THE ROLE OF SOCIAL INTERACTIONS IN BUILDING INTERNAL

CORPORATE BRANDS: IMPLICATIONS FOR SUSTAINABILITY

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This article examines internal brand building, which is defined as the alignment of a corporation and employees around a brand. The notion of social interactions may provide a valuable perspective on brand-related interactive space, in which top management communicates brand-related information to employees and employees share brand-related information. Depth interviews, observations, and documentary analysis reveal how a social interaction–based, internal, brand-building process influences employees' actions and perceptions of the branded environment. Social interactions might generate brand commitment and shared brand beliefs in certain conditions. These findings have key implications for sustainability.

> We have all our corporate brand values set out and written down; and we have communicated these values to our employees. Actually, we poured a lot of money into internal communication. Yet the experiences of our customers with our sales staff tell a different story. It seems that information somewhere gets lost.
>
> —Branch supervisor

1. Introduction

Internal brand building aims to align "an organization around a brand" according to a cluster of values (Tosti & Stotz, 2001, p. 30; see also Mitchell, 2002; Thomson et al., 1999) and thus facilitate delivery of the external brand experience. Through this process, three perspectives on corporate branding come into alignment (for a review and interdisciplinary framework, see Brown et al., 2006; Simões et al., 2005): actual (how the corporation views it), desired (how the corporation wants others to perceive it), and external (how others perceive it) (Aaker & Joachimsthaler, 2002; Balmer & Soenen, 1999; Kapferer, 2004).

Minimizing the gaps among these three perspectives has strategic importance, because stakeholders experience a corporate brand's values through its products and services, as well as at every touch point (Balmer & Wilkinson, 1991). Especially in service industries, in which encounters depend on the attitude and motivation of the corporation's employees (de Chernatony & Segal-Horn, 2001; Punjaisri & Wilson, 2007), employees constitute a key resource. The perceived qualification, friendliness, and responsiveness of employees, as well as how well they "live" corporate brand values, help customers develop trust in service encounters (Berry, 2000). In this sense, companies need to embed their corporate brand within employees, such that it gains "standardized, categorized, generalized meanings" (Phillips et al., 2004, p. 643).

Existing brand literature stresses the need for employee commitment to delivering brand values (Thomson et al., 1999) and identifies communication and social interaction as key facilitators of employees' commitment to the brand and shared brand beliefs. To the best of our knowledge though, few studies adopt a cross-fertilization approach and examine

communications and social interaction simultaneously (de Chernatony et al., 2006). Yet social interaction—which we define as "the integration of social, environmental, and economic concerns into an organization's culture, decision-making, strategy, and operations" (Berger et al., 2007)—may provide valuable insights into the brand-related interactive space that exists throughout the employee hierarchy and ultimately clarify a corporation's sustainability.

Thus our study contributes in several ways. First, facilitating brand-supportive behavior is a complex, difficult undertaking, strongly influenced by both vertical and horizontal dynamics. With our study, we attempt to understand how employees develop, employ, and change the brand-related information they possess. Second, this approach reveals methods that management can use to influence brand-related social interactions and thus induce brand commitment and shared brand beliefs among employees (Morhart et al., 2009). Both the facilitation of brand-supportive behavior and influences on brand-related social interactions have important implications for sustainability literature. Internal branding relates to the development of a corporate brand, and better communicated values could improve the workplace environment, which would nurture social aspects of a corporation's sustainability. For example, if employees understand and appreciate what the organization's brand stands for, they may perceive their workplace as more meaningful. Third, customers buy from service providers that they perceive offer the best value (Best, 2004). Determinants of this perceived value include quality of the services offered, the staff that delivers the service, and the brand image the corporation communicates (Doyle, 2000; Kotler & Keller, 2009). If customers trust their service providers, they tend to continue purchasing from them and offer much greater net present value than other customers (Reichheld, 1996). Therefore, these findings have key implications for the economic side of corporate sustainability.

We structure the remainder of this article as follows: We outline key concepts by building on related research fields to define the conceptual anchors of brand commitment and shared brand beliefs; we also discuss how social interaction in general, and communication in

particular, may facilitate their development; and we briefly discuss sustainability. After we discuss our methodology, we report on and discuss our study findings. We conclude with implications for sustainability, some study limitations, and avenues for further research.

2. Literature review: key concepts

To understand the related concepts of the corporate brand, internal brand building, brand commitment, and shared brand beliefs, we detail similarities and distinctions among them.

2.1. Corporate brand

A corporate identity refers to the distinct attributes of a corporation and "is fundamentally concerned with reality, [or] 'what an organisation is'" (Balmer & Gray, 2003, p. 979). Graphic designs (Abratt, 1989; Balmer, 1995), employee behavior (Duncan & Moriarty, 1998), and corporate communication with internal and external stakeholders (Argenti, 1998) give texture to the corporate identity. However, Balmer and Gray (2003, p. 979) propose that corporate identity differs from, yet still overlaps with, a corporate brand, because "the identity concept is applicable to all entities. Yet, not every entity has, plans to have, wants or even needs a corporate brand. As such, a corporate identity is a necessary concept whereas a corporate brand is contingent." Accordingly, a corporation's brand values constitute a supra-level set of values that may characterize one or several corporations.

The corporate brand thus derives from corporate values, which must be reflected in the brand promise and the value-driven behavior of the staff (de Chernatony, 2010). A corporate brand develops through the projection of the corporate identity and the related promise to stakeholders, who ascribe meanings to the company through their experiences (Hatch & Schultz, 2001; Schultz et al., 2002). Through communication that supports corporate identity and offers promises, these meanings stabilize (Davis & Dunn, 2002), so a brand image develops. Employee behavior offers a form of communication at all touch points and thus influences perceptions of the corporate brand.

2.2. Internal brand building

Internal brand building attempts to turn employees into brand ambassadors (de Chernatony et al., 2006). The challenge is delivering consistently satisfying customer experiences that encourage the development of a strong corporate brand. Research into employee attachment to an organizational ideology (Meyer et al., 2002; Mowday, 1998; O'Reilly & Chatman, 1986) links successful internal brand building to employee commitment and identification. That is, internal brand building engenders commitment and identification among employees (Burmann & Zeplin, 2005), and social interaction processes explain, encourage, and reinforce appropriate, brand-supportive staff behaviors, which in turn create value for the organization (Brodie et al., 2006).

2.3. Brand commitment

Research into organizational commitment has a notable history (e.g., Meyer & Allen, 1997; Mowday, 1998; van Dick, 2001), including Allen and Meyer's (1990) distinction among affective, continuance, and normative forms of commitment, which reflect employees' attitudes toward the company and motivation to invest effort to remain part of the group. Affective commitment refers to feelings of belonging and a sense of psychological attachment; continuance commitment notes the perceived costs of leaving; and normative commitment describes employees' attitudes toward the organization and feelings of obligation to it (Wasti, 2003).

In a meta-analysis of relevant antecedents, correlates, and consequences, Meyer et al. (2002) find that affective commitment has the strongest and most favorable link to organizational outcomes, such as citizenship behavior. Such behavior is facilitated through personal characteristics, including "a central life interest in work" (Meyer & Allen, 1991, p. 70) or "a need for achievement, affiliation and autonomy" (Meyer & Allen, 1991, p. 69), and satisfying work-related experiences, such as organizational support, relevant information, or beliefs that the organization cares about employee well-being (Meyer et al., 2002).

In an internal brand building context, employees should demonstrate brand-consistent behavior and thus perform roles as brand builders (de Chernatony et al., 2006). As a means to gain a competitive advantage, affective commitment is a relevant construct pertaining to internal brand-building dynamics. Analyzing the building blocks of brand commitment, Burmann and Zeplin (2005) advance Meyer and Allen's (1991) work by identifying culture fit (e.g., values of an organization that meet individual needs), structure fit, employee know-how, and disposable resources (as they relate to work experiences) as key.

Our discussion of commitment would be incomplete though if we ignored the overlapping notion of organizational identification:[3] As Lipponen et al. (2005) point out, organizational identity researchers often emphasize cognitive, self-definitional aspects of identification (e.g., Ashforth & Mael, 1989; Pratt, 2000; van Knippenberg, 2000), and Allen and Meyer's (1990) conceptualization of affective commitment as identification, emotional attachment, or involvement seems similar to this conception, because it acknowledges the cognitive component while also including affective and evaluative components (Tajfel, 1978). Moreover, the degree of social involvement in an organization relates to organizational identification (Mowday et al., 1982).

The idea of nested identities suggests that people express different levels of the self in organizations, ranging from workgroup or department (organizational) identities to corporate or even industry-level forms of identification (Ashforth et al., 2008). For managers to determine which form of identity is important, they must consider the match between the identity and their envisioned outcomes (Van Dick et al., 2004). Ullrich et al. (2007) show that higher-order identifications with the organization can support goals associated with a higher-order category, such as exemplifying or living brand values (e.g., Apple's corporate brand values are "design and innovation," "ease and simplicity," and "quality"). When these values

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[3] We use corporate and organizational identity interchangeably.

are more relevant to employees, they identify themselves with the values and behave accordingly.

We thus summarize the relationships among organizational identification, organizational commitment, and brand commitment as follows: A corporate brand reflects organizational values on an abstract level, as organizational identity. If perceived as relevant by employees, these values drive employee brand commitment (Urde, 2003), due to the combination of known brand values and the management of affective consequences (affective commitment), which increases an employee's identification with the organization (Burmann & Zepplin, 2005). Committed employees feel as if they belong to the organization and take ownership of its fate, through internalization, such that employees integrate the core values of the brand into their personal value systems (Burmann & Zeplin, 2005). Their brand-supporting behavior results from the moral and emotional bonds between the organization and employees. They create value for the company (Brodie et al., 2006) by working toward its success, "because in doing so they are behaving in a manner consistent with their own values" (Meyer & Allen, 1991, p. 76; see also Wieseke et al., 2009).

2.4. Shared brand beliefs

To deliver a brand promise consistently, employees need shared brand beliefs, though various departments could have differing views on internal brand building. Employees draw on different stimuli from their internal and external environments and may interpret them in differing ways (de Chernatony, 1999). Despite differing types of socialization, employees participating in ongoing communicative processes likely adapt their cognitive structures, at least incrementally. Over time, social interaction thus should change employees' evaluations, especially as they perceive the reactions of other employees to their behaviors. With the passage of time, social interactions also may lead to consensus about how to categorize and evaluate brand-relevant stimuli (de Chernatony, 1999); the socially constructed interpretation of stimuli (Alvesson & Karreman, 2000) then should facilitate employees' orientation. A

collective cognitive structure emerges and is continually shaped by ongoing social discourse. However, employees' newly acquired mental models are useful only if they internalize the brand values to show their "desire to take action … and to apply the knowledge constructively" (Thomson et al., 1999, p. 824).

Contemporary literature on internal brand building thus recommends a well-designed internal communication system to facilitate employee commitment to and alignment with brand values (Asif & Sargeant, 2000; de Chernatony & Segal-Horn, 2001; Thomson et al., 1999), though we need more insight into ways to encourage employees to build the brand and ensure their commitment to delivering brand promises.

2.5. Sustainability

Sustainability is fast becoming a viable ideology in political, economic, technological, and academic circles. Yet little theoretical, empirical, or strategic research has attempted to understand it in depth; the strategic nature of sustainability is even less well documented (Borland, 2009; Kilbourne, 1998; Sharma et al., 2007; Varadarajan, 2010).

The concept of sustainability has been shaped by various influences, including political, public, and academic forces (Benn & Dunphy, 2007; Dunphy et al., 2000). The Brundtland Commission (World Commission on Environment and Development, 1987) and the 1992 Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro introduced the concept of sustainability worldwide. In a corporate context, sustainability has been defined narrowly as corporations' social or environmental concerns and broadly as their social, environmental, and economic concerns (see Linnenluecke & Griffiths, 2010).

We adopt Berger et al.'s (2007) definition, in which sustainability refers to corporations' recognition of how social, environmental, and economic concerns affect their culture, decision making, strategy, and operations. This definition acknowledges that organizations take account of economic issues, but that they also adopt a broader perspective of their purpose including social (e.g., Campbell, 2006; Carter & Jennings, 2002; Royle, 2005; Van

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Tulder et al., 2009) and environmental (e.g., Carter & Ellram, 1998; Peattie, 2001; Plante & Bendell, 2000; Tibben-Lembke, 2002; Yang & Sheu, 2007) issues. For the purposes of this study we are particularly interested in the social and economic aspects.

3. The role of social interaction in fostering brand commitment and shared brand beliefs

Communication plays a major role in internal brand building, because it disseminates information about the brand identity to employees, which should facilitate brand commitment and shared brand beliefs. Drawing on van Riel's (1995) approach, we distinguish between organizational and management communication: Whereas organizational communication is ingrained into organizational structures (e.g., personnel selection, development, incentive structures), management communication relates to communication tools and modes, which may be formal or informal, direct or indirect, explicit or implicit, one- or two-way (e.g., Allan et al., 2002; Farmer et al., 1998; Goebel et al., 2004; Urde, 1999). Communicative tools that management uses include new and traditional media (Macrae & Uncles, 1997). This understanding of communication implies a configuration of related activities, such that communication is a formal framework between sender and receiver (Shannon & Weaver, 1964) or patterned processes of social interaction and behavior (Berger & Luckmann, 1999).

Although we note this distinction, we also argue that a diametric opposition of framework and processes is unhelpful. Social discourse researchers instead suggest blending the notions to express a relationship that is often mutually constitutive (e.g., Alvesson, 1994; Heracleous & Barrett, 2001; Heracleous & Marshak, 2004; Phillips & Hardy, 2002). This fruitful approach conceptualizes modes and tools of internal communication and social interaction as processes underlying internal brand building, which enables employees to make sense of brand-related stimuli.

To determine how constructive power evolves and gains momentum, Phillips et al. (2004) have developed a framework of the dynamics and relationship of institutionalization and language. They conceive of institutions (i.e., organizations) as constructed primarily through

the production of texts, which "mediate the relationship between action and discourse" (Phillips et al., 2004, p. 638). That is, texts produce social categories and norms that shape the understanding and behaviors of actors, facilitating some actions while constraining others. Accordingly, social discourses cannot be studied directly but rather must be understood with regard to the texts that constitute them. Following Phillips et al. (2004), we recognize that texts can appear in many facets, including written documents, verbal reports, artwork, spoken words, pictures, symbols, buildings, and other artifacts. However, for a text to be generated, it must be inscribed (i.e., spoken, written, or depicted) and accessible to others. Social interaction then emanates from actions undertaken to produce texts.

We attempt to illuminate such social interactive processes by exploring what happens in the social interactive space between top management and employees during the dissemination of brand-related information. We also elucidate social interactions among employees (see Figure 1).

{Insert Figure 1 about here}

4. Methodology

We adopt a qualitative approach to capture rich information, namely, a multiple case study approach that generates richer theory than can a single case study (Eisenhardt, 1989; Lindgreen, 2008).

4.1. Sampling procedure and sampled cases

We follow a theoretical sampling process for theory development (Strauss, 1987, 1991). As a general rule, five cases (i.e., replications) are necessary to study highly complex issues and achieve sufficient certainty (Strauss & Corbin, 1998; Yin, 1994). With the help of an industry expert, we selected five corporations from different industries; for confidentiality, we do not disclose their identities but rather refer to them as corporations A, B, C, D, and E. All five corporations operated in strategically relevant markets, offering products that require a high degree of service (e.g., banking, retailing, hospitality). We achieved saturation with these five

cases; additional investigations yielded few new insights. Three corporations (A, C, D; see Table 1) had largely developed and implemented their internal brand programs, so we undertake a *post hoc* examination; corporations B and E both were in the midst of an internal brand-building program process, so we can examine their programs as they took place. In the early stages of our research, we selected corporations C and D because of their interest, their willingness to cooperate, and their accessibility. Subsequently, we included corporation A, which had a reputation for its staff's commitment to the corporate brand. Finally, we identified corporations B and E as companies undergoing internal brand-building processes.

4.2. Data collection

We developed rich case histories of the internal brand programs and brand-building processes through in-depth interviews, observations, and secondary data. The interviews, which averaged 1.5 hours each, included various participants for each case study, with a general focus on CEOs and line staff who engaged in customer contacts. In total, we conducted interviews with 50 respondents over a four-month period. These respondents represented a balanced cross-section of staff from different levels and functions in each corporation, as well as varying involvement with the internal brand program. We also observed seven group meetings dedicated to the topic of the brand. We visited each case site and gathered information from short conversations, observations, and other *in situ* techniques. Prior to each interview, we reviewed any publicly available secondary data and promotional information about each corporation to increase our familiarity with the cases.

{Table 1 here about here}

All interviews were tape recorded and transcribed. The semi-structured in-depth interviews featured mostly open-ended questions. To ensure a flexible, complete investigation of respondents' different perceptions, we adopted an approach similar to Forman and Argenti's (2005): We ensured that basic topics were covered but left the order of questions and their wording ad hoc. The respondents could take the lead and dictate the direction and length of

discussions of particular questions. We also developed additional questions by noting the respondents' answers. As we show in Table 2, for executives, the first set of questions served as an introduction, focused on the relevance of internal brand building and the role of employees in building this corporate brand. The second set of questions explored internal brand-building processes (communication- and management-related) that helped anchor the corporate brand values in the minds of employees across the corporation. In the third set of questions, we investigated the brand commitment concept, using operationalized descriptions of affective commitment (Meyer et al., 2002) and brand citizenship behavior (Burmann & Zeplin, 2005) as guidelines. Finally, the fourth set elicited approaches to internal brand building, challenges faced, and methods and tools used.

For the line staff, additional topics included understanding what the brand values meant to their work context, the way employees demonstrated (or not) commitment to official versions of corporate brand values, how employees learned those values, and if and how they talked about the values.

{Insert Table 2 about here}

Corporations A and E agreed to allow us to observe group meetings so that we could discover how the information disseminated by top management was perceived. In corporation E, two meetings included members of the top management team, and two meetings featured lower management levels and line staff. We also observed three meetings in the customer service department of corporation E, with one group meeting illustrated by Table 3. Participating employees included the customer service director, brand manager (product A), marketing director, credit accountant, and sales director.

Following the interviews, we considered any further information provided by the respondents or gathered from other sources. By drawing on secondary data and multiple interviews in each case, we developed rich insights across multiple case studies and achieved a strong basis for transferring the findings to other contexts (Eisenhardt, 1991). Our secondary

data came from wide searches of published documents, reports, and business press articles. Because the unit of analysis was each case (i.e., each corporation's internal brand-building processes), we combined the information from each interview and the secondary sources into a single, case-specific manuscript.

4.3. Data analysis

We used Eisenhardt's (1989) within- and cross-case analysis methods to analyze the cases. In a first step, we analyzed each case to gain a richer understanding of the processes the firm underwent throughout its internal brand efforts by assigning our gathered data to categories (Miles & Huberman, 1994), related to corporate brand values, social discourse, employee commitment, or shared brand beliefs. Then in each category, we noted specific social interactions, forms, and consequences of social interactions. Through this process, we could identify relationships across categories. For example, their unique and often particular characteristics led different employees to focus only on those issues they believed were most appropriate and relevant to their organizations' internal branding efforts. We also met to discuss and reach agreement about any parts of the analysis subject to disagreement.

Because each case encompassed different timing for its internal brand building efforts, we compared the cases to determine any similarities and differences and gain a greater understanding of the associated processes. Such cross-case analysis is essential for multiple case studies (Yin, 1994). Finally, to gain a holistic, contextualized comprehension of how social interactions build brands internally, we tacked back and forth between prior literature and our data and thereby developed several theoretical categories (Spiggle, 1994).

To analyze brand-related communication behavior, we used the interaction observation instrument introduced by Bales in 1950; for the full instrument, see Miller, 1983). As we show in Table 3, certain items relate mostly to the socio-emotional area (categories 1–3 = positive reactions; 10–12 = negative reactions), whereas others mainly fall into task areas (categories 4–6 = problem solving attempts/task behavior; 7–9 = questions). For our analysis

of the group meetings, we created tabulation lists of the 12 categories and assigned informants' names or code numbers to each cell. This method helped us track discussions, comment by comment; to identify who made comments to whom, we assigned a number to each group member and to each group (Vallaster & Koll, 2002). This analysis also enabled us to address questions about the flow of social interaction:

- What is the balance between socio-emotional and problem-solving attempts with task behavior during internal brand-building interactions? The observations reveal formal versus informal leadership behaviors and qualities.

- Do certain members engage in certain behaviors more than others? The results offer implications for group dynamics, such as the presence of dominance versus cooperation, such that their impact on social interactions can be developed.

- Do some members disproportionately address specific members? If so, we can derive indications for involvement, engagement, or lack of interest.

{Insert Table 3 about here}

Throughout the study, we adopted several methods to improve its quality. Consistent with recommendations from interpretive researchers (Lincoln & Guba, 1985), grounded theorists (Strauss & Corbin, 1998), and previous case-based research (Beverland & Lindgreen, 2010), we applied credibility, transferability, dependability, confirmability, integrity, fit, understanding, generality, and control criteria and thereby improved the trustworthiness of the findings (Beverland et al., 2010). Specifically, we relied on experts to help select the cases, conducted multiple interviews, established our own independent interpretations of the findings, and allowed respondents to provide feedback on our initial findings. Whereas one author conducted all the interviews, both authors performed the independent coding of the transcripts (intercoder reliability = 80%), which reduced the potential for bias (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

5. Findings

Our findings reveal that affective commitment toward the brand identity remains a "privilege" of top management, who share greater knowledge about and a deeper emotional attachment to the brand identity than do their colleagues lower down the organizational hierarchy. The lower-level informants provide another view that includes resistance rather than brand-supportive behavior, such as ignoring information, cynicism, or even misbehaving. These contrasting perceptions strongly affect the degree to which shared brand beliefs are embedded throughout the corporation.

The conditions that encourage employees to accept shared definitions of brand reality entail several factors, including the social position of the text producer (i.e., leaders who live brand values), oral versus written texts, the forms of brand-related text, and structural conditions that facilitate internal brand-related social interactions.

5.1 Social position of the text producer

Communicative-based internal brand building processes notably emerge from people in leadership positions, which provides legitimacy to the internal brand-building process, as a brand supervisor in corporation B acknowledges: "The top management is *the* pivot for successful internal brand building. If they do not support this process, things soon fall apart." Commitment to the corporation and its corporate brand values stems from an exhibition of commitment, living the brand, and trusting employees. The first two elements relate to role modeling; the latter entails a positive relationship with supervisors. By exhibiting commitment and living the brand values, top management signals that it has incorporated the brand values into its own personal value system (Burmann & Zeplin, 2005; O'Reilly & Chatman, 1986; Pratt, 2000). Consider the comments of the person responsible for marketing and advertising in corporation B:

> When acting as a role model there is no need to talk. If you don't pick up the waste paper and only tell other people to clean the floor, changes won't be lasting. The

corporate brand will not be anchored in a person's consciousness. There won't be

much employee commitment. You are not trustworthy if you don't live what you say.

Although top management recognizes that engaging in such behaviors helps induce employee

identification with corporate brand values, the line staff in all five corporations reported often-

experienced misfits between statements and behavior. In response, employees reacted

cynically to the motifs top management expressed in their efforts to become a strong

corporate brand and even doubted the viability of a related change program. In corporation E

for example, a newly defined corporate brand value related to interdisciplinary thinking and

cooperation, but an employee respondent stated:

Yeah, right, he does not even talk to the general manager of this other department

without yelling at him all the time. I doubt that anything will change. All this branding

stuff is just for the paper, if you want my opinion.

Extant literature (Goebel et al., 2004; Gould-Williams & Davies, 2005) also suggests that

trusting employees to behave according to brand identity values will enhance employee

commitment. Most supervisors confirmed this link and described themselves as trusting their

employees, but the degree to which subordinates felt trusted varied with their level within the

corporation. Those employees lower down in the hierarchy (i.e., closer to the customer) felt

less trusted, particularly in corporation B, whose customer contact employees complained

about inexistent trust. The following statement is typical:

He [immediate supervisor] controls whatever I do; he wants me to report weekly.

Sometimes, I have the impression he is sneaking around my personal and office stuff.

I feel pretty uncomfortable with the current situation, and I just overhear whatever he

says about this value and branding and 'this is what we stand for' stuff. I don't care.

Sometimes, I do things I would not do otherwise: Freshness of fruits and vegetables is

one issue we really take care of. While I am responsible for sorting out bad products I

sometimes just don't do it just to see him again shaking his fingers at us.

5.2. Barriers to the ability of brand-related text to change employee behavior

Brand-related texts include corporate newspapers, notice boards, newsletters, and e-mails that address issues that senior management deems important (Cheney, 1983). According to our research though, little of this text is fully understood or gets read only by more junior employees. The interview respondents consistently believed that this text efficiently transmitted brand-related information and guaranteed smooth information flow, but most respondents were skeptical about whether, after reading the text, they actually changed their behaviors. Three reasons might explain this situation.

First, language problems prevented some communication. In corporation B for example, a branch leader observed: "Some people can't speak enough German. One would have to translate the text into various ethnic dialects so that they understand." The staff of corporation D made similar statements. Asked about the extent to which language influences brand commitment, one supervisor noted:

> It is very difficult to make the brand values understandable for the group of less skilled workers, let alone brand commitment; and the language problem intensifies this issue. They stay with us because they would not find a different job somewhere else.

An interview with an employee of the same corporation from Poland confirmed this impression, though with a different perspective:

> They give us work, but then they do not care about us any further. Sometimes, I feel very alienated—within the group and in the entire organization. Sometimes, even this country is very strange for me.

Second, the vast quantity of text often bars efficient information processing. According to the employee responsible for marketing and advertising in corporation B, "I flick through the employee magazine rather than actually reading it. It is a nice journal, but there is too much information in it." Other respondents, such as the customer service manager from corporation A, echoed this feeling:

> Our weakness is that we have too much communication. We provide so much information to our employees that the really important stuff often gets lost. There clearly is an information overload that can't be saved in your mind anymore.

The relevancy of information thus is a key issue:

> If you want to make the brand identity values comprehensible and relevant to the different groups of employees then you need to explain what they mean in the different employee contexts. For instance, friendliness is one of our core values, so what does this generic value mean when you answer the phone or when we have guests in our house, etc.? This will facilitate brand commitment. Explaining the brand identity values to our employees is not directly the task of only the top management, but every person who leads people need to be taken into responsibility (sales director, corporation A).

Third, written text appeared to provide an inappropriate tool to induce commitment, let alone initiate brand-related behavioral changes. The branch supervisor of corporation B commented:

> It does not work just to give them [employees] written information and tell them that they have to behave as it is described. This may work for a short time when pressure is high, but as soon as this pressure is gone employees fall back into their usual behavior.

The replies of six employees who worked for corporation C similarly exemplify the marginality of written text: Not only were half of them unaware that mission and brand statements or job descriptions existed, but none of them could describe the content of such text. Written text is often perceived as too abstract and without content (Larkin & Larkin, 1996; Lencioni, 2002), useful only to disseminate information and perhaps enhance brand knowledge:

> Within a corporation there are many values floating around: corporate culture values, brand identity values, own/personal values. Only if the top management is able to

make these values congruent to some extent, explain why the corporation uses these values and not others to differentiate itself in the marketplace, then the employee will hopefully be able to understand their generic meaning. Written text only helps to explain and/or to remind people about these values, but not to explain relevancy for your own working context or situation (general manager, corporation A).

5.3. Means of ensuring brand-related communication is persuasive

Employees tend to identify with and commit themselves to a target, such as their organization, if they perceive communication as persuasive (Cheney, 1983). Our research suggests that such persuasion takes place through a range of organizational artifacts (Schein, 1984), including gossiping and personal experience, which follows directly from the creation of strong in-group bonds that distinguish like-minded employees from others (Pratt, 2000). Also, the production of a company-owned vocabulary falls into this category. For example, corporation B introduced "rules of the game," a term that was open to interpretation by outsiders, though employees knew that it defined the brand values and daily behavior for staff members. Informal brand-related information also often produced organization-wide communication routines, such that "In our corporation the portion of 'gossiping' is very high, but pretty efficient, too, as the communication flow is getting real drive" (general manager, corporation A). Rumors or gossip disseminated information to employees more rapidly than formalized channels or managers (Michelson & Mouly, 2000), reinforced by events that fostered communicative atmospheres for employees to exchange their thoughts (e.g., coffee breaks, Christmas parties, joint excursions or training, eating in the common canteen). Employees typically discussed problems with customers and how these problems had been solved; another common topic related to branding and how employees could help ensure effective branding. Both top management and employees considered such events powerful contexts for commitment and shared brand belief development, and diverse, brand-related knowledge thus moved among all members, whether they supported branding actions,

opposed them, or considered them irrelevant. As an employee of corporation B noted, "Informal talk helps official information become more credible." However, the ultimate effects of purely informal communication (without official mandates) appeared mixed: Some employees noted that gossip helped them get to know one another or exchange ideas; others admitted that in informal settings, they never talked about brand-related issues.

Corporation A attempted to use a motto, "Experiencing what you tell others," to exemplify its brand strategy concept, because top management considered this communication strategy highly effective for transferring brand knowledge and stirring emotional attachment and commitment. As a branch supervisor stated:

> In each branch a big screen was installed and via live-broadcasting a person explained the 'rules of the game'. The single sections were actually located in each branch. The employees could participate simultaneously, and were encouraged to ask questions, give feedback or input.

Asked whether these rules were fully implemented by retail staff, another branch supervisor explained:

> While we had the responsibility to introduce these brand-related rules to the branches, there are, to our surprise, still employees who don't even know that they exist. I think we lack consistency and there is no coordinating mechanism available. Something happened in between.

5.4. Structural conditions facilitating internal brand-related social interactions

Internal brand-building processes depend on the strength of self-regulating mechanisms, as four main themes showed. First, a feedback mechanism between corporate stakeholders and employees was critical. Employees interact with various stakeholders and likely thus have varied experiences with the brand. These experiences, if communicated to employees responsible for internal brand building, seem to result in better ways to deliver on brand values. During the process of encouraging a customer orientation brand value among

employees at the production site, corporation E made customer complaints public by putting them on a board:

> Soon, the workers started discussing them and made assumptions of what went wrong during the production process and how one could improve the situation. Something like a shared brand understanding and commitment truly emerged (marketing manager, corporation E).

This statement reinforces recent research that demonstrates that when employees identify with their organization, they have a vested interest in knowing how external audiences view that corporation (Wolfinbarger & Gilly, 2005). The owner of corporation A confirms: "It is important that our employees listen to what people talk positively and negatively about our service. The more feedback they have, the better." Staff with direct interactions with customers also consistently claimed that positive feedback is highly valuable, because it makes them proud to work for a corporation where customers are satisfied and feel comfortable. Working for the well-known corporation A seemed to prompt positive feedback:

> Even when I sometimes think that this service was not what could be expected from us, I still discover a warmer and friendlier response than you'd probably get if you work for a not so well-known corporation. Of course, this makes me proud to work for this corporation (customer service director, corporation A).

Yet line staff in corporation C universally reported that negative feedback (e.g., complaints about the food or cleanliness of the hotel rooms) did not proceed further, whether because "I often find myself blaming the dissatisfied customer; he or she tends to complain all the time, has not slept well, has had difficulties with his family, etc." (line staff, corporation C) or because "I would not trust my boss that he doesn't use this information against me" (line staff, corporation C).

Second, another key feedback mechanism spans employees and their supervisors or the employees themselves. Respondents frequently noted that effective communication required a

give-and-take relationship, in which partners listened, gave feedback, and asked questions. Multiple comments suggested that management could benefit from listening and assessing the extent to which brand-related information had been understood. As the customer service manager of corporation A reported:

> Usually, the communication flow is top down, that is, manager–supervisor–employee. Bottom-up communication often is more direct, that is employees can talk to the manager directly when they have a problem or comments to make. I believe this is very important, as employees get the feeling of being heard and valued.

Other respondents mentioned that two-way communication encourages employee responsibility. Thus a member of corporation B pointed out, "Things should not only be presented to employees, but they should be asked for feedback…. [T]he branch supervisors should voice their opinion regarding the rules of the game; they should actively work to improve them." This belief suggests that two-way communication allows employees to participate in brand-related communication and makes them more willing to absorb, decode, and process brand-related information, which ultimately leads to shared brand beliefs. Corporation A's two-way communicative atmosphere helped energize employees with brand-related information, shaped by two main mechanisms: (1) actively encouraging employees to contribute to the brand-related discussion and (2) introducing a new type of minute taking. As we illustrate in Table 3, a sales director took the lead and addressed employees directly, encouraging them to provide opinions, suggestions, or information during a meeting that would balance divergent viewpoints and provide updates of brand-related issues. A pin board was used to visualize the topics discussed and identify persons in charge, cooperative deadlines, and brand-related subgoals. Therefore, the communication structure became more consistent and efficient in spreading brand-related information throughout the organization. However, our findings also demonstrated that such processes do not always flow easily. Free communication often was strained by a "mum effect" (Milliken et al., 2003), such that people

avoided sharing bad news. This effect was particularly obvious in corporation E: Even though middle management repeatedly stressed their good supervisor–subordinate relationships, most of them filtered information they conveyed upward. Thus for a long time, top management was not clear about the brand values of the corporation, even though the issue was discussed thoroughly during a group discussion with middle management employees—who showed great reluctance in addressing the lack of brand values and impact for employee commitment directly with their supervisors.

Third, brand building requires access to brand-related information. Top management widely believed that brand-related information had to be accessible to all employees, and advances in data networks helped firms better link their employees. However, computer-mediated communication, such as an intranet, also placed new challenges on employees. Line staff largely disliked the intranet platform, which included too much information: "I selectively sort out information that is directly relevant for my own daily business; the rest is of secondary importance and will be read at some stage when I have less to do" (branch supervisor, corporation B). Consequently, information overload and the virtual design seemed to have little impact on employee commitment, though they helped increase brand knowledge among employees.

Fourth and finally, staff development can be a critical function. In line with prior research into human resources, which suggests a link between the rather general notion of "work experience" and organizational commitment (see Agarwala, 2003; Chang, 1999), our respondents frequently pointed out that training or workshops helped engender shared beliefs in and care about brand-related issues. However, they also considered such training or workshops insufficient. As a manager at corporation D noted:

> Although a great deal of information about our hotel, desired behavior, etc., is written down, it requires a great deal of initiative to gather all the necessary knowledge. Unfortunately, we do not have a lot of training which would certainly help.

Training was the only standardized human resource procedure mentioned by top management, though other instruments, including reward systems, selection practices, and family-responsive practices, were implemented sporadically and loosely coupled to specific tasks:

> There is no such thing as a continuous or standardized evaluation whether we behave in a brand-supportive manner. We are assessed in relation to our individual development by our boss, and there are some tools available such as certain documents. However, our salary does not depend on brand-supportive behavior, development, or even perks (head of marketing and advertising, corporation B).

6. Discussion

There is little empirical research in internal branding literature that clarifies the processes of brand-related social interaction between top management and employees or when this information might be shared among employees. We consider the type of social interactions that induce brand commitment and shared brand beliefs and find the process is a fragile one. Thus, we highlight the thin line between brand commitment and brand disinterest or even cynicism.

Some means used to communicate corporate brand values are only short term and may create situated identities, with no or little impact on long-term affective commitment (Meyer et al., 2006). Other factors better pave the way for long-term, deep corporate brand identification, with positive results for employee commitment and good service, assuming the following conditions exist:

1. Leadership behaviors that indicate living the brand, showing commitment, and trusting employees to behave according to defined brand values are key for facilitating brand knowledge.

2. A consistent and persuasive communicative design (Schultz et al., 2002) enables the effective dissemination of brand knowledge with a common denominator as the theme.

This finding is valid for all forms of texts or genres, including supporting structures and processes.

3. Structural conditions that facilitate the flow of text support brand knowledge and shared brand knowledge development.

If disseminated brand knowledge appears relevant, the corporate brand gets activated, which leads to committed brand behavior or shared brand beliefs. Feedback loops among employees and with corporate stakeholders help secure and maintain the corporate brand (Riketta & Nienaber, 2007). The personal interactions among employees help them test the accuracy of their brand understanding. Simultaneously, through feedback, managers can be influenced by the brand perspectives developed by employees. Because employees likely have varying experiences with the brand (McDonald et al., 2001), fragmentation of meaning results, but feedback loops serve as warning indicators of unacceptable brand behavior. Figure 2 captures how brand-committed behavior and shared brand beliefs develop.

{Insert Figure 2 about here}

Yet the processes of brand commitment development and shared brand beliefs also feature black holes. First, employees reported that leaders often failed to live up to the corporate brand values they articulated. Cha and Edmondson (2006) have aptly described this scenario as a recipe for employee skepticism and cynicism (for a conceptual distinction of these terms, see Stanley et al., 2005). Some employees thus described themselves as cynical about branding in general and considered it an academic concept that—as one respondent casually asserted—"top management developed when they were in the mood for some philosophical time." Similar criticisms are common in print media, film, and theater, such as in the Dilbert comic strip, *The Simpsons*, or *Death of a Salesman* (Bateman et al., 1992). Furthermore, research into resistance notes how employees deploy discursive strategies to create resistant spaces within larger discourses that feature irony, cynicism, humor, complaining, and gossip (Mumby, 2005). Such discursive resistance is rooted in possibilities for alternative

interpretations, such that articulating alternatives does not directly confront the dominant discursive regime. In Prasad and Prasad's (1998) terms, such strategies involve subtle subversions, ambiguous accommodations, and various forms of disengagement that are difficult to identify as direct forms of recalcitrance.

Second, regular information exchange may help employees develop shared feelings about the organization's fate, which should increase brand commitment and shared brand beliefs. Yet clearly, informal channels of communication (e.g., gossiping) constitute powerful means for information transmission, even as rumor and gossip can ruin the harmony of a workplace and hinder individual commitment, if badly managed (Michelson & Mouly, 2000).

Third, employees who interact with external stakeholders always receive some form of feedback when reproducing brand values (Farmer et al., 1998). If employees know the brand values, feedback can lead to a reinterpretation, revisions to formerly developed brand-related mental models, or knowledge renewal (Ballantyne, 2003). If employees are committed to the corporate brand, they may sense that their identity, or that of the organization, is threatened by stakeholders' unfavorable responses. As our research shows, feedback loops are problematic when managers use them solely to uncover what goes wrong. Levesque (2006) notes that many companies use surveys and other feedback mechanisms to root out the causes of employee problems, customer problems, and complaints, so employees come to dread such measurement and data-gathering efforts that feel like witch hunts for employee scapegoats or formal exercises to assign blame. Thus, feedback rarely travels up the hierarchy to the responsible person/department, who might be able to initiate brand-related changes. Such defensive behaviors also mean an avoidance of internal branding efforts, because employees resist change and hope to protect their turf (Ashforth & Lee, 1990) through indirect forms of resistance. Similar effects arise for cross-functional cooperation: The human resource department was frequently described as a "people pleaser," whereas the marketing department

was reputed to consider only the bottom-line results of brand-building efforts. Thus, conflicts appeared preprogrammed.

Fourth, even if management believes that empowerment of employees, through continuous training and development, provides the necessary skills to perform brand-consistent activities (see Aurand et al., 2005; de Chernatony & Segal-Horn, 2001; McDonald et al., 2001; Sharma & Petterson, 1999; Tosti & Stotz, 2001), in practice such training seems to involve only one-time events. Supportive structures could help increase employees' emotional attachment to the brand through enhanced competence and responsibility for brand-related actions, leading to their increased perceptions of influence over brand issues (Ind, 2003; Janssen, 2004; Mudie, 2003). The underinvestment in employee–organization relationships instead produced employees who acted in purely mechanical ways or else resented their own organization (Tsui et al., 1997). These findings suggest a dilemma for service companies that need supportive employee behavior but are unable (or unwilling) to invest in different forms of communication to ensure comprehension of the key brand messages.

Fifth, brand knowledge becomes brand-committed behavior or shared brand beliefs only if the corporate identity brand values seem relevant, which increases their influence on employee behavior through a direct relation to emotional experiences. This consideration is in line with Ullrich et al.'s (2007) findings that lower- and higher-order identifications gain significance from the context. Our results suggest that brand identity values congruent with the employees' own values help facilitate brand commitment or shared brand beliefs.

Overall, our research demonstrates that higher-level management exhibits greater knowledge of and commitment to brand identity values, whereas employees lower down the organizational hierarchy express weaker information and emotional bonds. Their resulting behavior encompasses forms of resistance, mostly covert and nonconfrontational, operating at the interstices of organizational life. In this sense, employees strategically engage systems of brand-related meaning that constitute the daily fabric of the brand identity. Brand identity

values and related meanings are ambiguous but characterize social interaction. Even if the brand-related communication disseminated by management frames interpretive possibilities for the brand identity, the struggle over its meaning is always open, characterized by an excess of signification that allows for possibilities for constructing alternative, resistant accounts of the brand (Mumby, 2005).

Finally, our study contributes to sustainability literature. Top management sets the strategy for the organization, and lower-level staff implement that strategy (Maon et al., 2009). Corporations communicate an image of their brand to customers; to do so, staff must understand and share certain brand beliefs so that they can become, in effect, ambassadors (de Chernatony et al., 2006). By identifying with their corporation, staff members likely undertake brand-supportive behaviors, which increases the product's perceived benefits and ultimately its value. Where necessary, staff's understanding of what is the organizational brand image the management team is trying to build, as well as staff's behavior can be monitored and controlled (Johnson & Scholes, 2002). Thus, the economic aspect of a corporation's sustainability improves (Sachs & Ruhli, 2005).

7. Managerial relevance

Top management members have detailed knowledge about brand identity values and their meanings; across the diverse companies we study, they rate themselves as highly emotionally attached to the corporate brand. Theoretically, top managers understand the conditions in which employees accept shared brand beliefs, but the degree to which they actually induce brand commitment seems low. Management seemingly cannot activate the different levels of identities (or different foci of commitment) in which an employee is embedded. For example, management can communicate overall brand values, but it faces more difficulty when it tries to explain the meaning of these values in an employee's own work context, to which most people exhibit more commitment than they do to the overall organization.

Our findings help clarify how employees develop, employ, and alter the brand-related information they possess, as well as the methods that management can employ to influence brand-related social interactions. These processes induce brand commitment and shared brand beliefs among employees. Better communicated values also could lead to a better workplace environment, which nurtures the social aspect of sustainability, especially if employees participate in brand-related communication. This scenario ensures that employees understand and enact brand-related information, which leads to shared brand beliefs. To engender shared beliefs in and care about brand-related issues, top management in our study preferred to develop staff through training. Training workshops then provide a platform for management to share brand-related information with employees.

Because the sale of services demands interactions, staff members give customers the means to distinguish offers from multiple service companies operating in the marketplace. Brand-supportive behavior leads to a positive differentiation of the organization, and we argue that internal brand building and affective commitment facilitate such behaviors. Although resistance to change has been well documented (e.g., Chreim, 2002), research has largely overlooked the sequential psychological processes that people undergo to become brand ambassadors.

8. Further research

Social interaction or commitment might not be unique to internal brand building; the same lessons could apply to non–brand-related communication, such as the conveyance of a new organizational policy. We focus on the specific context of brand messages and related discussions to identify the level of intellectual and emotional attachment and identification that such communication seeks to inspire. Further research could study social interactions that relate more to brand content rather than the modes of delivery.

Further studies also should examine the conditional nature of affective commitment by investigating psychological processes, such as disinterest, cynicism, involvement, trust, or

loyalty, as well as their interrelationships. In particular, temporal effects may be critical if people demonstrate unique trajectories in developing affective commitment, depending on their individual characteristics and social or situational circumstances. Research along these lines could clarify when, how, and why employees develop affective commitment to a corporate brand.

We also are sensitive to the debate between structure and agency (Giddens, 1979) and thus recognize that social interaction may be a generative mechanism between organizational practices and discursive practices that relate to internal brand building. To analyze the dynamics of internal brand building, researchers should study the link between social discourse and internal support mechanisms for the brand (e.g., extent to which human resources and marketing interact). Such an investigation could test the assumption that brand-supportive commitment, and thus behavior, results only in an appropriate company culture with appropriate structure-related management processes and systems in place.

Finally, the service industry faces massive changes to employment systems, including the shift toward non-standard forms of employment, short-term hires, fixed-term contracts, part-time employment, and subcontracting—replacing regular, full-time, permanent employment. Positions may be filled with hourly on-call or part-time staff, which reinforces the existing low-skill/low-pay image problem and moves the delivery of internal value out of sight. Further research should consider how employees might become emotionally attached, if not to the organization as a whole, then to a particular occupation. This question leads to a further issue, namely, how to make an occupation so attractive, despite its temporary or low-paying character, that an employee decides to go the extra mile.

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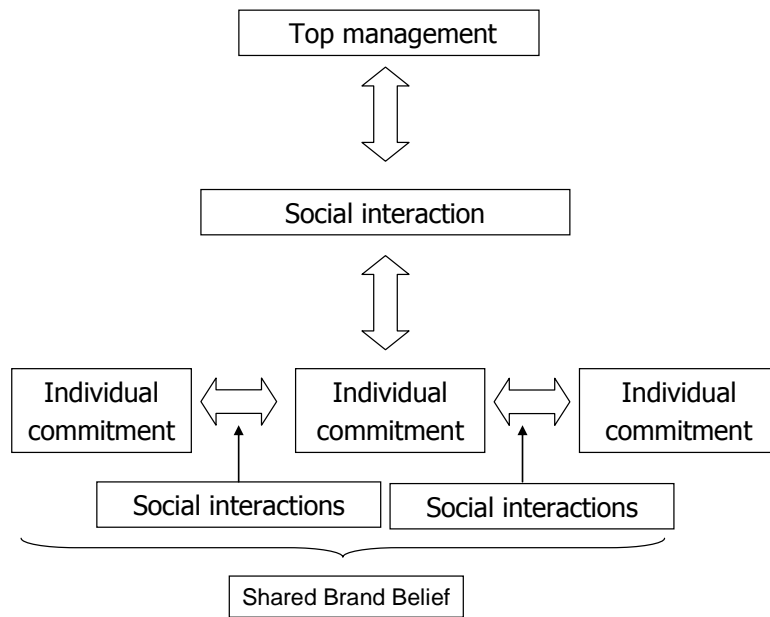
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Figure 1: Research focus

Top management

⇕

Social interaction

⇕

Individual commitment ⟷ Individual commitment ⟷ Individual commitment

Social interactions   Social interactions

Shared Brand Belief

Focus of research	➢ What happens in the social interactive space when top management disseminates brand-related information to employees lower down the hierarchical level in order to induce brand commitment? ➢ What happens in the social interactive space between employees so that shared brand beliefs develop?

Figure 2: How brand-committed behavior and shared brand beliefs develop
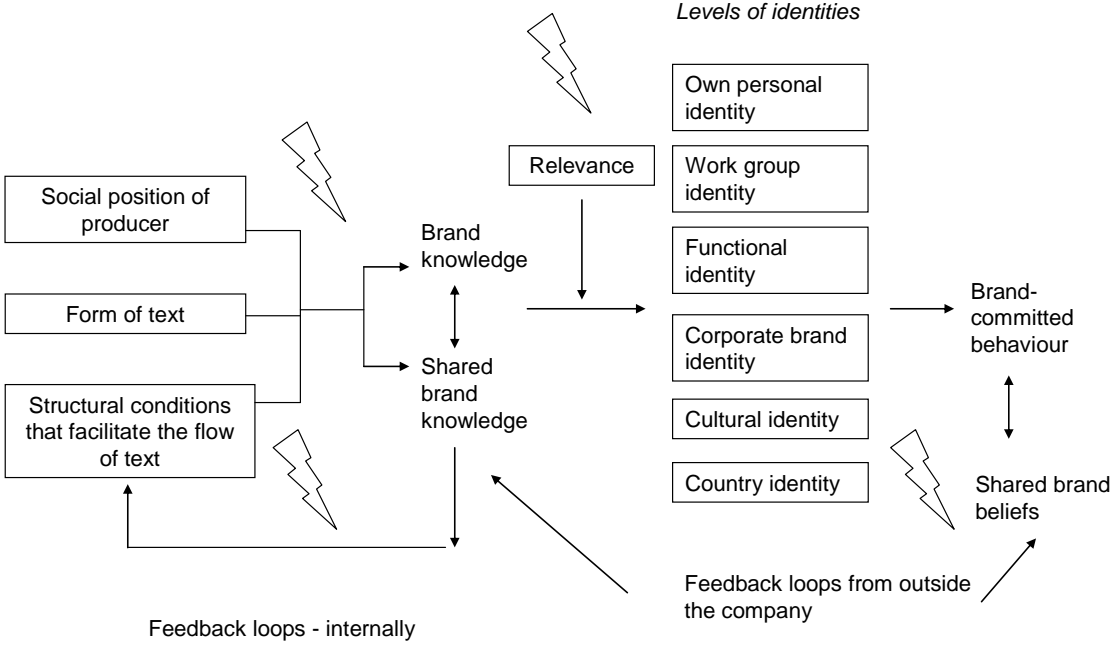
Notes: The lightning bolts indicate disruptions in the flow of brand information, which inhibit the development of brand-committed behaviors or shared brand beliefs.

Table 1: Interview sample

Unit of Analysis			Unit of Analysis		
Corporation A			**Corporation B**		
Industry	Bank		Industry	Retail	
Location	Austria		Location	Austria	
Employee no.	Approx. 450		Employee no.	Approx. 200	
Interviewee sample			Interviewee sample		
	Function			**Function**	
1	General manager		1	Head of purchasing	
2	Human resource manager		2	Branch leader	
3	Customer service director		3	Personnel development	
4	Sales director		4	Branch supervisor (1)	
5	Brand manager (Product A)		5	Marketing and advertisement	
6	Brand manager (Product B)		6	Owner	
7	Production service representative		7	Branch supervisor (2)	
8	Sales coordinator Europe		8	Sales manager	
9	PR trainee		9	Branch supervisor (3)	
10	Credit accountant		10	Sales personnel (Branch 1)	
11	Retail marketing coordinator		11	Sales personnel (1)	
12	Team coordinator marketing		12	Sales personnel (Branch 2)	
13	Marketing (Product A)		13	Sales personnel (2)	
14	Sales manager (Product B)		14	Sales personnel (2)	
15	Dealer service supervisor		15	Sales personnel (Branch 3)	
			16	Sales personnel (3)	
Corporation C			**Corporation D**		
Industry	Hotel		Industry	Hotel	
Location	South Tyrol (Italy)		Location	South Africa	
Employee no.	Approx. 60		Employee no.	Approx. 40	
Interviewee sample			Interviewee sample		
	Function			**Function**	
1	Line staff		1	Assistant manager	
2	Line staff		2	Manager	
3	Line staff		3	Clerk	
4	Line staff		4	Agent	
5	Management		5	Clerk	
6	Line staff		6	Rooms division	
Corporation E					
Industry	Hotel				
Location	Germany				
Employee no.	Approx. 70				
Interviewee sample					

	Function
1	Owner
2	Marketing
3	Sales/consulting
4	Legal issues
5	IT service
6	Project manager I
7	Project manager II

Table 2: Interview protocol, topics, and codes for analysis

Target: Executives/management	
Research Question	Topics/Codes for Analysis
What does your company convey to your external audience? Values of corporate brand ?	**Corporate brand**
What is the role of employees in communicating these brand values? Relevance of brand understanding/brand commitment?	**Internal brand building**
To what extent do you commit yourself to what is communicated to consumers? How is this shown in your daily work life? How committed would you rate your employees to be to the brand identity? Is that expressed in daily work life?	**Brand commitment**
How did you communicate this to your employees? Message, instruments, who communicated what? Target group?	**Communication**
Process of internal brand building: Major challenges thus far? Timeline? Effectiveness (related to brand understanding and commitment)	**Approach to internal brand building**
Target: Employees/line staff	
Research Question	Topics/Codes for Analysis
What is it that your company conveys to your external audience? What does this mean for your working context?	**Understanding of corporate brand identity**
To what extent do you commit yourself to what is communicated to consumers? Expressed in daily work life?	**Brand commitment**
How did you learn about what is communicated to consumers? By whom? How? Enough information to understand the content and reason why/why not? Do you talk with your colleagues about brand values? Why/why not?	**Communication**

Table 3: One group meeting observations in company E, customer service

	Categories		Customer Service Director	Brand Manager (Product A)	Marketing Director	Credit Accountant	Sales Director
Social-emotional	*1. Seems friendly*	Raises others' status Provides assistance and rewards	✔		✔		✔
	2. Dramatizes	Jokes, tells stories, gives indirect suggestion					✔ (jokes)
	3. Agrees	Engages in head nodding; gives verbal suggestions of commitment about information, opinion, or suggestion					
Problem-solving attempts/task behavior	4. Gives suggestion	Takes the lead; tries to assume leadership on the task		✔✔			✔✔
	5. Gives opinion	Provides evaluation; analysis, expression of feeling or wish	✔		✔✔		
	6. Gives information	Provides orientation, repetition, clarification, confirmation		✔			
Questions	7. Asks for information	Request orientation, repetition, clarification, confirmation	✔✔				
	8. Asks for opinion	Requests evaluation, analysis, expression of feeling or wish	✔				
	9. Asks for suggestion	Requests direction while maintaining a submissive position; asks questions designed to call for initiative of others					

Social-emotional	*10. Disagrees*	Gives passive rejection, mild disagreement; failure to respond					
	11. Shows tension	Laughs; shows signs of emotions anxiety; holds back					
	12. Seems unfriendly	Reduces others' status; defends or asserts self; conveys negative feelings					

Notes: Arrows show at whom the interaction was directed and which responses, if any, were provoked. For example, we can see that the sales director takes the lead (category 4: gives suggestion) on several occasions including addressing the customer service director and providing this colleague assistance (category 1: seems friendly). Checkmarks indicate that interactions took place, without these interactions being directed at anybody specific or producing a reaction from others.