Vision, Organisation Culture, Brand Positioning, Brand Personality, Relationships (staff to staff, staff to customer, staff to other stakeholders) and Presentation (to reflect consumer / stakeholder self-image & aspirations). While the brand's identity depends on how it is perceived by its stakeholders as being different from competition, the brand's reputation is presented as a resultant of the all its past and present actions over time (de Chernatony, 1999).

Hence, while identity is based on perception, reputation is based on reality. The gap between the two reflects incongruity and leads to a lowered brand performance since the stakeholder always expects the brand to offer benefits in line with the perceived identity.

Harris & Chernatony also emphasise on the importance of Perceptual Congruity and Communication for reducing the gap and goes on to suggest the mechanisms for harmonising perceptions to include collation of perceptions, conducting workshops & staff communication programs and usage of a totem/object based metaphor for uniform communication of brand identity and guide their behaviour towards reducing the identity-reputation gap (Harris & De Chernatony, 2001).

3.2 The Multi-Functional Approach to Internal Branding

Hatch, M. J., & Schultz, M. (2003) conceptualise Corporate Branding is as a continuous adjustment of the interplay between Brand Vision, Organisation Culture and Brand Image. It is suggested that an approach that is organisationally integrated and cross-functional would be required to manage the interplay. It is therefore important to "bring the (whole) corporation into corporate branding" or at the very least, to make it the integrated effort of HR, Communication and Marketing functions led by the top management. Hence, effective dialoguing between top management, external stakeholders and members of the organisational culture would be a pre-requisite. Honest self-assessment, responsive attitudes toward stakeholders, and respect for the values that attract all stakeholders to the corporation would add impetus to the internal branding efforts. Hence, effective internal branding would necessitate drawing in from the rich resource of organisational culture and make it an integrated part of the effort to build a corporate brand.

3.3 Internal Brand - Knowledge, Commitment & Involvement

According to Baumgarth, C., & Schmidt, M. (2010) the key determinants of internal brand equity constitute Brand Orientation or a brand orientated organisation culture at an organisation level and Internal Brand - Knowledge (IBK), Commitment (IBC) and Involvement (IBI) at an individual level. It is hypothesised that internal brand equity has a positive effect on the external brand equity of an organisation. The role of HR is emphasised by the authors by recommending the need for an open channel of communication between an organisation's brand management and HRM teams towards establishing and managing incentive systems, training programs, targeted internal communication, leadership, and effective recruitment systems in order to nurture a brand-oriented culture and also measure and manage the IBK, IBI & IBC (by means of regular employee surveys and summarizing scorecards)to serve as a control system that can support management by providing early warning of weaknesses in the internal branding endeavour.

3.4 Internal Brand identification, Commitment & Loyalty

Punjaisri, K., Evanschitzky, H., & Wilson, A. (2009) emphasise that internal branding is an enabler for the employees of an organisation to exhibit brand supporting behaviours. Their proposed framework for internal branding empirically draws the relationship between internal branding and the behavioural outcome (brand performance) as well as the meditational effects of employees' brand identification, commitment and loyalty. The model also indicates HRM activities like training, orientation, meetings and briefings as contributors to internal branding.

3.5 Brand Ethos & on-Brand Behaviour

According to De Chernatony, L., & Cottam, S. (2006), when employees automatically display 'on-brand' behaviour, the brand and the organisational culture act as one and the brand becomes an all pervading tacit entity, that there is a "brand ethos" within the organisation. In order to develop and nurture a brand ethos, the brand would need to transition from being an - explicit entity wherein the employees understanding of the brand is limited or negligible - to being an implicit entity wherein the employee behaviour is automatically based on the brand. Corporate control in the form of brand education and socialisation in the brand context help nurture a belief in the brand and cultivate brand commitment leading to internalisation of the brand and unification of the organisation culture and the brand. The organisation therefore transcends the realm of corporate control and progresses towards a state defined purely by employee interpretations. At this level, employees would 'live the brand' and hence espouse a brand ethos favourable to the organisation's business-brand outcomes.

The authors also emphasise on the need for a holistic, consistent, integrated approach to branding with a focus on customer service, building and nurturing differentiators evolving from the brand ethos, responsiveness to change, high brand literacy and synergy between brand & org culture.

3.6 Position, Consistency, Values & Systems

Based on their study of the role of internal branding in service organisations, De Chernatony & Segal-Horn (2003) have conceptualised a model which illustrates that the success of a service brand originates from the corporate culture, which defines the core values, and thereby encourages and endorses preferred forms of staff behaviour. This enables management to define the services brand's promise in terms of how functional and emotional values should be blended to position the brand and to grow its personality. By communicating information about the service vision, the brand promise and consumer expectations, staff can better understand their role as brand builder. This can be enhanced through training. Complementing this with highly co-ordinated service delivery systems, plus organisational processes (such as staff development) that encourage shared values, enhances the likelihood of a consistently executed services brand encounter. These key elements lie behind delivering to the consumer a match between the promised and perceived services brand, which, in turn, reinforces a holistic brand image on which greater consumer satisfaction depends. A long-term relationship of trust between the services brand and the consumer informs and reinforces the corporate culture in which the brand and the service delivery are embedded.

  Hence the key factors Influencing Successful Service Brands are stated to be:
- A Focused Position (which associates brand with benefit to customer)
- Consistency (of staff behaviour encouraged by systems)
- Values (enacted with conviction by management and hence staff)
- Systems (that ensure consistency)

  Other contributing factors which include staff contribution for - internal/external communication,   innovative ideas, relationship between brand & consumer and emotion evoked by brand at each customer touch point, have also been indicated to exercise an influence on internal branding in service organisations.

3.7 Values, Practises & Behaviours

Totsi & Stotz (2001) emphasise that while external marketing and advertising efforts can attract customers, it takes an entire company working together internally to retain the customers. In fact the effectiveness of an organization's marketing and advertising functions leads to higher customer expectations, and exercises a greater demand on the organization's ability to deliver the brand promise. Hence it is important to analyse the current practices of human capital management, to determine their compatibility with the brand promise and enabling change through workshops and 'brand-plans' at individual, functional and organisational levels. The authors' conceptual model illustrates the need for aligning the leadership and culture of an organisation with the brand.

3.8 Six Conventions of Corporate Branding

 Knox, S., & Bickerton, D. (2003) have recognised the prevalence of certain accepted practices/conventions, which offer a constraining influence on corporate branding and hence internal branding as follows:
- *Brand Context* which helps organisations "fix the co-ordinates" of their current situation considering a dual inside-out environments in which an organisation operates viz., the internal organisation culture & the external competitive landscape.
- *Brand Construction* or positioning framework which comprises the organisational attributes (values, vison and commitments), the benefits of its product/services to customers, its outward face to the market as supported by its brand image, its customers, the network of contacts used by the organisation and the mechanisms that drive the network.
- *Brand Confirmation* elicited from employees by articulating the brand proposition.
- *Brand Consistency* achieved by Corporate Communication's consistent articulation of brand attributes to internal and external stakeholders.
- *Brand Continuity* which ensures alignment of business processes to delivering customer value and helps drive the brand deeper into the organisation.
- *Brand Conditioning* which enables the organisation to review its corporate brand regularly.

3.9 The 6 Cs of Corporate Branding

The historical analysis of corporate-level constructs since the 1950s by Balmer & Greyser (2006) reveals a number of concepts such as corporate image, corporate identity, corporate branding and corporate reputation. While these elements have both internal and external focus, the internal perspective constitutes the influencers for internal branding. These have been termed as the 6Cs of corporate branding and constitute the following:
- *Character*: The internal factors which differentiate the organisation from others and include organisation structure heritage/history & philosophy of the organisation, organisational activities, tangible & intangible assets as well as the markets that it serves.
- *Culture*: Values, beliefs and perceptions of its employees.

- *Communication*: The communication channels that an organisation uses to reach out to customers and key stakeholders.
- *Conceptualisation*: The perceptions of customers and other key stakeholders about the organisation
- *Constituencies*: internal & external stakeholder groups to which customers belong (employees, investors, local community, etc.)
- *Covenant*: The emotional ownership of a brand held by its customers based on their expectations from the brand.

3.10 Four Components of Internal Branding
Based on a study of charity organisations in UK, Hankinson, P. (2004) indicates four components of internal branding.
- Functional Component (the purpose of the organisation)
- Symbolic Component (values)
- Behavioural Component (managerial practices)
- Experiential Component (feel of the working environment)

The study states several uses of internal branding including unifying the workforce around a common purpose, acting as a catalyst for change and contributing to the professionalization of the organisation. The author emphasises on the need for senior managers to adopt a 'brand-centric' focus that goes beyond the legal and organisational requirements of their job. It was noted that the internal brand should work in tandem with the external brand, an ideal referred to as "joined-up" branding or the management of consistency across all points of interaction.

3.11 The H Factor of Internal Branding
King & Grace (2010) define the Human Factor (H Factor) of internal branding as the extent to which employees perceive that the organisation treats them like a human being (e.g. with respect, is cooperative, communicates well, encourages working towards a common goal). The authors purport that the benefits of Employee Based Brand Equity (EBBE) vis., brand citizenship, employee satisfaction, retention and positive word of mouth can be achieved by ensuring openness (extent to which an employee is receptive to organisational dialogue), the H factor and role clarity (level of clarity an employee has of their role as a result of having brand knowledge, brand commitment, information generation and knowledge dissemination.

3.12 Summary of Concepts
The following table (Table 3. 1) summarises the findings from the conceptual models on factors influencing Internal Branding. As can be seen, the organisation culture, internal communication of brand values to ensure consistency & congruency in internal perceptions, employees' level of connect with the brand through knowledge, involvement, commitment& loyalty to the brand and systems and practices that support on-brand behaviour of employees are considered as the major influencers.

Table 3.1 *Internal Branding – Influencing Factors*

Author(s)	Interplaying Factors Influencing Internal Branding
Harris & De Chernatony, 2001	• Shared Values • Communication • Congruence between brand perceptions of employees and Brand management teams
Tosti & Stotz, 2001	• Values • Practises • Behaviours
Hatch & Schultz, 2003	• Brand Vision • Organisation Culture • Brand Image
De Chernatony & Segal-Horn, 2003	• Focused Position • Consistency of behaviour • Values • Systems
Knox & Bickerton, 2003	• Brand Conditioning • Brand Construction • Brand Confirmation • Brand Consistency • Brand Continuity • Brand Context
Hankinson, 2004	• Functional Component • Symbolic Component • Behavioural Component • Experiential Component
De Chernatony & Cottam, 2006	• Brand Ethos • On-Brand Behaviour
Punjaisri et al., 2009	• Brand identification • Brand Commitment • Brand Loyalty

Baumgarth & Schmidt, 2010	• Internal Brand Knowledge • Internal Brand Commitment • Internal Brand Involvement
Balmer & Greyser, 2006	• Character • Culture • Communication • Conceptualisation • Constituencies • Covenant
King & Grace, 2010	• Openness • H Factor • Knowledge Dissemination • Information generation • Role Clarity • Brand Commitment

4. Tools to Enable Effective Internal Brand Alignment

This section collates the systems and practices that researchers have suggested as leveraging tools to enhance the effectiveness of internal branding efforts in an organisation.

4.1 Coordination of HR & Marketing

Punjaisri & Wilson (2007) emphasise that in addition to Internal corporate communications function, involvement of the collective expertise of HRM and marketing functions is necessary for ensuring that employees can enact brand values to fulfil the brand promise. Training (to improve brand understanding), recruitment (of employees who align with the brand values) and reward mechanisms & recognition schemes (that influence on-brand behaviour) are enumerated as internal branding tools under the purview of HRM.

The role of HR in internal branding is also emphasised by Aurand et al (2005) purporting that employees have a more positive attitude toward the brand and are more likely to incorporate this image into their work activities when there is some degree of HR involvement in the internal branding process. Going on to establish a three-pronged approach harnessing the efforts of communications, marketing and HR, the authors establish that the successful promotion of the internal branding doctrine may be as dependent on HR initiatives as on those developed in the marketing department. Hence, when HR efforts are focused on embedding the brand message in systems, practices and efforts for recruitment, training and motivation, firms can better use internal communications, give employees a deeper understanding of the brand and the role that employees play in enhancing the brand promise, and reduce brand positioning confusion resulting from misaligned messages (Interbrand Insights, 2001).

Hijab et al in their study of the telecommunication sector in Pakistan also support the concept that an effective implementation of internal branding process within the organizations is heavily dependent upon human resource initiatives taken within the telecom organizations.

Ulrich, D. (1998) suggests that HR can help deliver organizational excellence in the following four ways:

- First, HR should become a partner with senior and line managers in strategy execution.
- Second, it should become an expert in the way work is organized and executed, delivering administrative efficiency while quality is maintained.
- Third, it should become a champion for employees, representing their concerns to senior management and at the same time working to increase employee contribution.
- And finally, HR should become an agent of continuous transformation, shaping processes and a culture that together improve an organization's capacity for change.

4.2 Leveraging on Leadership

Establishing that leadership influences the alignment of individual behaviour along corporate brand identity and brings about behavioural brand-adequate changes in the organisation, Vallaster & de Chernatony (2006) posit that successful leaders are those who adopt a holistic understanding of the corporate brand, considering it as the total sum of organisational signs that are transferred to its audiences: through the core values for which the organisation stands, the behaviour of employees, all symbolic representations regarding graphic designs, and finally, via all corporate communication for internal and external stakeholders. Successful leaders therefore act as *integrators* between the elements of corporate identity structures in order to develop a powerful brand image. The also act as *mediators* between the employees and the branding needs of an organisation and facilitate employee brand commitment by acting as a role model communicating in a manner supporting the desired brand identity. Leaders also act as *reviewers* who design "permeable" corporate branding structures which allow for regular check-ups between internal and external brand building.

4.3 Nurturing a Brand Community

Devasagayam et al (2010) present intra-organizational brand communities as a viable strategic tool for internal branding. While external brand communities comprising of customers / consumers with similar brand experiences have been

traditionally nurtured by organisations, it would be beneficial to apply the principles of consumer psychology to the internal market comprising of employees who could benefit from sharing brand related practices, success stories, failures and co-create strategies/corrective actions and even act as facilitators and brand ambassadors for external brand communities. The authors hypothesise and prove that membership in internal brand communities will lead to higher levels of employee identification (with overall branding communication), employee support (of branding strategies), employee interaction and affinity (with other members of the internal brand community) and employee satisfaction (with interactions related to external brand community members). Hence, when strong internal brands are supported by robust communities, which constitute external as well as internal stakeholders, the results are far more overarching and beneficial.

4.4 Four Core themes for Internal Branding
Through their study of the retail banking industry in UK, Pasolomou & Vrontis (2006) propose four elements to enhance the effectiveness of internal branding. Recognising the central role of employees in building and differentiating their corporate brand, the first element is about viewing employees as *internal customers* and hence reinforcing practices that enable internal customer satisfaction, motivation and retention. In order to enable the internal customer element, the authors propose *training and development programmes* as the second element to create knowledge and understanding among staff of how their attitudes and behaviour towards customers form an integral part of the overall service offering and hence shape employee behaviours to develop a strong service mentality that will pervade the entire organisation. The third element *internal standards* urge organisations to set high standards of on-brand performance and equip employees in order to enable them to meet and exceed these standards of performance. The fourth and final element *rewards* emphasises on the need to establish rewards systems rewards system which instil confidence and elicits that extra energy that individuals voluntarily invest towards the success of the organisation's brand.

4.5 Phased approach for Internal Branding
The research study by Tosti, D. T., & Stotz, R. D. (2001 suggests a phased approach to internal branding as follows:
- *Analyse the brand* from an internal perspective to clarify the brand promise to customers, establish the brand character that will best deliver that promise, translate brand character into values and behavioural practices for leadership and the company as a whole and analyse current practices (including human capital systems) to determine their compatibility with the brand promise
- *Orient the Senior Management* of the organization to thoroughly understand, support, and actively demonstrate commitment to the internal branding process
- *Ensure Mid-management involvement* to lead the internal branding initiatives on a day-to-day basis review mechanisms
- *Enrol the employees* to voluntarily engage in the internal branding process, through internal brand launches and workshops.
- *Conduct Tactical Sessions* to nurture a cross-functional approach for identifying and eliminating destructive brand practices.
- *Conduct Brand Camps* for developing brand plans for each of the employees which identify what practices they need to increase and which ones to eliminate.
- *Support, assess and review* the internal branding process at regular intervals to ensure progress and initiate course corrections.

4.6 Consolidated IB Framework
Mahnert & Torres (2007) propose a consolidated internal branding framework (CIBF) to plan, execute and evaluate an internal branding programme comprising seven tools for the success of Internal Branding (IB) viz., Organisation culture & cross functional coordination, Information on internal/external environment, management support, communication, strategy for the IB program, recruitment, motivation & rewards and education. These elements can help achieve internal consistency with the external brand and encourage brand commitment and the possibility of brand championship among employees.
The authors recommend the following steps to facilitate an Internal Branding program:
- Create a flutter organisation with high levels of interaction
- Ensure that the culture reflects the values of the brand
- Conduct regular, ongoing 360° research internally and externally
- Ensure that any activity has a suitable, achievable target
- Ensure appropriate measurement metrics for each target
- Make brand values and brand direction a mantra for every employee
- Create a multi-departmental, heterogeneous internal brand team
- Inspire leadership to support and enact the internal brand
- Communicate constantly, consistently, and economically in every direction
- Tailor communication to information needs
- Ensure alignment between corporation and brand direction
- Ascertain that budget and timing are realistic while reflecting internal branding needs
- Involve employees in design and implementation

- Recruit, train and reward employees with a view to brand values
- Offer ongoing brand training and education for management and staff

4.7 Linking Internal Corporate Communication to HR

Sharma & Kamalanabhan (2012), in their study of public sector organisations in India, draw a linkage between internal branding and internal corporate communication (ICC) to state that improvement in the quality of its ICC practices leads to better internal branding outcomes. The study also conceptualises a model that indicates that ICC results in the achievement of internal brand identification, commitment and loyalty. In addition the authors state that it is important to integrate the human resources (HR) and ICC functions in order to disseminate corporate brand information effectively. Hence, brand communication training which is typically associated with HR is perceived as an important dimension of ICC which helps can be utilized to influence employee's attitude towards the corporate brand.

White & Stafford (2010) further support the concept of ICC through their study of a multi-campus university and emphasise on the direction dimension of internal communication, as well as the channel dimension. While technology based channels like e-mail is efficient for information exchange, the preference for communication among all groups of employees is face-to-face, interpersonal, dialogic interactions. Meetings, despite being acknowledged as time-consuming, are valued as a channel for feedback and providing face time with top managers. In addition, electronic channels, if used thoughtfully, are indicated to flatten the traditional, hierarchical structure of internal communication and give employees at all levels of the organization the sense of hearing things first-hand, from the top.

4.8 Top & Middle Managerial Control of Internal Branding

Henkel et al (2007) emphasise on the relevance and managerial control of behavioural branding and state that Managers should spend more time explaining and discussing targets of behavioural branding, and they should create an organisational environment that enables employees to find their own individual ways of articulating a brand to customers.

In order to promote the complex employee behaviours that may generate a highly distinguishing brand performance, structures, processes, and incentives are needed to enable brand-oriented employee behaviour. In addition to top management commitment, it is recommended to bridge the gap between top management and front line personnel, senior managers also need to join their employees regularly and act as role models striving to improve the team feeling across functional borders. The authors also suggest that in order to make brand values understandable and behaviourally convertible the managers can translate brand values into brand stories, cast employees for the corporate ads so that employees are empowered and motivated and remain conscious that their day-to-day activities and behaviours in customer contact situations build the cornerstone of their companies' external appearance.

5. Discussion

Based on the above studies the following conceptual model is proposed for external – internal brand alignment which illustrates a balance between the internal and external worlds of an organisation. The roles of each of the relevant organisational functions assume a two-fold responsibility of addressing the internal as well as external stakeholders as well as systems & practices that govern the two environments of an organisation. The marketing function therefore needs to not only enhance the brand positioning for the target group of customers, but also attract the internal customer / employee towards investing time and effort in nurturing the brand. HRM shall not only establish and manage internal strategies and operations but also leverage on the same to establish the brand image amongst potential employees, orient existing employees towards the brand-cause and ensure that they are continuously geared for enhancing the strength of customer relationships and improving customer brand experiences. Similarly, corporate communications shall manage the brand perspectives of both employees and customers alike. The supplier management function shall focus on facilitating quality management of the organisational offerings as well as aligning the suppliers to the brand promise. The leadership of the organisation would therefore develop and implement strategies that support both the external as well as internal brand image of the organisation and bring about a synergy between the two elements. Lastly, the brand communities constituting the customers and employees shall together support the brand cause by facilitating exchange of experiences that help deliver the brand promise.

The double-direction arrow between the internal-external environments indicates their symbiotic relationship which allows for exchange of information and know-how that will strengthen the corporate brand. The double-direction arrows between the relevant functions and internal/external brand effectiveness indicate the need for review mechanisms that help measure effectiveness and hence adopt course corrections and strategies that will enhance the outcomes of internal and external branding efforts. The two-way, semi-circular arrow cutting across the functions indicate the need for cross-functional alignment.
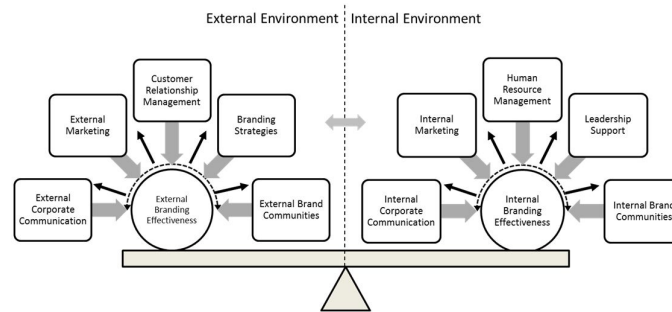
Figure 2 *Internal Brand Alignment – Symbiosis Between Internal & External Environments*

6. Conclusion – The Need for Quantitative Measurement

This study of select literature emphasises on the need for organisations to invest in strong internal branding efforts which narrow the gap between the internal and external environments of organisations. It also identifies the organisational functions that need to continuously step-up their internal and external branding efforts and lists out the tools and mechanisms that these functions can leverage on for effective internal brand alignment.

While research till date has established the elements / influencers that govern internal branding, there is no empirical method evolved for measuring the extent of alignment between people equity and brand equity of an organisation. While both the concepts are intangible in nature, the established set of influencers point towards a quantitative measure that can be applied to review the progress of organisations in their internal branding endeavours, identify gaps and hence evolve course correction methods as well as innovative strategies for employees to co-create.

It is recommended that future research efforts focus on quantifying the strength of internal brand alignment in organisations, diagnose the extent of alignment espoused by systems, processes and behaviours across functions & levels and hence evolve a measurement & review tool that can be applied on a continuum for sustained internal brand management.

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