

**HOW DO ACADEMIC STAFF AND MANAGERS PERCEIVE  
INTERNAL BRANDING IN UK BUSINESS SCHOOLS? EXPLORING  
INTERNAL BRANDING UNDERSTANDING, SUPPORT AND  
LEADERSHIP IN UNIVERSITIES**

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## **Declaration**

This is to certify that this thesis is a result of my own work, and that no portion of it contained herein has been submitted for another degree or qualification in this or any other university, to the best of my knowledge, and that the original work is mine except where due references are made.

## **List of abbreviations**

Higher Education	HE
Higher Education Institution	HEI
United Kingdom	UK
Internal Branding	IB
Marketing and Communications Based Perspective	MCBP
Norms and Values Communications Based Perspective	NVCBP
Research Question	RQ

## Abstract

The development of a strong university brand requires commitment of employees and alignment of their values to the institutional ones (Hemsley Brown and Goonawardana, 2007; Whisman, 2009). Internal branding is important for organisations to promote the brand to employees with the aim of developing a correspondence between internal and external brand messages and thereby facilitating the transformation of brand promises into reality. But existing research in the context of HE is limited, and has identified some difficulties as well as resistances in the application of internal branding strategies (Chapleo, 2007; Naidoo *et al.*, 2014), outlining the need of understanding what factors inspire or hinder the development of brand support in employees, leading to the objectives and focus of this study. Indeed, previous studies (eg. Chapleo, 2015; Dean *et al.*, 2016; Spry *et al.*, 2018) called for more research in the topic of internal branding in Higher Education, suggesting the need of clarifying the roles played by the actors involved in the internal branding processes as well as the factors that could facilitate and drive brand supporting behaviour. This exploratory study addresses such calls for further research, adopting a qualitative approach and digging into the perception of academic staff members and managers through the use of semi-structured interviews. The concept of internal branding in the context of United Kingdom's business schools is explored, with a focus on the meaning of internal branding for managers and academics and the role played by training and communications activities in generating brand support. The topic of brand leadership is discussed, with a reflection on the leadership dimensions that can aid developing brand-supporting behaviour in academics. The potential obstacles for internal branding strategies are investigated, with a specific focus on the reasons behind the widely reported degrees of academic cynicism towards branding efforts. The research advances existing literature through the joint analysis of academic staff and managers' perceptions, providing an in-depth exploration of the internal branding actors' feelings and preferences. Due to the practical nature of the internal branding discipline, the study is valuable from an implementation point of view for practitioners, providing guidance on how to implement and communicate internal branding in Higher Education. Indeed, upon being accessed by academic staff members, the work may be useful in helping them familiarising with the internal branding activities increasingly adopted in HE. Finally, the results have pedagogic implications. Focusing on how internal branding efforts affect teaching and the daily activities of academics, the study explores the degree of inclusion and consideration of brand values in academic practices, reflecting on how internal branding efforts can be incorporated into teaching and daily activities to strengthen inclusion and buy-in of the brand values.

# CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCTION

### 1. Introduction

The current research revolves around the concept of branding in Higher Education (HE), focusing more specifically on the concept of internal branding. The first chapter of this report provides an introduction to the topic. A discussion of the recent changes in the HE context that brought about branding in the context of HE follows. Discussion in the second section explains how universities have changed, how marketing became a common practice in HE and the reasons for applying branding. The current research project focuses on the context of United Kingdom and therefore a background on development of UK HE is offered. The second chapter presents a literature review of the branding approaches in HE, examining how HE Institutions (HEIs) tend to brand themselves through corporate branding approaches and discussing the role of internal branding to achieve involvement of staff in the process. Discussion then moves on to examine internal branding and its applications to HEIs. The third chapter provides a conceptual framework, highlighting the gaps identified and addressed by the current research questions. In the fourth chapter, the methodology is presented, with an overview of the research philosophy underpinning the research, the approach chosen, and the method selected to collect data. The fifth chapter presents the data analysis, with relevant excerpts of data collected. The sixth chapter discusses the findings linking them back to the literature review. Finally, the seventh chapter offers a conclusion, summarising the key contributions of this study.

#### 1.1. Background of the research

There has been a growing interest in developing reputation among UK HE Institutions (HEIs) (The Guardian, 2012). The “first global ranking of universities was developed in 2003 by the Shanghai Jiao Tong University—and the rest, as they say, is history” (Hazelkorn, 2011, p. 1). Hazelkorn’s (2011) words encompass the starting point of an important change in the way of thinking and perceiving HE. Bunzel (2007) suggests that the drivers for branding in universities

involve the desire “to enhance the university’s reputation and to have a positive influence on university ranking” (p.152). Furthermore, as noted by Belanger *et al.* (2002), increasing competition in the field and decreasing financial support and funding from the government force universities to adopt marketing strategies. The decision to adopt marketing strategies in HE is essentially related to the desire to demonstrate differentiation in services offered when compared to competitors, in a bid to attract as many students as possible (Butt and Rehman, 2010). Similar attempts to attract students focus on the offer of free laptops and book vouchers, for instance, and advertisement of university courses featuring career and job prospects (Ford, 2007; Lacey, 2006; The Guardian, 2006). The increasing marketization of HEIs has led to an increase in promotional activities, and the concepts of brand building and brand management have become central alongside the growing importance of names, logos and reputation (Finder, 2005; Toma, Dubrow, and Hartley, 2005; Vidaver-Cohen, 2007, Rainford, 2020).

The next section provides a reflection on the transforming role of universities, discussing the drivers and motivations that may lead HEIs towards the adoption of branding practices.

## **1.2. Drivers and motivations for branding in HE**

The necessity of branding for HEIs is related to the shift of students toward a consumer status, part of a larger trend that moves from the traditional ‘social compact’, which involved concepts of funding and governance in the relationships among HE, state and society during the last century (Slaughter and Leslie, 1997). The traditional beliefs that universities are separate entities that require independence from corporate and political influences to work optimally, linked to the need of professional autonomy and guaranteed state funding, have slowly vanished (Naidoo *et al.*, 2011). The new conceptualisation of HE involves universities that incorporate the vision of students as customers, although with difficulties in keeping good academic standards whilst maintaining customers’ satisfaction (Mills, 2007) as reported in different fields, such as tourism education (Dale & Robinsons, 2001). Naidoo (2008) explains that government and HEIs developed mutual interests, with governments creating the conditions for these new trends, by developing a quasi-market background. The author argues that the new situation facilitates the new market mechanism based on self-regulation desired by universities and, at the same time, allows the achievement of governmental goals. Such

market mechanisms require HEIs to define and communicate what they stand for in the market, in order to be competitive, with branding as ideal tool to achieve these aims. Indeed, Naidoo (2008) helps clarifying the challenging HE background which drives universities towards the adoption of branding, although noting that “insufficient research has been carried out” (p.9) in the field, providing a direction for future research that this study aims to fulfil. Existing research helps providing a richer picture, highlighting different forces that affect HEIs’ decision of adopting branding. The drivers behind branding in HE can be summarised as such: increasing competition and declining number of enrolled students (Nguyen and LeBlanc, 2001); desire of better image and increased prestige (Sevier, 2002); desire of showing the audience that the actions are taken according to the stated mission (Cobb, 2001); necessity of showing improvement to the investors and eventual donors (Sevier, 2002); the necessity of reuniting different institution under a common brand, to deliver a compact and encompassing idea of the institution, especially in case of merging or dislocated institutions (Williams and Omar, 2014). The new stage where universities are resorting to branding in order to face each other can be summarised in two key points: on the one hand, HEIs are allowed increasing resources compared to the past, in terms of communication, technology and accessibility; on the other hand, the number of stakeholders that such institutions can tap into is limited and disputed, due to the challenging market and the increasing competition (Morphew *et al.*, 2001; Toma *et al.*, 2005; Williams, 2012; Williams, Osei, and Omar, 2012).

Following from the reasons and drivers to adopt branding, discussed in the previous paragraphs, the next section will address the way in which branding activities are adopted in universities.

### **1.3. The implementation of branding in Universities**

There has been lot of research concerning the attributes of strong brands in commercial organisations, but little research has focused on corporate brand management in specific settings such as HE (Chapleo, 2010). Pinar *et al.* (2011) outlines the fact that the industry’s awareness about organisational branding increased and that organisations started using branding strategies to improve their status and create stronger profiles. Balmer and Gray (2003) and de Chernatony (2002) reflected on the nature of corporate brands, identifying them as



complex and with high applicability to the non-commercial sector. University branding can be seen as part of a larger group of marketing and branding practices involving institutions that are intrinsically non-commercial (Fairclough 2013). Fairclough (1993) outlines the fact that public services and institutions, such as universities, slowly started to move toward economical concepts of goods trading, with promotion slowly becoming widespread in public fields previously separated from the economical one. The recent changes affecting universities, and the HE sector in general, can indeed be regarded as examples of marketization processes in the public sector (Rainford, 2020). However, Balmer and Gray (2003) observe that corporate branding is not necessarily needed by all the public sector's institutions, nevertheless suggesting that it is essential for some of them, such as universities. Curtis *et al.* (2009) agrees, highlighting the importance of having a distinct brand for HEIs and suggesting that the inseparability and intangibility of HE services specifically requires the use of branding as a key resource. This is due to the fact that universities are essentially complex institutions, often with schools in different locations and a high variety of services. The nature of branding can reduce that complexity, helping to promote loyalty and attraction to the organisation as a whole, reuniting the different services under a common name (Bulotaite, 2003). Jevons (2006) supports the argument, suggesting that university should develop strong and differentiated brands to communicate their value and benefits to existing and potential staff and students. Jevons's (2006) idea seems to be accepted in the Higher Education field, since universities started to increasingly manage their brands in the last decades, in a moment where the HE field has experienced a significant shift towards a quasi-commercial status. During this revolution of the public sector, branding has acquired a key role in strategic management, with universities competing for same students forced to adopt promotional activities to attract them (Osman, 2008). Promoting and developing a strong brand bestows a university a premium status capable of attracting promising staff (Belanger *et al.*, 2002; Butt, Lodhi and Shahzad, 2020), attract students (Alkhalwaldeh *et al.*, 2020; Bamberger, Bronshtein and Yemini, 2020) and manage issues more efficiently (Argenti, 2000). Bulotaite (2003) adds that university brands have a great potential in terms of feelings' development in the audience (eg. attachment to the brand, identification with the institution, sense of belonging, etc.), compared to most brands. Such potential can be developed and turned into reality through the development of a unique communicative identity (Bulotaite, 2003). One of the most influential factors affecting and

driving branding in HE is represented by the university rankings that slowly became central in the process of student attraction (Bunzel, 2007). Argenti (2000) suggests that rankings have deeply affected the marketing orientation of universities' business schools, more than any other institution. Rankings are directly connected to positioning in the market and positioning is acquired through differentiation (Mazzarol and Hosie, 1996; Czarniawska and Genell, 2002; Maresova, Hruska and Kuca, 2020). Differentiation in universities is outlined by how universities identify themselves and what type of audience their services are aimed at (Wolverton, 2006; Maresova, Hruska and Kuca, 2020). Targeting a specific audience can result complicated, due to the stakeholders' diversity in universities: from an internal perspective they include current students and staff; from an external point of view, instead, they include prospective students, prospective faculty, alumni, recruiters, companies, media, donors and local community (Melewar and Akel, 2005; Argenti, 2000; Butt, Lodhi and Shahzad, 2020). With such a broad and diverse range of people involved in universities' life, HE branding, needs not only to focus on students and their orientation, but requires also managing the institutional brand as a whole (Whisman, 2009; Butt, Lodhi and Shahzad, 2020). The marketing approach in universities, focused mostly on short-term strategies to achieve specific objectives, is simply not enough to address the concept of overall reputation and act at a corporate level (Argenti, 2000; Maresova, Hruska and Kuca, 2020). The implementation of branding practices appears to be the most adequate approach for universities attempting to improve their reputation. However, branding in HE presents some obstacles due to the complexity of the environment where universities operate, and the stakeholders involved in the life of HEIs. Several authors (eg. Spry *et al.*, 2018; Dean *et al.*, 2016; Chapleo, 2010, 2015; Naidoo *et al.* 2015) recognised the challenges that branding for universities poses, calling for further research in the context of HE branding. To further clarify the context discussed, HEIs' environment and stakeholders, briefly introduced in this section, are presented in the following sections.

### **1.3.1 HE environment**

Many of the studies of branding in HE followed the perspective of strategic management in the organisation studies literature (Brown and Mazzarol, 2009; Celly and Knepper, 2009; Chapleo, 2010). According to this specific perspective, HEIs try to differentiate themselves from the competition due to the pressure given by the modern competitive HE market (Hemsley-Brown

and Oplatka, 2006; Mampaey, Huisman and Seeber, 2015). However, regarding the concept of HE as a simple competitive environment may be too pretentious (Temple, 2006; Brown and Carasso, 2013) and recognising competition as the only type of pressure affecting HEIs would mean oversimplifying the situation. Competition plays a role within the pressures affecting the HEIs but there are many other important aspects influencing the life of a HEI such as, for instance, institutional pressures (Mampaey, Huisman and Seeber, 2015). Institutional pressures play an important role, since a large number of HE institutions may be still shifting from government-led institutions to market-led organisations (Gornitzka and Maassen, 2000; Jungblut and Vukasovic, 2013). Different studies reflected on the role of branding and the drivers behind the choice of branding strategies, outlining that competitive pressure is not the only force leading to the adoption of branding (Chapleo, 2007; Waeraas and Solbakk, 2009; Naidoo *et al.*, 2014). Waeraas and Solbakk (2009) suggest that the desire to portray excellence, truth, objectivity and academic freedom drives to the use of branding more than the competitive pressure. Nonetheless, brand differentiation appears as a difficult target to reach, first of all due to the difficulties in encompassing the concept of university, and then due to the external as well as the internal institutional challenges (Waeraas and Solbakk, 2009). A further reflection on the challenges that universities are facing, both internally and externally, is provided in the following section.

### **1.3.1.1. Institutional and Competitive pressure in HE**

Deephouse (1999) suggests that, when combining competitive and institutional pressure, it becomes hard to deal with both individually and the ideal solution requires organisational strategizing and central brand communication to deal with the entire problem instead of focusing on the individual parts.

HE institutions find themselves between a rock and a hard place. On the one hand, competitive pressures force them to try to differentiate themselves from the competitors, while, on the other hand, institutional pressures oblige them to conform to standard regulations and common rules, limiting the freedom to differentiate. Organisations that do not conform to those rules and regulations risk losing legitimacy (Meyer and Rowan, 1977; DiMaggio and Powell, 1983; Mampaey, Huisman and Seeber, 2015). With so many pressures and points of view to take in account, HEIs find difficulties in outlining and choosing a definite organisational model. The

result is that the different institutions end up mimicking each other and taking for granted common norms, practices and ideal values, ending up in limiting the differentiation and creating high levels of similarity in the field (DiMaggio and Powell, 1983).

In such a strong institutionally-wise homogeneous environment, reflecting those common values becomes something taken for granted, and failing in doing so represents an anomaly that may lead to a negative perception from the stakeholders as well as loss of their support. The result is that following the trend and adjusting to the standard becomes a more important concern for organisations' survival than trying to differentiate them, and consequently, HEIs focus more on being legitimate than being effectively different.

### **1.3.2. University stakeholders**

Brand management in HE represents a complex concept due to the complex nature of the institutions themselves (Kuoppakangas *et al.*, 2019), resulting in a challenge that goes beyond the traditional branding activities (Kapferer, 2001). HE Institutions are essentially complex institutions, involving several stakeholders with different points of view, ambitions and motivations (Jevons, 2006). Such diversity can lead to hard challenges for brand management, resulting in difficulties not only in starting the branding activities but also in maintaining them in a continuously evolving market (Jevons, 2006). When considering HEIs from an external marketing point of view, prospective students, prospective faculty, alumni, recruiters, companies, media, donors and local community are the stakeholders playing the role of users and consumers (Melewar and Akel, 2005; Mampaey, Huisman and Seeber, 2015). Indeed, such stakeholders play a major role in the life of HEIs, influencing directly the quantity of resources available for them, through the allocation of budgets, and indirectly, such as in the case of students paying fees (Argenti, 2000; Melewar and Akel, 2005; Mampaey, Huisman and Seeber, 2015). However, corporate identity stakeholders are not limited to the external side. From an internal perspective they include current students, faculty and general staff (Melewar and Akel, 2005; Argenti, 2000). Universities tend to deal with their external stakeholders using marketing activities and positioning strategies, while, on the internal side, they are usually involved on the promotion and the management of core values, corporate culture and vision to current students, staff and faculty (Aaker, 2004; Hatch and Schultz, 2003). Melewar and Akel (2005,

p. 41) explain that “in a market where students are recognised as customers, universities have to implement strategies to maintain and enhance their competitiveness. They need to develop a competitive advantage based on a set of unique characteristics. Furthermore, universities need to communicate these characteristics in an effective and consistent way to all of the relevant stakeholders”. Following Melewar and Akef’s (2005) words, it is imperative to highlight that, even though all the stakeholders play a role in the life of a university, each one of these categories has a different level of importance for the institution. Pinar *et al.* (2011) clarifies the idea, suggesting that students’ learning experience represents the key driver for value creation and development of university branding, implying therefore that students are key stakeholders for universities. Following to that, teaching and research represent core factors, as directly related to the creation and development of meaningful activities for students’ learning experience, and can be supported by secondary factors such as student life, sport and community activities (Pinar *et al.*, 2011). Such activities are useful to improve the student’s experience in the universities, benefitting their brand perception (Pinar *et al.*, 2011). Furthermore, students that complete their studies in a HEI tend to bring their experience along even after the studies and seem to identify with the brand of the institution, not as customers who benefitted temporarily of a service, but as individuals who joined a community and grew with it along the experience (Balmer and Liao, 2007). Such long-term involvement with the brand of the institution outlines the importance of improving student experience in universities as different studies suggest (eg. Hatch and Schultz, 2003; Balmer and Liao, 2007; Whisman, 2009). For instance, Hatch and Schultz (2003) suggests that the sense of belonging plays an important role in corporate branding. Balmer and Liao (2007) concur, indicating that the act of awarding degrees to students can be translated with development of a life-long membership to a university and the blossoming in students of a sense of identification with the university, its corporate identity and brand. The authors add that identification does not last only until the end of the studies, but it persists even after completing the degree (Balmer and Liao, 2007). However, students are not the only ones benefiting from a sense of identification when dealing with strong corporate brands. In fact, employees as well seem to gain a sense of belonging with the corporate culture and identification with the organisational values, which appears extremely important considering that they are the main actors involved in the delivery of such values to the different stakeholders (Hemsley-Brown and Goonawardana, 2007; Whisman, 2009; Piehler

*et al.*, 2016). The importance of employees and the impact of internal branding and employees' involvement in the creation of the brand have been outlined in different studies (eg. Hemsley-Brown and Goonawardana, 2007; Whisman, 2009; Piehler *et al.*, 2016) and are considered key topics of interest for the current study that will be discussed in detailed in the following chapters. What can be deducted up to this point is that with so many actors involved, developing effective integrated communications can be challenging, especially due to the different perspectives of the actors involved (Conway and Yorke, 1991; Müller, 2017). A clear example of the complexity of branding in HE due to the involvement of different people is given by the gap between perceptions and point of views of students and faculties, as well as by the complex role of students. Management and staff represent the key members in the processes of creation and delivery of the brands, becoming sometimes the main opponents to the effectiveness of their branding activities, due to their different perspectives and perceptions (Conway and Yorke, 1991; Chapleo, 2015). Students are consumers and products of education (Weisha and Jindao, 2018) and have different roles in the branding processes: they are targets, when branding activities are delivered, but they are also 'co-creators' when their experience and feedback plays a role in the creation of future strategies (Foroudi *et al.*, 2019). An example of potential multiple perspectives in HEIs is provided by Ng and Forbes (2008) that identified a significant gap between the management point of views and students' expectations on designing the programs. This brings about a mixed landscape of different perspectives and perceptions that change according to the temporary status of the involved actors (eg. potential students, students, alumni, etc.), representing a difficult challenge for branding. Furthermore, academics have been showing resistance to the shift towards the new commercial reality, supporting the idea of universities as a place to learn, more than a place where exchanging degrees for money, and HEIs attempted to align their views to the institutions' objectives (Naidoo and Jamieson, 2005). A recent study from Naidoo *et al.* (2014) supports what previously introduced with an investigation concerning two important business schools, showing that academics do not really accept the idea of branding, seen as something far from their work of researchers and, more specifically, instructors. Significant were the words of one of the interviewed academics reported in the study, in which the interviewee explained his disagreement in using University templates for personal research presentations; the participant explained that even though he always clarifies that he works for his specific institution, he

refuses to use branded templates because they would give the impression that he is 'owned' by the university, more than he works for it (Naidoo *et al.*, 2014, p.150). This review succeeds in explaining the existence of internal resistance that concern branding activities in HEIs. Nonetheless, the importance of branding is bringing always more institution to take part in the game, convincing them that playing is worth the risk of encountering obstacles (Jevons 2006; Temple 2006).

It has been discussed that the branding efforts that HE Institutions have to make are not limited to simple actions, but are also complicated by the difficulty of dealing with complex institutions, with several obstacles such as: fragmentation of the institutions with different internal structures; certain level of resistance to changes; different kind of programs and majors offered involving the most differentiate topics; clash between the individual schools, different facilities, the individual majors and the overall brand managements; the gap between the perceived decisional factors from the institutions and the effective decisional process in which students are involved (Hemsley-Brown and Oplatka, 2006). Branding becomes the only solution available for HEIs to enhance their brand and to satisfy consumers' wishes and needs while positioning and marketing in the institution (Chapleo, 2007; Hemsley-Brown and Goonawardana, 2007; Lowrie, 2007; Edmiston, 2008; Williams, 2012). To ensure that the values promised to the external audience are carried by the employees, who play a key role in their delivery, organisations started implementing branding activities towards internal audiences, leading to the development of the internal branding discipline. Nonetheless, the topic of internal branding in HE is still fresh, providing different opportunities for the current study. The authors who have explored HE internal branding in-depth (Chapleo, 2010, 2012, 2015) or related it to different areas such as brand architecture (Spry *et al.*, 2018), brand co-creation (Dean *et al.*, 2016) and brand support and leadership (Sujchaphong, Nguyen & Melewar, 2015), all concur that further investigation is required, providing calls for research that this study aims to address. Nonetheless, before discussing the case of HE, an introduction for the discipline of internal branding is required. The next sections introduce the topic of internal branding, main focus of this research.

## 1.4. Focus of the research

The current section addresses the topic of internal branding, topic of interest of this research, providing an overview of the existing studies and the rationale of the research.

### 1.4.1. Internal branding

In 2010, Foster *et al.* observed that many definitions had been provided for internal branding along the years but a general consensus on what is internal branding had not been achieved yet. At present, the situation has not changed in that regard, with many available attempts of defining internal branding existing. Each one of the existing definitions adds some contribution to clarify the concept, while limiting it to certain aspects according to the specific focus of the study. In chapter 2, and more specifically in the section 2.2.1, the definitions are provided and critically reviewed, in order to outline respective strengths and limitations. Based on such reviews, the definition chosen for internal branding, provided by the author of the current study, is:

...an internal process that, through the engagement of employers with employees, enables the latter to understand and internalise the brand values, allowing them to align their behaviour to such values and deliver the brand promise in a coherent way.

The way in which the author developed this definition, as well as the reflection on past studies and definitions that support and have inspired it, are explained in the detail in the following chapter. For the introductory purpose of the current chapter, only some definitions will be discussed here, and the attention will be directed to the concept of internal branding as a whole, rather than on attempts to define it, in order to provide a better understanding of the topic of this study. Agreeing with the internal branding's outcome suggested by the chosen definition, Punjaisri and Wilson (2011, p.2) state that "internal branding is about ensuring that the brand promise is transformed by employees into reality, reflecting the espoused brand values that set customers' expectations". Similarly, focusing on the *process*, Tosti and Stotz (2001) supports the definition chosen, regarding internal branding as the process of promotion and communication of the corporate brand to the different employees, transmitted in a clear way to



ensure their understanding of the link between brand delivery and brand promise. The authors highlight the importance of delivering the brand promise coherently, explaining that it has a huge impact on customers' preferences toward the brands (Tosti and Stotz, 2001). Moreover, the successful impact of the brand promise is directly related to the satisfaction of the customers, and the achievement of such satisfaction depends essentially on how such promise is delivered by the employees to the customers (Tosti & Stotz, 2001; Schultz & de Chernatony, 2002). Such idea is supported by Punjaisri and Wilson (2007) who explain that the attitudes and behaviour of employees delivering the brand promise to the stakeholders play a key role in the attainment of successful branding for institutions. However, the delivery of the brand promise can see the deliverers more or less involved. Reflecting on this aspect, de Chernatony (2002) suggests that the delivery of brand promise is more likely to be successful if the employees deliver such promise spontaneously, of their own accord, identifying issues that can arise when employees are not involved with the brand. To limit such issues, Davis and Dunn (2002) specify that if an organisation wants its employees to deliver effectively the brand promise, it needs to communicate to them 'what the brand stands for' as well as what makes the brand different and unique. Therefore, defining the brand clearly would help to describe what the essential brand values are, and ensuring that employees clearly understand such values would allow them to deliver efficiently what it is expected from the brand (Urde, 2003). The interest in managing internally the brand, ensuring understanding of brand values through a clear communication and improving the brand delivery, is relatively recent when compared to the interest in the external image. In 2004, Vallaster outlined that literature on internal branding was limited, although it was an area receiving increasing attention, seen as an important strategy, particularly for universities (Whisman, 2009). Along the years, the growing interest led to studies taking in account different applications of the concept in HE, contributing to enrich a field that still requires attention and holds many potential areas of study. Examples related studies can be found as follows. Judson *et al.* (2006; 2009) analysed the concept of internal branding in HEIs and found that when activities related to internal branding are actuated, employees are affected and become more likely to deliver naturally the brand promise in their daily interactions. The importance of the internal audience is suggested by Whisman (2009) who suggests that delivering the brand promise to the internal staff is essentially as important as delivering it to the external audience. University staff plays a key role in

representing the institution to the external audience, through the performance indicators of ‘staff reputation’, top-quality teaching and research output (Ivy, 2001; Naude & Ivy, 1999). Accordingly, Baker and Balmer (1997) agree on the importance of a brand aware staff, explaining that individual members of universities are experts in their own right and therefore consider that they are the best judge of how to fulfil their role. However, employees may not totally understand what the brand values of their institution are, ending up reflecting their own values instead of the university’s ones (Jevons, 2006) and failing the brand promise of the institution consequently damaging the credibility of the brand (Stensaker, 2005). Reasons behind the misunderstanding of the university’s values or the refusal to accept such values by the university staff represent the interest of the current research. The next sections discuss the gaps identified and the rationale for the current research.

#### **1.4.2. Previous studies in the United Kingdom**

A study from Naidoo and Jamieson (2005) carried out in the UK HE noted that academics have been playing the role of forces opposing the pressure of change, supporting the concept of the ‘learning to know’ over that of ‘learning to have’ of national economy and other stakeholders. Institutions wanted academics to become more open towards the modern idea of HE and cooperate to achieve the institutions’ objectives (Naidoo and Jamieson, 2005). To facilitate those changes, the institutions started to introduce standard methods to make teaching more uniform and push the adaptation of the academics (Middleton, 2000). Academics’ resistance to the shift toward the new commercial reality, supporting the idea of universities as a place to learn, more than a place where exchanging degrees for money, and HEIs attempted to align them to the institutions’ objectives (Naidoo and Jamieson, 2005). A recent study from Naidoo *et al.* (2014) confirms what previously introduced with an investigation concerning two important UK business schools, showing that academics do not really accept the idea of branding, seen as something far from their work of researchers as well as instructors. In his study for example one of the participants explains his disagreement in using University templates for personal research presentations as he refuses to use branded templates because they would give the impression that he is ‘owned’ by the university, more than he works for it (Naidoo *et al.*, 2014, p150). The importance of the internal audience is supported by Whisman (2009) who suggests that delivering the brand promise to the internal

staff is essentially as important as delivering it to the external audience. Chapleo (2010) investigates UK HEIs' branding and outlines the importance of 'getting staff behind the brand'. Moreover, Chapleo (2015) identified a lack of understanding of branding concepts among management/staff, which ended up influencing their delivery of the brand promise and consequently the positioning of the university, suggesting internal branding as a solution to reach the desired differentiation for HEIs. The existing studies in the context of UK Higher Education branding, presented in this section, highlighted the fact that the adoption of branding and internal branding in UK universities may be a challenging process and presents some difficulties, suggesting the need to further investigate the internal branding processes and their implications. In line with this, the next section introduces the rationale for the current research, moving then to the aim and objectives that this study intends to fulfil.

### **1.4.3. Rationale of the current research**

In the HE context of UK there has been a growing recognition of the importance of internal branding. Several studies (eg. Baker and Balmer, 1997; Stensaker, 2005; Jevons, 2006; Whisman 2009; Chapleo, 2010; 2015) have addressed the importance of having a supportive staff capable of carrying the institution's values, and a positive correlation between a supportive behaviour and an effective delivery of the brand promise has been suggested. Internal branding is seen as the process capable of developing such supportive behaviour, but lack of information on the application of the concept and resistance from the staff create issues and difficulties. Studies such as Judson *et al.* (2006; 2009), analyse the concept of internal branding in HEIs, finding that when activities related to internal branding are actuated, they affect the employees who become more likely to deliver naturally the brand promise in their daily interactions. However, such specific studies have not been carried out in the context of UK, and, when carried out (eg. Naidoo *et al.*, 2014) they focused on stating what was happening rather than understanding the reason behind such events. The increasing interest on these concepts and the lack of information available constitutes the driver for the current research. Moreover, the desire of exploring further the topic of internal branding in UK universities is linked to the previously introduced calls for research from existing studies. Chapleo (2010, 2012, 2015) carried different studies in the contest of HE, explaining in each study the need for further research and the importance of clarifying the roles of these involved in the internal

branding processes. Dean *et al.* (2016) similarly noted that HEIs' stakeholders may play a role in the creation of the brand, focusing on the concept of brand co-creation, suggesting the need for further research to uncover the processes occurring in universities. Spry *et al.* (2018) noted that multiple brand identities may co-exist within an institution, ultimately affecting the stakeholders' perception towards the corporate brand, noting that further research is required to explore the implications of brand architectures for internal branding. Sujchaphong, Nguyen & Melewar (2015) reviewed the concept of leadership and the factors generating brand support, explaining the need to explore practically the concepts that the paper reviewed theoretically. As management and staff members represent the key stakeholders involved in the internal branding implementation, the first being the implementer and the latter the target of the internal branding efforts, the author of this study believes that a deeper understanding of their perception towards internal branding would help clarify the ongoing approaches and identify potential obstacles. In order to address the aforementioned calls for research, the study explores management and staff's perceptions towards different concepts holding the potential of influencing internal branding application in HE. Examples of the concepts discussed are brand architectures, internal branding training and development activities, internal branding communications, employee brand support and, finally, brand leadership, in order to contribute to existing research and narrow down gaps addressed by the literature.

## **1.5. Research Aim and Questions**

The following paragraphs address research aim and research questions for the current research.

### **1.5.1. Research Aim**

The current research focuses on exploring Internal Branding in the HE context from the perspective of UK Business Schools' academic staff and management.

### **1.5.2. Research Questions**

- 1) What does internal branding mean to academic staff and management in a Business School context?

- 2) How does the academic staff of a Business School support the internal branding strategy?
- 3) How do Business School's academics and management perceive internal branding training and communications?
- 4) How do Business School's academics and management perceive the role of leadership in the internal branding strategy?
- 5) What are the factors that may hinder the internal branding strategy of a Business School?

## **1.6. Summary**

The current thesis structure is outlined here:

### **Chapter 2. Literature review**

In the second chapter, the concept of internal branding is discussed, and the relevant literature is reviewed. The chapter discusses the topic of internal branding in general and then moves to the specific setting of HE. Studies available on the topic are reviewed, with a specific emphasis on the concepts of internal brand training activities and internal brand communications. The influence of leadership in internal branding applications is recognized and reviewed.

### **Chapter 3. Conceptual framework and research questions**

The third chapter offers a conceptual framework resuming the topics analysed in this research. The topics are then presented and related to the objectives of this research. Along the sections, justifications for the current research are provided and linked to the different questions. The sections, aligned to the research questions, address key areas of research for this study, such as: the understanding of brand and brand values; the perception towards internal brand training and development activities and internal brand communications; the perception towards leadership as an internal branding asset; the obstacles that may occur when implementing internal branding programmes.

#### **Chapter 4. Research methodology**

The fourth chapter offers an overview of the philosophy underpinning the current research as well as the philosophical stance of the researcher. The research paradigms are reviewed and a focus on the one underlying this research is offered. The approaches available are presented, and the reason behind the choice of the one used for this research is explained. Similarly, methods are observed and the selected one are discussed in-depth. The approach and method chosen are critically reviewed, the sampling choices explained, and the processes of data collection and analysis are clarified.

#### **Chapter 5. Research findings and data analysis**

The fifth chapter presents the findings of the study and relevant analysis. The results are presented through an inductive thematic analysis, addressing the relevant themes for the current study. The chapter is structured through the use of themes and relative subthemes, and excerpts from the semi-structured interviews are provided to support the analysis and explain the perspectives of the participants interviewed for the study.

#### **Chapter 6. Discussion**

The sixth chapter discusses the findings identified in the previous chapter, relating them to the literature review, past studies and original research questions of this research. Areas discussed concern: a) the meaning of internal branding for management and academic staff; b) academic staff support of the branding strategy; c) brand training and development activities and internal communications; d) brand, leadership and brand leadership; e) internal branding obstacles.

#### **Chapter 7. Conclusion**

The final chapter provides a summary of the results of the research. The theoretical and managerial contributions are addressed, and the research limitations are presented. Finally, possible directions for future research are provided with recommendations on possible areas of future investigation.

## CHAPTER 2

### LITERATURE REVIEW

#### 2. Literature Review

The second chapter provides a review of the literature, addressing studies and theories relevant to the current research. Along the chapter, branding concepts are firstly discussed in general and then linked to the specific setting of HE, in order to provide a flowing narrative and allow the reader to familiarise with the areas of discussion.

##### 2.1. The concept of Branding in HE

Before discussing the concept of branding in HE, it is arguably important to clarify what HE brands are. Higher Education brand have been discussed by different studies (eg. Balmer & Liao, 2007; Celly & Knepper, 2010; Ng, 2016; Spry *et al.*, 2020), but except for some authors (eg. Bennett and Ali-Choudhury, 2007), almost none of these attempted to provide an encompassing and clear definition. The definition from Bennett and Ali-Choudhury (2007, pp. 85-86) is useful in introducing university brands, seeing them as:

*“A manifestation of the institution’s features that distinguish it from others, reflecting its capacity to satisfy students’ needs, engender trust in its ability to deliver a certain type and level of HE, and help potential recruits to make wise enrolment decisions”.*

In line with the definition, universities seem to recognise the importance of managing their brand to make it distinct and appealing, with branding becoming a common practice among HEIs (Jevons, 2006; Temple, 2006; Chapleo, 2015; Spry *et al.*, 2018). The newly developed interest in branding strategies and image management in HEIs suggest that they are shifting from social institutions to industry-like organisations (Gumport, 2000; Stensaker, 2005). Efforts to manage university brands are essentially a consequence of the adaptation to the current commercial-orientated model of university (Stensaker, 2005) in a moment where the education field itself has changed, acquiring a status of quasi-commercial service industry

(Brookes, 2003). Indeed, managing university brands is very important according to Belanger *et al.* (2002), as it creates the potential to attract students and talented staff, as well as potential donors and research funding. Furthermore, HEIs can exploit their specific and unique brand to target a narrower sector of the market, tailoring specific objectives and mission to needs and desires of a targeted specific segment (Brown and Mazzarol, 2009).

The following sections introduce the concept of corporate branding and illustrate its application in HE.

### **2.1.1. Corporate branding**

Brands represent key elements in the relationships between companies and their customers and therefore managing them becomes essential to influence costumers' attitudes toward institutions (de Chernatony, 2002; Curtis *et al.*, 2009; Kotler and Armstrong, 2010). The awareness of a brand has a strong influence of consumers' experience (McClure *et al.*, 2004). Keller (2007) defines the two main roles of branding strategies as 1) 'clarify brand-awareness' through the explanation and communication of differences and similarities among products and 2) to 'motivate brand-image' through the provision of guidelines to the management regarding the specific brand elements to apply to the different products. The importance of a brand is outlined by Davis and Dunn (2002) who suggest that brands can essentially lead organisations to success. However, the same authors explain that the successful delivery of a brand to stakeholders and customers implies some rules such as the fact that all the employees should "work in a cohesive and consistent way to support the brand and its promise to guarantee that customers and other stakeholders are always satisfied and even delighted with their brand experience" (Davis & Dunn, 2002, p.4). Brand management importance grew in recognition, as strong brands appear to be preferred by customers and seem to affect positively marketing activities (Kotler and Armstrong, 2010). However, product branding in commercial organisations dominated the branding theory scene, leaving services and corporate-level branding neglected and in need of further research (Balmer and Gray, 2003; Chapleo, 2010)

One of the main changes happening in businesses, as they progress from local to global, involves the shift of marketing strategies from the classical product branding to corporate brand management (Balmer and Gray, 2003; Chernatony, 2002). Global positioning is related to



differentiation and, as Hatch and Schultz (2003) suggest, such differentiation should not be limited to products but extended to the entire corporation. Key factors to achieve such differentiation involve the values and the emotions that an organisation symbolises, and therefore the institutions themselves become the main actors of the differentiation process (Hatch and Schultz, 2003). Following to this, there has been growing recognition of corporate branding as significant strategic resource resources (Balmer and Gray, 2003; Hatch and Schultz, 2003). In corporate branding, unlike product/services branding, the emphasis is moved from products and services to the institution itself, which, in fact, represents the brand (Morsing and Kirstensen, 2001). Furthermore, a corporate brand is considered a complex and intangible mix of factors, as an asset combining corporate vision, corporate values, corporate strategy, corporate products and corporate responsibility; when successful established, a corporate brand can lead to significant differentiation and outline a valuable competitive advantage (Balmer and Gray, 2003; Morsing and Kirstensen, 2001). Moreover, Hatch and Schultz (2003) suggest that when dealing with stakeholders, strong corporate brands enhance loyalty and fidelity. Corporate brands also differ from products brands from a length of approach perspective: products brands usually focus on short terms approaches, with marketers playing key development roles, while corporate brands are usually driven by a sustainable approach and developed through core values connecting the entire organisation (Hatch and Schultz 2003). The management of a corporate brand is therefore a complex task and requires support by the different internal levels, through ideal integration of HR, communications and marketing management and activities (Balmer and Gray, 2003). Corporate branding appears to be able to enhance companies' reputation, recognition and visibility through different approaches from traditional product branding. If product branding recognises customers as only key stakeholders, when talking about corporate branding the list of stakeholders radically increases. A corporate brand audience typically involves different groups, such as: employees, suppliers, customers, partners, investors, regulators and, finally, the community in general (Balmer and Gray, 2003; Hatch and Schultz, 2003). The delivery of brand values, previously recognised as a key process in corporate branding, requires strategic positioning of the message deliver and integrated communications across the organisation (Van Riel, 1995; Hemsley-Brown and Goonawardana, 2007). Corporate branding appears to be important in a company strategy. Hatch and Schultz (2003) outlines the need of corporate branding practices to have a multi-

disciplinary nature, including elements of culture, corporate communications and strategies. Employees have a key role in the delivery of the brand to the stakeholders and play a key role in defining the brand themselves; employees' role is crucial in corporate branding as they represent a link between the internal and the external environment of an organisation (Balmer and Gray, 2003; Hatch and Schultz, 2003). Finally, as de Chernatony (2002) suggests, corporate branding can be defined as a cluster of emotional and functional values, with the promise of specific experience, and can be regarded as a dynamic interface connecting organisations' values and actions and stakeholders' interpretations of such values. Therefore, to develop a successful corporate brand, a certain level of harmony is required among managerially defined values, implementation of such values by employees and recognition and appreciation of such values among external stakeholders. (De Chernatony, 2002). Hatch and Schultz (2003) agrees, adding that effective corporate branding starts with an alignment of strategic vision, organisational culture and, finally, corporate images held by the stakeholders. The literature suggests that corporate branding can be beneficial for different types of organisation, especially those with a diverse portfolio and broad range of stakeholders.

The next section addresses the potential benefits of corporate branding for HEIs, clarifying how the discipline can fit the unique context of Higher Education.

#### **2.1.1.1. Corporate branding benefits for universities**

Corporate branding can help organisations clarifying their propositions and indirectly help communicating their identity internally (Pich & Spry, 2019). Morsing (2006) proposes that the aim of corporate branding is to focus the branding efforts on the institution as a whole, rather than on its individual products or services, with the potential of reuniting all of them under the common brand. In line with such potential, there are several reasons that have made corporate branding an attractive tool for universities. First of all, a study by Simoes and Dibb (2001) shows that organisations can initiate and increase customers' loyalty by focusing on the development of the organisation's brand, using communication tools and activities to improve the position of such brand in the market and to differentiate it from the competitors' ones. For a university, this could be essential as it would allow the institution to overcome competition and retain students who progress to higher levels. (eg. from undergraduate to postgraduate studies). Schultz and de Chernatony (2002) also recognise the potential of brands in developing

global recognition for companies, through the alignment of organisational cultures across geographic and functional boundaries. For universities, this would be useful as it would help fight competition on local, national and international scale. Further benefits of organisational brands are suggested by Keller & Aaker (1992), who address the positive impact of such brands when the organisations introduce new products or services. This would benefit universities when introducing new degrees or courses. Finally, Kay (2006) claims that corporate branding can be also seen as the way in which organisations communicate their identities, with corporate brands deriving directly from such identities (Balmer & Greyser, 2002). This would be extremely useful for universities that wish to communicate ‘what they stand for’ and why students should choose them instead of competitors. It is important to notice that, as Morsing (2006) suggests, organisations that inspire and support their employees in the coherent delivery of their organisation’s brand are more likely to maintain customer satisfaction.

In line with the potential benefits for HEIs identified in the current section, the next section explores the application of corporate branding in the university context.

### **2.1.2. The implementation of corporate branding in Universities**

In the last decades, a number of studies have addressed the creation of corporate identity in HEIs and investigated the topic of corporate branding in HE (e.g., Melewar & Akel, 2005; Kay, 2006; Atakan and Eker, 2007; Balmer & Liao, 2007; Celly & Knepper, 2010; Ng, 2016; Spry *et al.*, 2020). Ng (2016) observes that in Higher Education “corporate branding can help to impute on individual offerings the same sense of uniqueness, superiority and/or other favourable attributes associated with the overarching corporate brand” (p.44), highlighting the benefits linked to its implementation. Such benefits appear even clearer when considering a recent study from Spry *et al.* (2018) who notes that, in a university, “the programmes have their own identity and image, in a not too dissimilar way to a specific product or service in other industries” (p.345-346), recognizing to corporate branding the capacity of reducing the gap across the different individual identities. Moreover, further to showing potential in clarifying the organizational identity, corporate branding appears essential when aiming to involve students in the institution’s reputation, history and prestige (Balmer & Liao, 2007). A study from Balmer and Liao (2007) focused on student-brand identification and noted that high levels

of such identification can be achieved through managing efficiently brand-values, brand promise and communications. Arguably, to communicate their brand values and promise externally, institutions need to present an internal understanding of what they stand for. Celly and Knepper (2010) suggest that a university should make efforts to involve, include and inform groups of the benefits for them to take part in the institutional branding endeavours, so they can take advantage of the developed brand equity and take part in the larger system. To realise the creation of a strong corporate brand, it is essential for organisations to create a link between stakeholders and organisation, through actions and symbols to show what the organisation stands for (Mark, 2006) as well as the organisation's main concept and idea (Schultz *et al.*, 2005). Corporate branding should take in account the internal audience, in the attempt of aligning employees' behaviour to the brand promise (Ind, 2007). A university brand will fail its promise to the customers if employees fail in delivering such promise, ending up losing credibility (Stensaker, 2005). Such point identifies one of the main reasons why this study focuses on internal branding activities and the perspectives of academic staff. The need for further research is similarly identified by Spry *et al.* (2018), with the authors recognising the existence of limited research in the context of HE corporate branding, especially when focusing on the internal perspective and the involvement of the staff. Similarly, Curtis *et al.* (2009) call for further research in the field of HE branding, due the authors focusing only in one specific HE institution. Finally, Dean *et al.* (2016) observe the need for further investigation on the interpersonal relationships occurring among university stakeholders, and their role in affecting the perception towards the corporate brand. The studies observed and the calls for further research identified suggest the importance of the internal stakeholders for a successfully corporate branding. In such landscape, internal branding appears as a useful, if not essential, asset for universities, representing the key topic for this study and requiring a clear introduction in the current chapter. However, before discussing in-depth the concept of internal branding, a further look at the complexity of HE brands is required. The next section discusses the concept of brand architecture in universities, which different authors recognise as important when addressing the creation and management of the brand identity (eg. Chapleo, 2015; Spry *et al.* 2018), and its implications for internal branding.

### 2.1.3. Brand architecture

In order to fully appreciate the nature of university brands, it is necessary to discuss the concept of brand architecture, a concept relevant to multi-layered organisations with significant levels of autonomy across the layers. The review of the literature suggests that there are different definitions that look at the topic, some from a closer perspective than others. For example, a broad yet informative way of referring to brand architecture is the organization and management of a company’s brand portfolio (Gabrielli & Baghi, 2015; Strebinger, 2014). Muzellec and Lambkin (2008) looks at brand architecture as a strategic approach that supports the management of several brands within the same organization. Chapleo (2015) regards branding architecture as the organisation of a portfolio of different brands within the same company and their capacity of driving purchasing behaviour.

Across the literature, four key brand architecture strategies can be identified, which are presented in the table 2.1 below.

**Table 2.1. Brand architecture strategies.**

Architecture	Features
Branded house	Single ‘Master’ brand <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Unites company and its business and products with a common identity (Uggla, 2006)</li> <li>• Risk as entire company exposed (Muzellec &amp; Lambkin, 2008)</li> </ul>
House of Brands	Distance between the corporate brand and the businesses and products (Petromilli et al., 2002) avoiding associations with corporate brand (Muzellec & Lambkin, 2008) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Effective when organisation highly diversified (Gabrielli &amp; Baghi, 2015)</li> </ul>
Endorsed brands	Organisation’s businesses and products endorsed by the corporate brand (Aaker & Joachimsthaler, 2000) with common identity <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reduced risk as ‘Master’ brand plays less dominant role than that of sub-brands (Hsu, Fournier, &amp; Srinivasan, 2015)</li> </ul>
Sub-brands	Similar to endorsed brands stretching across products and markets with new and different offerings (Uggla, 2006) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• ‘Master’ brand more closely associated to sub-brands</li> <li>• More risk as allows ‘Master’ brand to compete in markets than would otherwise be the case (Hsu et al., 2015)</li> </ul>

**Source: Adapted from Spry *et al.* (2018)**

Although some distinct strategies have been presented, organisations rarely adopt a specific set strategy (Spry *et al.* 2018), often adopting “mix and match” strategies according to “branding similarities” between services and products (Strebinger, 2014, p. 1783). Among the hybrid strategies, the most common appears to be a mix between the two extremes, house of brands and branded house (Spry *et al.* 2018). In line with such view, Muzellec and Lambkin (2008)

have noted that organisation can move towards a separation strategy (leaning towards a house of brands approach) or an integration strategy (resembling the branded house approach). Devlin (2003) notes that organisations may prefer a separation strategy as it would allow them to communicate differentiated competencies to tailored target markets. Whilst there are different brand architecture strategies, as seen in table 2.1, the application to different contexts remains limited (Spry *et al.* 2018). When looking at the context of HE specifically, Chapleo (2015) notes that, at theoretical level, none of the identified strategies may fit the complex structure of HE institutions. Whilst the literature on brand architecture in the private sector, specifically multi-national companies, has obtained interest in the recent years, the studies in HE are limited (Gabrielli & Baghi, 2015; Strebinger, 2014). Studies in the specific HE sector (eg. Chapleo, 2015; Melewar and Nguyen, 2015; Spry *et al.*, 2018) recognised the importance of the topic, suggesting that further investigation on the role of brand architecture in HE may help gaining a deeper understanding of the way in which university brands are developed, managed and perceived. The next section provides further attention to the topic of brand architecture in HE.

#### **2.1.3.1. University Brand Architecture**

Across the literature, it has been discussed how HE Institutions tend to be different from the majority of the other service providers, due to the intangibility and complexity of their product offerings (Marquardt, Golicic, & Davis, 2011). Such complexity may be found in the fact that the offering may consist of the actual institutions, the individual courses provided, the qualifications awarded and the overall university experience, each of which may project a unique different brand (Dibb and Simkin, 1993). Along with this, HE institutions may have several sub-brands to manage, especially when structured through multilayered hierarchies involving colleges, schools and departments (Hemsley-Brown & Goonawardana, 2007). For example, Chapleo (2015) noticed that departments in universities often presented qualities of sub-brands, especially when carrying out marketing activities aimed at selected external stakeholders. Nonetheless, views about sub-brands in HE vary, with some (eg. Rahman & Areni, 2014) arguing that the existence of sub-brands in HE may pose an obstacle to the creation of a consistent brand, leading to ambiguity and diluting the corporate brand proposition (Devlin, 2003; Hsu et al, 2015). Nonetheless, the increasing managerialism in HE is leading universities to centralise their branding efforts, potentially attempting to aggregate

the sub-levels (eg. Schools, departments) identities reducing their autonomy (Chapleo, 2015) as well as their individual branding strategies (Hemsley-Brown & Goonawardana, 2007). Indeed, “this may jeopardise the very source of differentiation that can ensure the success of an HE corporate brand” (Spry *et al.* 2018, p.4). A recent study from Spry *et al.* (2018) investigated the concept of brand architecture in university setting, noting that internal stakeholders may show different levels of attachment to the university brand and department brand. Reflecting on the role of sub-brands within universities, Hamsley-Brown and Goonawardana (2007) suggest the need of acknowledging views of schools and faculties about the brand, in order to align those views under a comprehensive brand and achieve consistent brand harmonization. However, research in the field appears limited and the same Spry *et al.* (2018) note, with the same author suggesting a need to further investigate the role of internal stakeholders and their attachment to the different brands that universities carry. Similarly, Chapleo (2015) calls for further research in the topic, explaining that “research into brand architecture structures in universities and their applicability may enhance our understanding of the field” (p.161). The identified calls for research, supported by the limited number of existing studies in the topic of HE brand architecture, contributes to the objectives that this study aims to fulfil. Acknowledging the complex nature of university brands, the next section looks in further detail at the core topic of this study, the concept of internal branding in the HE context.

## **2.2. Internal branding in HE**

### **2.2.1. The concept of internal branding**

The current section explains the topic of internal branding aiming to provide a comprehensive idea of the concept. Even though, as explained in the introductory chapter there remains debate into the conceptualisation of internal branding, several authors have addressed different aspects of the topic.

Broadly, internal branding can be seen as a process that aims to establish a link between brand identity and employees’ behaviour, in order to ensure the delivery of the brand promise across the different activities of the members of an organisation. However, for the sake of clarity, the topic is now presented more in depth. Table 2.2, provided below, has been created by the

author of this study to address internal branding definitions and descriptions. The definitions are then discussed and the one chosen for the current study is provided.

**Table 2.2. Internal branding definitions and key notes.**

Definitions of internal branding	Definition key notes
Internal branding is “the internal-oriented management process within the intention of anchoring the target brand identity in employee behavior” (Wittke-Kothe 2001, p. 7.)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Focus on the process</li> <li>● Internal-oriented management process</li> <li>● Can be used to anchor brand identity to behaviour</li> </ul>
“Internal brand building is about aligning employee behavior with brand values” (Vallaster and De Chernatony, 2004, p. 2).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Focus on the process</li> <li>● Can be used to align employee behaviour with brand values</li> </ul>
“...we propose the construct behavioral branding as any type of verbal and nonverbal employee behavior that directly or indirectly determines brand experience (Henkel <i>et al.</i> , 2007, p. 311).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Focus on the indirect outcome</li> <li>● Can modify employees’ brand behaviour toward the stakeholders, consequently, affecting their brand experience</li> </ul>
“Internal branding is considered as means to create powerful corporate brands. It assists the organization in aligning its internal process and corporate culture with those of the brand” (Punjaisri and Wilson, 2007, p. 59).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Focus on outcome and process</li> <li>● Can be useful for corporate branding</li> <li>● Can help the alignment of internal activities and corporate culture with the brand</li> </ul>
“the ultimate goal of internal brand management is to provide a new tool for strengthening a brand and establish methods to attain a unique and nonimitable market position, hence providing the basis for a lasting premium price and large market share” (Burmam <i>et al.</i> , 2009, p. 281).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Focus on the outcome</li> <li>● Can be used to strengthen a brand</li> <li>● Can be used to achieve a unique market position</li> <li>● Can provide basis for lasting premium price and large market share</li> </ul>



<p>“It follows that the behavior of employees should be as consistent as possible with the brand identity and expressed brand values. This is not simply a matter of appropriate self-presentation and communication, but also of personal identification with the brand, emotional attachment to it, and motivation to become involved with the branding strategy in direct interaction with customers and influencers. In our study of the process, we define the strength of workforce internalization of brand equity, in support of branding at the customer interface, as the company's internal brand equity” (Baumgarth and Schmidt (2010, p. 1250)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Focus on outcome and process</li> <li>● Can be seen the process of internalisation of brand equity, to achieve support of the external branding strategy.</li> </ul>
<p>“Although a universal definition has not yet been proposed authors agree on a key principle underpinning internal branding, that is that it ensures that employees transform the espoused brand values, which set customers’ expectations about the organization, into reality during the delivery of the brand promise” (Foster <i>et al.</i>, 2010, p.402.).</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Focus on the outcome</li> <li>● Internal branding ensures that employees deliver brand values to customers, satisfying expectations and keeping the brand promise</li> </ul>
<p>“The objective of internal branding is for the employer to engage with their employees in a way that enables the delivery of the brand promise” (King <i>et al.</i>,2012, p.271).</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Focus on the objective</li> <li>● Focus on the engagement between employers and employees to deliver the brand promise</li> </ul>
<p>“IB is defined in this study as a nurturing process whereby employees are dialogued and trained with brand knowledge. Such a process enables employees to understand the meaning of a corporate brand and pass on a consistent brand experience to customers.” (Yang, Wan and Wu, 2015, p.269)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Focus on the process and objective</li> <li>● Internal branding helps communicating with and training employees.</li> <li>● Employees are enabled to understand the meaning of the corporate brand and deliver it as brand experience to customers.</li> </ul>

**Source: developed by the author of this study.**

The several definitions presented address different aspects of the concept of internal branding, helping to clarify the meaning of the key topic of this research. However, it can be argued that, when focusing on some aspect of the concept, these definitions tend to leave out some aspects, resulting in limitations for the purpose of the current study. Wittke-Kothe (2011) for instance, focus on the *process* of internal branding, stressing the internal orientation and highlighting its capacity of anchoring the brand identity to the employees’ behaviour. The definition succeeds in emphasizing the capacity of internal branding to affect in-depth and change the employees’

behaviour, shaping it according to the brand identity. However, it may be seen as limited as there is no mention of brand values in it. Vallaster and de Chernatony (2004), on the other hand, provide a brief and meaningful definition, which emphasizes the importance of aligning brand values to behaviour. Nonetheless, such definition could be considered limited as it seems to suggest that employees will behave accordingly to brand values, but not necessarily internalise them, outlining a view potentially more coherent with an internal marketing approach, rather than an internal branding one. Then, the definition of Henkel *et al.* (2007), is useful to understand the potential of internal branding in terms of its outcome and how it can affect the employees' delivery of the brand and, consequently, the brand experience. Despite providing useful knowledge, this definition does not address the process of internal branding directly or its direct effect and, therefore, standing on its own, it is arguably limited. Punjaisri and Wilson's (2007) definition reconnects the nature of internal branding as a mean of corporate branding. It also takes in account the process through which internal branding's potential is expressed, addressing its capacity of aligning the corporate culture and the internal processes with the brand. Even though this definition provides more explanation on the process and the outcome of internal branding, it may be seen as limited for the current study as it does not mention staff or employees' importance as well as not taking in account the brand values. Similarly, Burmann *et al.* (2009) focus on the internal branding process, seeing it as a mean to strengthen the brand and obtain a premium marketing position. While the positioning aspect is indeed important, it can be seen as an indirect objective competing to corporate branding as a whole, so it can be argued that the definition is not accurate for internal branding itself. Again, there is no mention of staff/employees or brand values. Contrariwise, Baumgarth and Schmidt (2010) takes in account both the importance of employees and brand values, as well as the importance of employees identifying with such values, rather than just carrying them. The definition is very helpful as it helps understanding the key steps of the process but moves away from the current study as it moves to the domain of brand equity. Foster *et al.* (2010) go straight to the point, explaining that there is no universal definition for internal branding. Their definition is useful as it explains that internal branding ensures the employees' transmission of brand values during the delivery of brand promise. This definition touches the key concepts of process, employees and brand values and appears to be one of the most complete even though still presents some limitations. Just as the previously addressed definition from Henkel *et al.*

(2007), the definition from Foster *et al.* (2010) it is limited when considering the actual process that affects employees' behaviour, and, in that aspect, just like Vallaster and de Chernatony (2004) fails in explaining the idea of employees internalising the brand values, rather than just transmitting them. The next definition reviewed, from King *et al.* (2012), is limited in many ways as it only mentions the positive effect of internal branding on employees and their delivery of the brand promise, ignoring the process. However, this definition contributes to the others by focusing on the role of employers and the importance of their *engagement* with their employees, highlighting an important aspect of the internal branding process. The last definition treated, offered by Yang, Wan and Wu (2015), shares with Foster *et al.* (2010) and Vallaster and de Chernatony (2004) the limitation of not mentioning the process through which employees internalise the values of the brand but it is helpful as it mentions internal branding's potential in allowing the understanding of such values. Furthermore, the definition is useful to address the outcome, with the positive effect of internal branding in influencing the brand delivery and, consequently, the customer experience.

Many definitions have been reviewed, and the positive contributions and limitations of each one of them has been considered. However, the different definitions observed seem to focus only on specific aspects of the concept of internal branding (eg. objectives, process, outcome), showing limitations in encompassing the overall discipline. Therefore, reflecting upon the reviewed literature, a definition based on Wittke-Kothe, (2001), Vallaster and De Chernatony (2004), Foster *et al.* (2010), King *et al.* (2012) and Yang, Wan and Wu (2015) is provided by the researcher, with the attempt of defining comprehensively the topic and incorporate the different views of the previous authors. Internal branding is defined as:

*...an internal process that, through the engagement of employers with employees, enables the latter to understand and internalise the brand values, allowing them to align their behaviour to such values and deliver the brand promise in a coherent way.*

The provided definition also seems to agree with Punjaisri and Wilson (2011) and Tosti and Stotz (2001). Punjaisri and Wilson (2011) focuses on the processes of internal branding, defining it as the act of “ensuring that the brand promise is transformed by employees into reality, reflecting the espoused brand values that set customers' expectations” (p.2). Once

again, the importance of delivering the brand promise reflecting the brand values is explained, as well as the capacity of internal branding to make it happen. Similarly, Tosti and Stotz (2001) seems to match the researcher's definition, agreeing on the importance of the exchange between employers and employees, addressing internal branding as useful for the promotion and communication of an organisation's brand to its different employees, transmitted in a clear manner to ensure their understanding of the link between the brand promise and the brand delivery. Furthermore, as seen in some of the above definitions, and explained in the previous chapter, internal branding can be considered a prerequisite for successful corporate branding (Punjaisri and Wilson, 2017).

Along this idea, Hatch and Schultz (2001) explain the importance of having a strong alignment across the internal and external aspects of an organisation, suggesting that strong corporate brand building would benefit of aligned corporate culture, corporate vision and corporate image, regarding internal branding as the necessary tool to bring such alignment. The need of aligning internal and external branding activities is arguably a core need for organisation, as it is outlined by different studies (e.g., Ind, 2007; Schmidt & Ludlow, 2002; Punjaisri and Wilson, 2011; Vallaster & de Chernatony, 2004). To bring such alignment, Ind (2007) suggests that organization should use the "internal marketing of external campaigns" (p.123), in order to make sure that the delivery of branding activities is embraced and aided by the organisation's employees. Schmidt & Ludlow (2002) reinforce the idea introducing the concept of 'inclusive branding', explaining that when managing efficiently branding activities, taking in account both internal and external members and stakeholders' perspectives, the danger of behaving in a neglectful and unproductive way towards any category of stakeholders can be reduced. Furthermore, LePla and Parker (1999) suggest that the consistent delivery of actions and messages based on organizational values to both external customers and internal staff would help a company to create products and services aligned to its values and strengths. That way, the company would be able to keep its promises to the customers, gaining their trust and developing increased customer loyalty (LePla & Parker, 1999). The idea is furtherly supported by Tosti and Stotz (2001) who encourage the use of internal branding, observing that even though the use of external marketing and advertising efforts can be useful in attracting and engaging customers, to keep these customers and develop a relationship with them, efforts from

the entire institution are required. Benefits of internal branding programs are also noted by Vallaster and de Chernatony (2004), who regard these programs' capacity of facilitating brand-supportive behaviour through the alignment of employees' behaviour and brand promise transmitted to the external audience. There seems to be an overall appreciation of internal branding potential and the benefits related to its use. However, years ago Burmann and König (2011) noted that the available literature on internal branding in service industries was limited and therefore offered opportunities of investigation. Even though some studies have been carried out (eg. Wallace and de Chernatony, 2009; Yang, Wan and Wu, 2015), the current research landscape is still limited requiring more attention. Nonetheless, there are different terms that are often found in marketing literature and are somehow related to the involvement of internal stakeholders in the organization's mission and values. Examples of such terms are 'relationship marketing', 'internal marketing', 'employee branding', and then, 'internal marketing'. These concepts regard employees as key targets for marketing communication activities, even though presenting differences among them.

Relationship marketing, for instance, involves the creation and the maintenance longstanding connections with external customers and different stakeholders (Gronroos, 1994). Accordingly, relationship marketing tends to focus on both internal and external audiences, such as influencers (eg. the European Union, financial bodies and governments), referring customers (eg. advisers and brokers), internal workforce, suppliers, and employment agencies (Dibb & Simkin, 2000). On the other hand, internal branding, instead, places its main focus on internal staff, the employees, to communicate to them the corporate brand value (Tosti & Stotz, 2001). This point is supported by Punjaisri and Wilson (2007) who explains that internal branding processes arose as necessary tools and activities required to achieve alignment between employee behaviours and organisational brand values.

When discussing relationship marketing perspectives, the term 'internal relationship management' is introduced by Miles and Mangold (2004), to link the different topics of relationship marketing, internal marketing and employee branding. The authors suggest the importance of managing the relationship with the internal stakeholders, regarding communications with employees as essential to develop trust and make them aware of their importance for the organisation (Miles and Mangold, 2004). By managing the relationship

with their employees, organisations can facilitate employees' internalisation of the brand image and increase their motivation in actively deliver the brand to the customers (Yagnik and Kshatriya, 2020). Such attempts can be seen as examples of *employee branding*, defined as "the process by which employees internalise the desired brand image and are motivated to project the image to customers and other organisational constituents" (Miles and Mangold, 2004, p.68). In this regard, employee branding can be considered similar to internal branding, sharing the aim of having employees behaving according to the brand values. However, employee branding presents some differences as it exploits internal marketing approaches to encourage employees towards brand support behaviours (Miles & Mangold, 2004). The use of such marketing activities appears to be recognized as effective, with Rafiq and Ahmed (1993) suggesting that using marketing activities on the internal side is the best way to achieve motivated employees. The use of internal marketing is also seen as useful in the process of corporate brand building. (Papazolomou and Vrontis, 2006) Ahmed and Rafiq (2002) provide some background, reporting that the terms 'internal marketing' were used for the first time in 1976 by Berry, Hansel and Burke, showing that the interest in managing employees' behaviour is not just a recent phenomenon. In 1993, Rafiq and Ahmed (1993) were suggesting that, from the internal marketing perspective, employees are considered as internal customers. Furthermore, another aim of internal marketing is the focus on staff involvement in internal activities to improve organizations' performances (Ahmed & Rafiq, 2002; Mosley, 2007). Internal staff needs to be efficiently trained and motivated to interact with customers in a certain way, to develop and ensure customer satisfaction (Mosley, 2007).Hankinson (2004) suggests that the increasing interest in internal marketing led to the creation and the development of internal branding. However, as Mosley (2007) points out, it is important to identify some incongruence between the concepts of internal marketing and the derived internal branding.

**Table 2.3: Key points of internal marketing and internal branding.**

	<b>Internal marketing</b>	<b>Internal branding</b>
<b>Management</b>	Customer-based	Resource-based
<b>Communication</b>	Communicates customer brand promise, attitudes and behaviour expected from employees to deliver on this promise by ensuring that they understand their role in delivering a customer experience.	Communicates brand values to employees, in order for them to understand those values which lead to appropriate actions and behaviour.
<b>Culture</b>	Trains and effectively motivates customer-contact employees in order to provide customer satisfaction	Value-based culture, typically attached to some form of corporate mission and vision
<b>Focus</b>	Focuses staff attention on the internal activities which need to be changed in order to enhance marketplace performance	Focuses on developing consistent, distinctive and deeply held values.
<b>Approach</b>	Outside-in	Inside-out

**Source: Based on the categorisations by Mosley (2007).**

Table 2.3, provided above, provides a comparison between internal marketing and internal branding, adopting Mosley’s (2007) categories of Management, Communication, Culture, Focus and Approach. Mosley (2007) observes that the approach of internal marketing is different from the one of internal branding. It is suggested that internal branding follows an inside-out approach, based on the internal resources (Mosley, 2007), while the precursor internal marketing appears to be carried out through an outside-in approach, based on what has to be externally communicated (Whisman, 2009). The internal marketing approach attempts to communicate to the employees what are the attitudes and the behaviour expected from them, while telling them customer brand promise (Sujchaphong, Nguyen & Melewar, 2015). The expectation is that employees will understand their role in the delivery of such promise to the customers, through their interactions (Ahmed & Rafiq, 2002; Mosley, 2007). In fact, the brand promise is described as the customers’ expectations toward the organisation’s behavior, generated from the communications and the advertisement used by the organization (Davis and Dunn, 2002). Following to this point, according to the internal marketing approach, employees may feel like tools of communications, with the results of low interest and involvement, as well as inconsistent behaviour, in the delivery of the organizational brand promises (Mosley, 2007). This issue may be seen as one of the drivers to the rise of internal branding. Other studies (Mosley, 2007; Whisman, 2009) show that internal branding takes a different approach,

adopting an inside-out process and focusing on transmitting values to the employees, rather than issuing orders on how to behave. In other words, it appears to succeed in tackling the issue of the alienation of the individual employee by empowering him and making him part of the process. Urde (2003) explains the different kind of values transmitted to the employees:

- Brand mission and vision values: these respectively address the commitment to the company objectives and the attempt to inspire and involve employees in their organization. These attempts to guide employees on the right way to support the organisation's brand and act consistently with it;
- Organisation's values: these help employees to realise and define, in relation to their organization, 'what they are', 'what their organisation stands for' and 'what it is that makes them who they are';
- Core values: encompass the brand and relate to the in-depth essence of the brand and its value.

Therefore, internal branding aims to transmit the listed values to the employees to allow them to understand what the organization is, what it is doing, how it does what it does and what are the essential aspects and values that define the organization. A final distinction can be made between internal marketing and internal branding, where the first could be resumed as a type of customer-based management, as it focuses on what has to be communicated to the customers, while the second could be regarded as a resource-based type of management, where the idea focuses on the internal resources to empower them and indirectly achieve the desired communication to the customers (Mosley, 2007).

The growth of interest in internal branding resulted in a vast literature with several definitions of the concept (Punjaisri & Wilson, 2011). Internal branding is commonly regarded as the way to reduce the gap between the desired corporate brand and the corporate brand perceived by the company's stakeholders (Mitchell, 2002; Urde, 2003; Punjaisri & Wilson, 2011). According to Mitchell (2002, p.100), internal branding is about communicating efficiently "what makes the company special". Furthermore, Urde (2003) suggests that the term internal branding can be used to encompass the relationship between brand and organization and is necessary to ensure that the organization keeps the promises of its brand. Moreover, Punjaisri



and Wilson (2011, p.2) state that “internal branding is about ensuring that the brand promise is transformed by employees into reality, reflecting the espoused brand values that set customers’ expectations”. Another suggestion is provided by Tosti and Stotz (2001), who regard internal branding as the process of promotion and transmission of the corporate brand to the different employees, in a clear way to ensure their understanding of the link between brand delivery and brand promise. The same authors claim that the brand promise has a huge impact on customers’ preferences toward the brands (Tosti and Stotz, 2001). However, the successful impact of the brand promise is directly related to the satisfaction of the customers, and the achievement of such satisfaction depends essentially on how such promise is delivered by the employees to the customers (Tosti & Stotz, 2001; Schultz & de Chernatony, 2002). This idea is supported by Punjaisri and Wilson (2007) who claim that the achievement of successful corporate branding depends “largely on employees’ attitudes and behaviour in delivering the brand promise to external stakeholders” (p.58). The delivery of the brand promise can see the deliverers more or less involved. For instance, de Chernatony (2002) suggests that the delivery of brand promise is more likely to be successful if the employees deliver such promise spontaneously, of their own accord. Davis and Dunn (2002) specifies that if an organisation wants its employees to deliver effectively the brand promise, it needs to communicate to them ‘what the brand stands for’ and why the brand is different and unique. Therefore, defining the brand clearly would help to describe what the essential key brand values are, and ensuring that employees clearly understand such values would allow them to deliver efficiently what it is expected from the brand (Urde, 2003).

Although this section discussed the topic of internal branding in-depth, it is important to clarify that the studies mentioned so far (eg. De Chernatony, 2002; Punjaisri and Wilson, 2007) focus primarily on the discussion of internal branding theories and/or their application to practice in settings outside Higher Education. Nonetheless, researchers (eg. Whisman, 2009; Chapleo, 2015; Clark, Chapleo and Soumi, 2019) noted that the concept of internal branding would be particularly suitable for universities, recommending further research in the focused setting of HE. Among the existing research, Whisman (2009) suggest that “in the complex university realm, internal branding helps an institution overcome internal resistance to branding efforts. It helps the institution take an identity-development strategy beyond traditional approaches”

(p.1). Similarly, Wæraas and Solbakk (2009) note that internal branding in higher education organisations can present unique challenges, due to the large number of departments and different identities. Finally, Clark, Chapleo and Soumi (2019) maintain that “the role of internal branding as part of brand management strategy is poorly understood in the higher education context” (p.4), suggesting a need to further research on the specific field.

The aforementioned studies recognize the importance of internal branding for universities, providing calls for research that this study aims to address. Consequently, the topic of internal branding in HE is presented in the next sections, in order to provide a detailed overview of the area of investigation for this study.

### **2.2.2. Internal branding in the HE context**

In 2011, Burmann & König outlined that the literature concerning internal branding was still at its early stage. Even now, the literature of internal branding in universities appears limited, with a need for further research (Mampaey, 2020) little and the concept was seen as something new (Whisman, 2009). Nevertheless, some related studies existed (eg. Baker and Balmer, 1997; Naude & Ivy, 1999; Ivy, 2001; Jevons, 2006; Judson *et al.*, 2006; 2009; Stensaker, 2005; Whisman, 2009) and more (Chapleo, 2010, 2015; Kaewsurin, 2012; Dean *et al.*, 2016) have been carried out in the recent years, showing a growing interest in the topic. For instance, Judson *et al.* (2006; 2009) analysed the concept of internal branding in HEIs, finding that when activities related to internal branding are actuated, they affect the employees who become more likely to deliver naturally the brand promise in their daily interactions. The importance of the internal audience is suggested by Whisman (2009) who suggests that delivering the brand promise to the internal staff is essentially as important as delivering it to the external audience. University staff plays a key role in representing the institution to the external audience, through the performance indicators of ‘staff reputation’, top-quality teaching and research output (Ivy, 2001; Naude & Ivy, 1999). Baker and Balmer (1997) supports the importance of a brand aware staff, explaining that individual members of universities are experts in their own right and therefore may believe that they are the best judges of how to fulfil their role. However, as introduced in the first chapter, employees may not totally understand what are the brand values of their institution, ending up reflecting their own values instead of the university’s one

(Jevons, 2006) and failing the brand promise of the institution, which may damage the credibility of the brand (Stensaker, 2005).

The next sections will address different perspectives on internal branding with a dedicated critique of benefits and limitations of each perspectives, in order to clarify the theoretical underpinnings of this study.

## **2.3. Perspectives of internal branding**

The previous chapter highlighted the importance for employees to understand the values of the organisation and its brand. Karmark (2005) distinguishes two main perspectives that organisations follow when operating internal branding: a marketing and communications-based perspective (MCBP); a norms and values communications based perspective (NVCBP). The two perspectives are now introduced.

### **2.3.1. Introducing the MCBP**

Karmark (2005) observes that, according to the marketing and communication-based perspective (MCBP), employees represent target audience for the organisational brand communications. Such perspective builds upon the idea that risks of misinterpretation may arise when leaving to employees the responsibility of understanding brand values (Kunde, 2000), suggesting that such values need to be carefully and efficiently communicated (Karmark, 2005). Deepening the idea, Kunde (2000) states that organisations should “carefully [ensure] that people are committed and understand and accept both the whys and hows of brand delivery” (p.171). The main tools that can be used to ensure understanding and delivery of the brand are internal communications, manuals such as explanatory guides and books about the brands, and training and development (Piehler, Hanisch and Burmann, 2015). A study from Punjaisri and Wilson (2011) noted that organisations tend to use communication activities and training processes, such as group meetings, briefings, training and orientation, to make sure that employees understand what customers are expecting and deliver it efficiently. Further ways to communicate values are related to corporate visual identity, through the use of names, slogans and symbols (Melewar & Akel, 2005). Therefore, the main challenge for management

is to define the brand values and transmit them to the employees (Karmark, 2005). The approach exploiting corporate visual identity follows the corporate identity position (Karmark, 2005), coming from a strategic and visual perspective, which regards identity as a corporate communication (van Riel, 1995). The creation of the corporate identity is main responsibility of the management, which also defines and directs the way in which the organization should be presented to the external audiences (van Riel, 1995).

In the MCBP, the brand values are created and spread throughout the organisation starting from the top, with a top-down approach (Karmark, 2005). Therefore, the diffusion of such brand values follows a vertical approach, shaped in a formal communication in job-related contexts (Postmes *et al.*, 2001). Wilson (2001) suggests that internal communication should be actively held, persisting and directly connected to the training provided. As previously stated, Karmark (2005) highlights that in the MCBP the idea of leaving the brand values to be interpreted by the employees is seen as risky, with potential misunderstandings. However, the same author notes that communicating brand values through brand books and similar tools is unlikely to relate such values to the employees' daily operations (Karmark, 2005), suggesting a need for further research in the actual application of the MCBP in branding practices.

The following section will explore the alternative perspective on internal branding, defined as 'the Norms and values communications based perspective'.

### **2.3.2. Introducing the NVCBP**

The 'Norms and values communications-based perspective' (NVCBP) aims to align employees' personal values to their organisation brand values (Karmark, 2005). Such perspective suggests that employees' behaviour and attitudes should be in line with the values of their organization (de Chernatony, 1999). In this perspective, the internal branding activities aim to increase employees' identification with the brand values, through the use of involving activities, such as events and storytelling (Karmark, 2005), in order to act on the feelings of the employees and develop some sort of emotional attachment (Kunde, 2000). Furthermore, the use of sponsorships in this kind of activities succeeds in obtaining a double positive effect, fostering the brand image among external consumers as well as internal employees (Ind, 2007). The norms and communication-based perspective builds upon the organizational identity

perspective (Karmark, 2005); such perspective focuses on organizational members' stance about the questions "Who we are? [and] Who am I?", observing their position as employees involved in organizational culture (Albert *et al.*, 2000, p.13), as well as their collective understanding of their organisation's specific values and characteristics (Hatch & Schultz, 1997). Such understanding for the employees of their role in the organization and of the organization's values is enhanced by a strong corporate culture, which improves employees' identification with their organization's brand (Kunde, 2000; Gotsi & Wilson, 2001; Morsing, 2006). The culture of the organization includes strategies and vision of the organization (Gotsi & Wilson, 2001). The understanding of vision and the use of strategies can be useful in an organization to encourage employees of all levels to support the brand (King & Grace, 2005). In the NVCBP the transmission of brand values is carried out through horizontal communication (Karmark, 2005), involving informal and socio-emotional interpersonal interactions among co-workers in the organization (Postmes *et al.*, 2001)

### 2.3.3. Comparing the two perspectives

After analysing the MCBP and the NVCBP, some differences can be outlined. The table below (Table 2.4) clarifies the features of both perspectives, outlining their respective tools, underpinning beliefs, focus, type of communications and type of control.

**Table 2.4. A comparative table between MCBP and NVCBP**

	<b>Marketing and communications-based perspective</b>	<b>Norms and values communications-based perspective</b>
Tools	Internal brand communication, training and development, brand books and manuals	Fostering brand identification through culture-embedding mechanisms, storytelling and events
Underpinning belief	Relying on the brand values as guidelines for the employees to live by when at work	Builds on the premise that the personal values of employees become congruent with the brand values
Perspective	Corporate identity perspective: anchored in a strategic and visual perspective with a focus on identity as corporate communication; top management has an explicit role in the formulation of corporate identity and decides how the organization is made to appear to external audiences (Riel, 1995)	Organizational identity perspective (Hatch & Schultz, 1997): anchored in the cultural perspective with a focus on the way in which organizational members make sense of issues relating to the question of 'who we are as an organization' in the context of the organizational culture and history, a collective shared understanding of the organization's distinctive values and characteristics (Albert, Ashforth & Dutton, 2000)
Focus	Implementation and communication	Management of values
Type of Communications	Vertical communications, formal communications, work-related communications up and down the organizational hierarchy (Postmes, Tanis & de Wit, 2001)	Horizontal communications, informal interpersonal and socio-emotional interaction with close colleagues and others at the same level in the organization (Postmes <i>et al.</i> , 2001)
Type of control	Direct control – top-down management: a formal socialization process	Normative control: an informal socialization process

Source: Based on the categorizations from Karmark (2005) and adapted from Sujchaphong, Nguyen & Melewar (2015)

The marketing and communication perspective appears more concerned with the topic of direct and formal control of the transmission of values to the employees. On the other hand, the norms and values communication-based perspective shows a form of indirect control, with management trying to act on a deeper level, influencing employees' attitudes and behaviour through the control of the underlying experience, feelings and thoughts (Kunda, 1992). This last perspective holds potential but can also hide some risks. Karmark (2005) suggests that one of the risks is the creation of a brand culture that is self-centred, avoiding external influences and potential constructive criticism, where the internal involvement gives only one perspective leading to self-seduction and vanity (Hatch & Schultz, 2002; Karmark, 2005). In fact, Karmark (2005) explains that there is a gap between the institutional brand values as perceived and carried by the internal employees, and these same values, as perceived by external stakeholders (eg. consumers). The structure of the organization plays an important role, as sometimes the work environment of headquarters and secondary branches are different, and therefore the brand values may be perceived differently from these closer to the origin of the values eg. headquarters, and these in secondary branches (Karmark, 2005). Therefore, there is a possibility that these new hired employees who are not dealing directly with the headquarters may be excluded by the values carried by the organization (Karmark, 2005). Reaching the employees is a key topic from the norms and values communication based perspective, as this perspective attempts to replace the formal direct managerial control of actions with an indirect approach aimed at controlling, or at least influencing, the employees' feelings, which, in turn, affects the behaviour and, consequently, the actions (Karmark, 2005). This perspective can be criticized though as it tends to focus on the result of rooted brand values (Ind, 2007). In fact, such result appears hard, or even impossible, to achieve when avoiding the pre-mentioned formal direct managerial control. This is due to the fact that, to develop and share strong brand values, organisations need management to set, adhere and control such values (Karmark, 2005; Vallaster & de Chernatony, 2005, 2006, 2009). The current section showed two different perspectives on internal branding, comparing the different approaches and pointing out the particularity of them. The next sections will present the potential effects of such perspectives when applying internal branding.

#### **2.3.4. The potential effects of internal branding from two perspectives**

The previous section showed that the key driver for internal branding is the organizations' desire of persuading employees to support the organizational branding.

Schultz (2003) suggests that persuading an employee to support the organizational brand essentially means getting such employee to carry and deliver the brand promise to the consumers. As noted in the previous sections, employees play often a key role in the achievement of successful corporate branding (Karmark, 2005; Punjaisri & Wilson, 2007) as the direct point of contact between organization and external audience. Furthermore, employees appear capable of establishing a bridge between the corporate brand identity as thought internally and as perceived by external audiences (Vallaster & de Chernatony, 2006). Several authors regarded the grade in which an employee supports the brand as the grade in which it 'lives' that brand (e.g., Ind, 2007; Karmark, 2005; Gotsi & Wilson, 2001). The idea behind living the brand can be translated in the roles that employees end up playing when supporting the brand (Karmark, 2005), such as, for instance, brand deliverer (Kunde, 2000), brand ambassador (Gotsi & Wilson, 2001), brand champion (Ind, 2007), brand citizenship (Burmam & Zeplin, 2005), and brand co-creator (Schultz, 2005; Dean *et al.* 2016). The idea of 'living the brand' connects to the employees' inner desire of supporting, which essentially means that management cannot oblige or force them to adapt such attitude (Schultz, 2003; Mitchell, 2004). In fact, Karmark (2005) explains that to live the brand a connection with the values of the brand and the organization is required. When such connection is established and employees 'live' the brand, they adapt and internalize such values, allowing them to deliver the brand promise in a spontaneous and not artificial way (Karmark, 2005).

Several studies (e.g., Burmann & Zeplin, 2005; Judson *et al.*, 2006; Punjaisri & Wilson, 2007, 2011; Piehler, Hanisch and Burmann, 2015; Piehler *et al.*, 2016) regard employee's behaviour as a consequence of internal branding activities, suggesting therefore the need of reflecting on the potential of such practices. The general idea is that a higher management's application of internal branding will lead to an increased brand-supportive behaviour, as different authors noted (e.g., Burmann & Zeplin, 2005; Judson *et al.*, 2006; Punjaisri & Wilson, 2007, 2011; Vallaster & de Chernatony, 2005, 2006; Piehler, Hanisch and Burmann, 2015; Piehler *et al.*, 2016). Judson *et al.* (2006) confirms the potential of internal branding, showing that when

internal branding activities are carried out, an organisation's employees are more likely to understand clearly the nature of their university's brand, and its value, as well as being more likely to include such values into their everyday work operations. The supportive behaviour toward the brand that comes from the use of internal branding has been studied and several terms have been used to address it. For example, Burmann and Zeplin (2005) regards the employees' behaviour developed through internal branding with the term 'brand commitment', explaining that such term can be seen as "the extent of psychological attachment of employees to the brand, which influences their willingness to exert extra effort towards reaching the brand goals" (p.284). King and Grace (2008) address the relationship between employees and brands through the application of internal branding, suggesting that when employees perceive that their relationship with the organisation is positive and meaningful their level of commitment to the organisation, its brand and its goals will be high. Furthermore, Vallaster and de Chernatony (2006) refer to the employees' behavior toward the brand affected by internal branding with the term 'brand adequate behaviour'. On the other hand, Punjaisri and Wilson (2011) regards internal branding activities as activities capable of developing in employees' brand identification, loyalty and commitment, which will lead to the development of brand performance. The authors explain that brand performance can be translated into brand supporting behavior for employees, which essentially concerns to the capacity of committed employees to understand and carry brand values, allowing them to deliver the brand promise to the final customers (Punjaisri and Wilson, 2011). Communicating brand values correctly to employees can lead to positive outcomes. Karmark (2005) suggests that a correct transmission of brand values to employees' will help them 'living the brand', with the development of supportive behaviour toward the brand in forms of: brand understanding; brand delivery; brand representation; and brand embodiment (be the brand). According to the marketing and communication perspective, the employees are expected to be able to understand and deliver efficiently the brand, thanks to the internal branding communications; on the other hand, according to the norm and value based perspective, employees should communicate the brand naturally and wholeheartedly by effectively representing the brand and/or embodying the brand (being the brand) (Karmark, 2005).

The next sections will address the consequences of internal branding from both marketing and



communication and norms and values based perspectives, reviewing and discussing specificities and differences.

## **2.4. Consequences of internal branding from the MCBP and the NVCBP**

This section addressed the way in which the adoption of MCBP and NVCBP can affect the internal branding implementation.

### **2.4.1. Consequences of internal branding from the MCBP**

The MCBP regards employees as the ones responsible to deliver the brand promise and the brand values to the stakeholders, by complying with the brand guidelines that address and specify the meaning of the brand to the employees (Karmark, 2005).

Employees have a key role in creating correspondence between brand promise and brand delivered, reducing the gap between them (Schultz, 2005). Karmark (2005) supports the idea that when brand values are carefully explained and communicated to employees, these can understand and consequently deliver efficiently such values, by living the brand. There is therefore a need for employees to embrace and live the brand (Urde, 2003) and through internal branding, the process can be simplified, with the brand shifting from a non-living object to a humanized and personalized concept, through an anthropomorphizing shift (Fournier, 1998; Karmark, 2005). From this perspective, organisational brands are seen as capable of having personalities (Davies & Chun, 2003; Duboff, 1986), emotions (Aaker, 1996), and unique features and characteristics (Balmer & Greyser, 2002), which define their specific natures, giving them coherence and stability (Cornelissen, 2006). The evocation of such concepts and characteristics can be compared to the effect of metaphors, which not only link a term to a concept but have also the capacity to “generate inferences beyond the similarities required for their comprehension” (Cornelissen, 2005, p.754). Furthermore, the strict relationship between a brand and its characteristics can be compared to metaphors as these “are often embedded in the deep structure of a text, rather than stated overtly” (Amernic, Craig & Tourish, 2007, p.1844).

As previously noted, the marketing and communication-based perspective believes on a direct control of actions through the use of marketing tools. Henkel *et al.* (2007) explain that the theory of marketing control is an adequate framework to explain the control exerted by organizations on their employees when attempting to achieve understanding of the brand values and alignment of behaviour with such values. The theory of marketing control (Jaworski, 1988) suggests that there are control devices that can be used to affect the actions of individuals (Hackman & Oldham, 1975; Jaworski, 1988; Jaworski, Stathakopoulos & Krishnan, 1993). The consequences of such controls include a modified behaviour with employees tending to act consistently in the “best interests of the organisations”, supporting the “true aims of the organization” and contributing to the achievement of “organizational goals” (Jaworski, 1988, p.23). Activities that form parts of these aimed at direct control can be defined as ‘formal’ and translated as “written, management-initiated mechanisms that influence the probability that employees or groups will behave in ways that support the stated marketing objectives” (Jaworski, 1988, p.26). On the other hand, types of indirect control can be defined as ‘informal’ and addressed as “unwritten, typically worker-initiated mechanisms that influence the behaviour of individuals or groups. This informal control may or may not be supportive of the stated marketing objectives” (Jaworski, 1988, p.26).

Following from the explication of existing forms of control, it can be concluded that the marketing and communication based perspective, with its brand-centred training activities and internal brand communications, regards internal branding as a formal control tool, with activities capable of developing a supportive behaviour of employees toward the institutional brand (Jaworski, 1988). Plus, the communication tools used in such perspective, such as training and development and internal communications, can be analysed through the social identity approach (eg. Tajfel & Turner, 1986; Haslam, 2001) and seem to have a strong commitment generation potential. Such activities appear more concerned with work-related and organisational issues rather than interpersonal relations of the employees, focusing on explaining and defining the role of employees as member of the organisations, rather than focusing on their relationship with the work environment (Postmes *et al.*, 2001).

Even though internal branding has been seen as a powerful tool to generate commitment and brand supportive behaviour, it is important to notice that some authors (e.g., Mitchell, 2004;

Karmark, 2005) contrariwise suggest that the use of internal branding in organisations may not necessarily be able to develop and maintain such huge commitment. In fact, Mitchell (2004) suggests that the use of internal branding activities may have some positive impact on a minority of employees but, such positive effect, will be counterbalanced by an equal limited number of resisters. The author (Mitchell, 2004) then questions the situation and suggests that, once the initial excitement vanishes, the final outcome of all these branding activities (eg. carefully crafted and expensive events, storytelling, away-days, workshops, cascading programmes, dramatizations, sessions, newsletters and internal videos) ends up being null.

To support this idea, the author (Mitchell, 2004) explains that the problem may be related to the fact that organisations tend to focus too much on changing the way in which employees act, without putting enough effort in translating the brand values into real-life experiences (Mitchell, 2004). Such idea of a too detached approach is supported by Karmark (2005), who suggests that when brand values are communicated using communication tools, such as brand books for instance, these are likely to little relate, or not relate at all, to the employees' daily operations. Following this review of the MCBP, the next section provides further clarifications about the implications of the NVCBP.

#### **2.4.2. Consequences of internal branding from the NVCBP**

The norms and values-based perspective, instead of directly controlling employees' actions by telling them 'what to do', focuses on controlling and influencing their inner experiences and feelings, consequently affecting their behaviour in an indirect way (Kunda, 1992). In fact, the norms have high potential of influencing behaviours as they "enable employees to justify their behaviour" (Vallaster and de Chernatony, 2006, p.764). As previously introduced, internal branding from the norms value based perspective attempts to achieve such influence by using culture-embedding tools on employees, with the aim of developing and strengthening their identification with the brand and the brand values; examples of such tools are storytelling and events (Karmark, 2005). The idea that culture in organisations is essential in fostering identification is supported by Vallaster and de Chernatony (2006) who explain that "corporate culture is the carrier of stories and gossip" (p.767), carrying and spreading information about positive and valued behaviour and foster myths around the organisation. Using these internal

branding culture-embedding mechanism, organisations can influence their employees' behaviour toward the brand, making it supportive, and attempting to achieve what is defined 'brand adequate behaviour' (Vallaster & de Chernatony, 2006).

The current perspective can be related to the organisational identification theory (e.g., Albert *et al.*, 2000). In fact, in line with such theory, it appears that staff behaviour and staff attitudes can be influenced by informal communications channels (Stuart, 2002). Plus, the current perspective focuses on commitment generation and derives from the underlying assumptions that such commitment arises through informal interpersonal relations (Postmes *et al.*, 2001). As previously stated, employees are expected to hold values aligned to the organisational brand's values. Consequently, this perspective regards employees as potential brand carriers, expecting them to become 'brand ambassadors' and ultimately embrace the brand incorporating it into their own experiences by becoming brand co-creators and 'being the brand' (Karmark, 2005). Such idea is clarified by de Chernatony (2002) who states that:

"If the values are deeply rooted and coherently interlinked, then the relevance of the brand's values and the connections staff make with the brand enable them to deliver the brand promise in a more natural manner, with passion and commitment. This, in effect, brings the brand to life and enhances the likelihood of a better performance" (de Chernatony, 2002, p.122).

Ind (2007) stresses the importance of such interconnection between employees and brand, claiming that employees are required to be the brand. Karmark (2005) recognises such importance but clarifies the difficulties of the process, explaining that there should be compatibility between brand and employees' lifestyle and attitudes and behaviour at work. This issue can be tackled through company recruitment communication, by focusing on the roots of the problem in the recruitment stage, hiring employees with beliefs and objectives that match or at least support the organisational ones (Ind, 2007). By following this selection, the organisation will hire employees which will result as compatible vessels to embody and carry the brand, as they will be related to it through compatible behaviour in both working and private environments.

## **2.5. A perspective of internal branding applied to HE institutions**

Previous sections provided the theoretical background on internal branding and its potential effect from both marketing and communications based and norms and values communications based perspectives. It has been shown that even though the use of internal branding holds potential in developing supportive behaviour in the employees, different effects can be achieved according to the way in which internal branding is applied. Karmark (2005) suggests that each of the perspectives presents some limitations, and consequently recommends using of a mix of both perspectives to organisations, in order to achieve different outcomes. Organisations seem to be aware of such limitations because, as noted by Karmark (2005), they tend to operate through both mechanisms. The current research explores the implementation of internal branding primarily from the marketing and communication-based perspective. Reasons behind the preference towards the marketing and communication-based perspective will be provided in the next section.

### **2.5.1. The MCBP in HE institutions**

Henkel (1997) showed that HE institutions are being shaped as corporate enterprises, with the consequent increased adoption of direct control over employees. The major focus on control of actions and behaviour of employees led to a lower interest in the traditional academic values such as security of academic tenure, working independence in terms of teaching and research, a clear and simple career structure and fair share of work allocation, which ended up being limited or ignored (Henkel, 1997). On the other hand, Henkel (1997) suggests that the roles of academics and their responsibilities have been clearly defined, in a wider process of function differentiation aimed to institutional performance's improvement; the author (Henkel, 1997) adds that research tend to contract those with high academic achievements, while teaching focuses on those at the beginning who have not made a big impact on research. The change happening in HE institutions in terms of structure and orientation is supported by de Boer *et al.* (2007) who explain that in this process of corporatisation there is a shift from a flexible system "with autonomous units" (Weick, 1976, p.8) to a more strictly organised system, with a more limited freedom of choice (Weick, 1976). Furthermore, Ind (2007) suggest that some organisations, such as religious institutions, military institutions or educational institutions,

have highly explicit codes of behaviour and therefore it could be risky for their employees to identify themselves with their daily operations. Therefore, reflecting on the aspects listed, it may be argued that the norms and values communications based perspective is not the most adequate to the current context, as it focuses on the indirect control of thoughts, feelings and underlying experiences in order to influence behaviour (Karmark, 2005).

On the other hand, the marketing and communications-based perspective tends to follow a top down process, with brand values being spread from the top to the bottom through a formal process of internal communications as well as training and development activities (Karmark, 2005). Postmes *et al.* (2001) argues that those top-down communication, also known as vertical communications, are more formal and focus more on the levels of commitment, differentiating themselves from the horizontal communications, which focuses more on informal interpersonal relations and therefore are harder to direct toward commitment. The same study focuses on the role on leaders as well, showing that vertical communication from leaders plays a key role in the creation of organisational commitment (Postmes *et al.*, 2001). The authors also note that each individual tends to have a different drive toward and focus of commitment and identification and, therefore, formal communications may be more useful to create a common direction toward commitment (Postmes *et al.* 2001).

Furthermore, the interpersonal relations among employees can be seen as mostly influent on an employee's personal identity rather than on its social identity and identification (Tajfel, 1978) Therefore, it can be argued that vertical and formal communications, which focus more on the work-related and organisational issues rather than interpersonal relations, have a higher potential of commitment generation as they focus more on the self-identification of the employee as member of the organisation (Postmes *et al.*, 2001).

All the information provided until this point support the idea that the marketing and communication based perspective tends to be the most appropriate for the current research in HE institutions, as this perspective focuses on generating understanding of the brand values and commitment to them through direct controls, training and development and internal communication (Karmark, 2005). Plus, the fact that in the marketing and communication based perspective the brand values diffusions follows a top-down approach (Karmark, 2005) confirms its ideal use in the HE context, where most institutions experience a top downwards

management style (Tsai & Beverton, 2007).

Therefore, this study will explore the implementation of internal branding primarily from a MCBP, examining application and consequences as well as reactions and eventual resistances. Indeed, the possibility of uncovering activities related to the NVCBP is not excluded due to the exploratory nature of the study, which will be discussed in conjunction with the other findings to allow a better understanding of internal branding in HE. The following section will provide a more detailed overview on internal branding from the MCBP, in order to ensure understanding of the dimensions explored in the current study.

## **2.6. Analysing internal branding from the MCBP**

In the previous sections, it has been explained the reason behind the choice of the marketing and communication-based perspective when analysing internal branding in HE institutions.

This section will provide more information on internal branding when analysed from such perspective.

The marketing and communication-based perspective builds from the idea that employees are target audiences for the brand-related organisational communications (Karmark, 2005). Karmark (2005) describes the idea behind this perspective stating that:

“Employees should first and foremost understand the brand values as [...] defined by the brand organisation. The primary means for attaining this understanding are internal communications, branding, training and development. Here the role of employees is to deliver the brand’s values to key stakeholders primarily by following brand guidelines which are often presented in the form of a brand book or other types of manuals that specify the meaning of the brand values to the employees” (p.108).

The marketing and communication based perspective aims to exert direct control on the behaviour; for this to happen, there is a need of a clear and efficient communication of brand values to employees, as offering free interpretations of such may lead to misunderstandings and failure in supporting the brand (Kunde, 200; Karmark, 2005). The importance of clarity and efficiency in the transmission of values is recognised (Karmark, 2005) and particularly

stressed by Kunde (2000) who explains that if employees are left to themselves to choose the adequate course of actions, there will be variable results that will be hardly consistent among themselves. Kunde (2000) adds that some may perform well, in line with the brand values, while others may fail to comply with the brand expectations, also due to the fact that brand values tend to be different and hard to follow without a previous clear understanding. For a successful brand management, values should be delivered and communicated identically in a coherent way (Kunde, 2000).

Therefore, brand values need to be clearly communicated. This perspective recognises a key role to management, stressing its responsibility to firstly create the brand values and then, precisely, to communicate such values to employees (Karmark, 2005).

The main tools used by this perspective to deliver and communicate such brand values are brand-centred training development activities and internal communications (Karmark, 2005; Burmann & Zeplin, 2005; Punjaisri & Wilson, 2007, 2011).

The following sections will focus on the two tools just listed, providing information on both brand-centred training development activities and internal communications.

### **2.6.1. The nature of brand-centred training and development activities**

Training can be defined as “a planned and systematic effort to modify or develop knowledge/skill/attitudes through learning experience, to achieve effective performance in an activity or range of activities” (Pinnington & Edwards, 2005, p.185). Miles and Mangold (2004) add that training and development activities are essential tools to communicate with employees. Training helps employees to acquire knowledge for their job and master job-related skills; development focuses on increasing employees’ general knowledge and skills while positively affecting their behaviour, with the aim of consequently improving their capacity to adapt to different situations and meet changing job requirements (Miles and Mangold, 2004). The author of this study created a table including activities that the literature regards as useful to support internal branding implementation, provided below (Table 2.5).



**Table 2.5. Internal branding training and development activities**

<b>Activities classified as “Internal branding training and development activities”</b>
Training (Gotsi & Wilson, 2001; Burmann and Piehler, 2013)
Orientation programmes (Punjaisri & Wilson, 2011)
Performance evaluation (Aurand <i>et al.</i> , 2005)
Development courses (Punjaisri & Wilson, 2011)
Recruiting, motivating and rewarding (Bergstrom, Blumenthal and Crothers, 2002)
Group meetings, briefings, training and orientation (Punjaisri and Wilson, 2011)
Staff involvement in brand co-creation (Jacobs, 2003)

**Source: created by the author of this study.**

An institution that wants to develop a specific brand image, may use training and development activities to “send various messages about the customer service behaviour the organisation expects employees to exhibit” (Miles and Mangold, 2004, pp 72-73). Following this idea, it can be argued that brand-centred training can be useful to develop understanding of the brand values and to have employees acting in line with such values (Aurand *et al.*, 2005; Ind, 2007). Considering that a clear definition and communication of brand values will benefit the organisation in the achievement of aims and objectives, organisations should develop brand-centred training programmes according to such values (Aurand *et al.*, 2005; Papasolomou & Vrontis, 2006; Ind, 2007). Punjaisri and Wilson (2011) show that the use of training activities can increase employees’ appreciation of the brand values as well as their capacity of delivering them. Miles and Mangold (2004) support the need of a clear communication, explaining that in the recruiting and staffing stage, the employees usually look for information about the job they have applied for and the organisation they are interested in, representing an ideal occasion for institutions to provide them meaningful information.

The idea of having a clear communication sees timing as an important aspect of the implementation. In fact, brand-centred training and development activities should be organised as early as possible when new employees are recruited, in order to guide them straight away

through the right path (Wilson, 2001; Karmark, 2005; Ind, 2007). As previously mentioned, it is very useful to hire people with a predisposition to follow such right path, as Ind (2007) clarifies: “People can sometimes uncover suppressed aspects of their character on these occasions but it is likely that if they possess contradictory beliefs, the whole experience will be uncomfortable” (Ind, 2007, p.118).

The importance of the recruitment stage is only one of the aspects capable of influencing effective internal branding activities. The next section will highlight the relationship between HR and internal branding, relating it to the training and development activities.

#### **2.6.1.1. Internal Branding and Human Resources**

The use of internal branding training and development activities also present a huge potential at organisational level, as they can be easily supported by, or used to support, HR activities (Piehler, Hanisch and Burmann, 2015). Such potential is not to be underestimated, as HR activities themselves are recognised (e.g., Gotsi & Wilson 2001; Aurand *et al.*, 2005) as useful in generating brand supporting behaviour in employees. Different studies investigated HR activities such as training (Gotsi & Wilson 2001), orientation programmes (Punjaisri & Wilson, 2011), performance evaluation (Aurand *et al.*, 2005), and development courses (Punjaisri & Wilson, 2011), finding out that, as long as they are aligned with brand values, they can affect employees’ behaviour to make it supportive of the brand. The importance of internal branding has been recognised as well from HR, with ad-hoc HR activities developed to back-up the internal branding practices (Aurand *et al.*, 2005). As noted in Aurand *et al.* (2005), employees seem to be more positively inclined toward the brand and tend to incorporate it in their working routine when HR are involved in the internal branding implementation. The authors clarify this view, expressing that “there is a strong relationship between HR involvement in internal branding and the incorporation of the brand into work activities” (Aurand et al, 2005, p.163)

The internal communication of brand values through activities can positively influence the employees’ support of the organisational brand (Gotsi and Wilson, 2001; Piehler, Hanisch and Burmann, 2015), but, as suggested by Gotsi and Wilson (2001), to increase the effectiveness of such communication it would be useful to align the HR activities to the brand values that want to be transmitted. In fact, the authors (Gotsi & Wilson, 2001) explain that if recruitment

policies, training and remuneration structures, performance appraisals fail to comply with brand values and are not in line with them, there will be unclear and conflicting messages about what should be the ideal behaviour for the organisation. Ind (2007) also supports the importance of aligning activities internally, explaining that, according to the grade of alignment of brand values to HR activities, different level of employees supporting behaviour will be achieved. Miles and Mangold (2004) argue that rewards and compensation are also very effective ways to align employees' interests with the goals of the organisation, as remuneration influences employees' behaviour and attitude attracting employees and driving them to stay in the organisation.

However, the study by Punjaisri and Wilson (2007) suggests that among the different activities, training activities were the only ones recognised by employees and management as likely to effectively influence and strengthen the employees' behaviour, while other HR activities, such as recruitment and reward systems, were not mentioned as effective.

The delivery of messages and training activities to employees can be achieved in different ways, not only physical but also digital. An example is e-learning, which can be considered a useful brand-centred tool capable of involving the employees into the brand and achieving their understanding of brand values and vision (Ind, 2007). E-learning includes a variety of sub-areas and applications, such as computer based learning, web-based learning, digital cooperation and collaboration, virtual classrooms, and can be useful to transmit information through different tools such as video, graphics, audios, models, animations, visualisations and simulations (Federico, 1999; de Rouin, Fritzsche & Salas, 2004). The use of e-learning is also seen as useful by de Rouin, Fritzsche and Salas (2005) who believe that e-learning should be a tool used in organisation, included in, and aligned to, other training activities and processes. Some of the benefits that e-learning offers, for instance, are lower cost than traditional physical classroom-based training (Goodridge, 2001), possibility of support sessions as preparation for main training (Ind, 2007) and consistency of delivery standard (Ind, 2007). Nonetheless, it is important to list some limitations of e-learning, such as lack of interpersonal interactivity and low completion rates of programmes due to a lack of direct control (Ind, 2007).

It can be concluded that the use of training and development activities appears essential in order to communicate to the employees: what the brand values are; what is the importance of such

values for the organisation; how important these values should be to the employees. Therefore, the use of these activities may help generating understanding in employees and guide them, potentially influencing their behaviour.

The following section will focus on the other tools previously listed as useful for internal branding from the marketing and communication-based perspective: internal communication activities.

### **2.6.2. The nature of internal communication activities**

As previously stated, the marketing and communication-based perspectives believes that to achieve a correct delivery of brand values to employees, and consequently their successful transmission of such values to the external audience, the use of internal communication activities is required (Karmark, 2005). Internal communications essentially aim to build employees' commitment and supporting behaviour toward the brand, through the communication of the benefits of the brand and attempts of involvement with the brand (Ind, 2007).

The use of internal communication is varied, as different kind of organisations use this tool in their daily operations, such as call centres (Burmam & König, 2011), hotels (Punjaisri & Wilson, 2007, 2011) and universities (Judson *et al.*, 2006). Examples of internal communication tools are: group meetings, internal publications, memos, e-mail messages, text messages, direct contact, brand books, newsletters, group meetings and intranet (Judson *et al.*, 2006; Punjaisri & Wilson, 2011; Piehler, Hanisch and Burmann, 2015). The author of this study created a table including communications that the literature regards as useful to support internal branding implementation, provided below (Table 2.6)

**Table 2.6. Internal branding communications**

Communications classified as “Internal branding communications”
Group meetings, internal publications, memos, e-mail messages, text messages, direct contact, brand books, newsletters, group meetings and intranet (Judson <i>et al.</i> , 2006; Punjaisri & Wilson, 2011; Piehler, Hanisch and Burmann, 2015)
Brand manuals (Karmark, 2005)
Brand books (Ind, 2007)
Brand value statements (Burmann and Zeplin, 2005);
Brand mantras (Keller, 1999)
Brand-based games, videos and performances (Kunde, 2000; Ind, 2007)
Internal role models, communicating through programmes, stories, events, policies (Aaker and Joachimsthaler, 2000)
Brand workshops (Burmann and Zeplin, 2005)
E-learning (Ind, 2007; Goodridge, 2001)
Learning maps (Burmann and Zeplin, 2005)
Organisational storytelling (Schein, 1985)

**Source: created by the author of this study.**

Internal communications can be useful when fostering the relationship with a brand, not only with customers but with employees as well (Miles & Mangold, 2004; Burmann and Piehler, 2013). Miles and Mangold (2004) argues that a way to support the internal public relations implementation consists in targeting the employees with advertising, as it can allow employees to understand the brand image and can foster their emotional connection to the brand.

Furthermore, the communication of the brand values in organisations is achieved through corporate visual identity, by invoking and retaining, for instance, the organisation’s name, symbol and slogan (Melewar & Akel, 2005; Whisman, 2009; Piehler *et al.* 2016). The importance of retaining brand values is also confirmed by Ind (2007), who suggest that internal communications are useful when organisations wish to refresh and reiterate the importance of the brand. Vallaster and de Chernatony (2006) explain that a reappraisal of the organisation’s history, and the frequent use of the same logo, pictures and claim would help the employees to understand and remember the brand promise, as well as to accept and internalise its values and

identity. One of the internal communication listed tools, the intranet, can be useful when attempting to keep employees interested in the brand, as it can put the brand on the spot and make it object of discussion among employees, rather than live on the side as a secondary concept (Davis & Dunn, 2002; Ind, 2007).

Davis and Dunn (2002) show that in order to achieve and develop a healthy and effective relationship between employees and organisation's brand, intranets are used to involve the employees with the brand and help them talking about it. In fact, the intranet contain useful information and guidelines for naming, trademarking, communication elements, tool kits and brand valuation (Davis & Dunn, 2002; Tschirhart, 2008) and have potential not only in helping employees to talk and discuss about the brand, but also in supporting them in their daily operation and in their business related decision-making processes (Davis & Dunn, 2002). Other internal communication useful tools concern brand manuals, which can include video and games, and brand books; those can be very helpful in specifying and communicating the deep meaning of brand values to an organisation's employees (Karmark, 2005). Ind (2007) explains that brand books exist to clarify and strengthen brand values and brand context, as well as to empower the relationship among the brand, the strategies and activities of the organisation. Also, other authors (e.g., Napoles, 1988; Wheeler, 2006; Piehler, Hanisch and Burmann, 2015) show that the inclusion of the brand vision and meaning in these brand books affects the readers inspiring them, teaching to them new concepts and developing brand awareness. Nonetheless, it is important to notice that brand books are not rule books but rather a guide to attitudes and behaviour (Ind, 2007). Furthermore, even though organisation have the potential of communicating brand values through corporate visual identity (Simoes & Dibb, 2008), using tools such as logos, slogans, symbols and organisation names (Melewar & Akel, 2005), brand books should surpass the bonds of visual identity, which only provide information on the use of logos for instance, and being more effective focusing on a more encompassing experience capable of influencing behaviour as well (Ind, 2007).

However, as previously discussed, one of the problems noted in the marketing and communication based perspective is that values communicated may through brand books may no effectively relate to the daily work of employees (Karmar, 2005) and be difficult to memorise and be interiorised (Burmann & Zeplin, 2005). A suggested solution to the problem

(Ind, 2007; Tschirhart, 2008) proposes an interconnection between intranet and brand books, with the idea that brand books can assume a different presentation, being published on the intranet as an online brand centre. Wheeler (2006) observes that intranets and online brand websites started to include new fundamentals, such as ‘Who we are’ and ‘What our brand stands for’, in addition to templates and guidelines. Furthermore, the creation of an alternative digitalised online brand book would allow the management to update brand details with ease, reducing time and costs (Wheeler, 2006). Ind (2007) supports such benefit, explaining that “the updating element is partly connected to the opportunity to allow the words themselves to evolve but, more importantly, it provides the means of sharing best practice and keeping the brand in people’s minds” (p.110). Even so, the risk of brand books becoming reference sources, useful to provide information but weak in creating employee’s involvement, still exist. Therefore, it is suggested that additional tools may support or replace brand books, such as brand-based games, videos and performances, in order to create an involving experience and development brand engagement for the employees in their daily operations (Kunde, 2000; Ind, 2007). The use of such internal brand communication tools brings the transmissions of values to a deeper level, increasing the understanding of employees and influencing their mind, and consequently their behaviour, increasing their chances of following the desired working path (Ind, 2007).

It can be concluded that, according to the marketing and communication-based perspective, organisations can influence positively the behaviour of their employees, shaping it to match the desired image through the use of internal brand communications media and brand-centred training and development activities. Such tools hold the power to ensure employees’ understanding of the brand and the brand values, as well as the capacity of allowing their delivery of such values to the external audience. The marketing and communication perspectives seems to regard employees as an actual target, just like any other external target, and Ind (2007) explain that management should involve the employees in the development of the ideas and the creation of the internal branding activities, rather than just present those to them once finished. This kind of approach will be useful to achieve supporting behaviour from the employees as well as to ensure that they clearly understand the message, being involved in its creation (Mitchell, 2002; Ind, 2007; Tschirhart, 2008).

The current study aims to explore the link between internal branding activities and academics' support toward the brand in universities. For this reason, the concept of internal branding and the literature concerning this topic and its possible approaches and effects have been previously reviewed. The next sections will focus on the creation of brand commitment, employee brand support in universities, and will then deeply explore the concept of leadership applied to HE.

## **2.7. Brand commitment, training activities, internal communications and leadership**

Previous sections have outlined the importance of training activities, internal communications and leadership for the marketing and communications perspective. The current section will now relate those concepts to the development of brand commitment.

### **2.7.1. Generating brand commitment**

Brand commitment can be achieved through different measures that need to be coordinated; such measures have been combined in three main levers: brand-centred human resources (HR) activities, brand communications and brand leadership (Burmam and Zeplin, 2005). These levers can be successfully applied to internal branding, since the management of brand-centred activities, the use of communication and the adoption of brand leadership will ensure different points of contact between brands and employees, potentially leading to commitment. First of all, to achieve success, these levers need to be aligned in the context: a culture and structure fit is a key requirement, and the brand commitment will lead to brand citizenship behaviour only if the employees receive enough guidelines as well as the resources required to deliver a solid brand experience (Burmam and Zeplin, 2005). Having these context factors in line, will not generate identification or internalisation but will allow compliance (Burmam and Zeplin, 2005). Instead, HR activities and communication, can be used to develop brand internalisation, while brand identification, instead, can be generated through brand leadership (Burmam and Zeplin, 2005). The three levers will be now individually discussed in the following sections, starting from the HR activities potential in generating brand support.

### **2.7.2. HR management importance in generating brand support**



A study by Burmann and Zeplin (2005) suggests that some employees may have a stronger correlation between their own values and these of their institution; the authors explain that, when such correlation exists, less efforts to align the behaviour are required (Burmann and Zeplin, 2005). The authors also explain that when HR management attempts to work in support of the brand, it should attempt to recruit people with such correlation between own values and organisational brand's values, while promoting the current employees presenting such correlation (Burmann and Zeplin, 2005). Such idea is supported by Ind (1998, p. 325), who maintains that "Recruitment is a branding exercise, it's part of the management of the corporate brand". Many companies tend to neglect the brand-fit characteristic of their potential employees at recruitment stage, possibly because evaluating whether applicants hold correlated values to the organisational brand can be a difficult task (Burmann and Zeplin, 2005). However, as Chatman (1989) suggests, there are screening methods that can simplify the process. In another study (Chatman, 1991), the author also suggests that it may be useful to have prospective employees spending time with experienced and successful employees, in order to have them projecting themselves working in the organisation and developing brand-fit identity through a process of self-selection. Furthermore, once recruited a new employee, HR management has the potential to create correlation between individuals' values and organisational brand values by gradually integrating the new member, with activities such as orientation trainings (Burmann and Piehler, 2013). The use of such activities is important as it has a strong impact "on the initial socialisation process, and therefore needs to convey the brand identity with its heritage and vision, its values, capabilities and personality" (Burmann and Zeplin, 2005, p287). Plus, the initial inductive activities can be supported by further dedicated programs, such as formal trainings, social events and mentor programmes, which can strongly influence and support the transmission of the organisational brand values (Piehler *et al.*, 2016). Burmann and Zeplin (2005) suggests that, considering that such activities in form of institutionalised socialisation improve "organisational commitment, organisational identification and person-organisation fit" (p.287), as shown in different studies (Allen and Meyer, 1990; Ashforth and Saks, 1996; Chatman, 1991; Klein and Weaver, 2000), the same effect should apply to the creation of brand commitment through brand identity internalisation efforts. The next section discusses the second lever of brand commitment, internal communications.

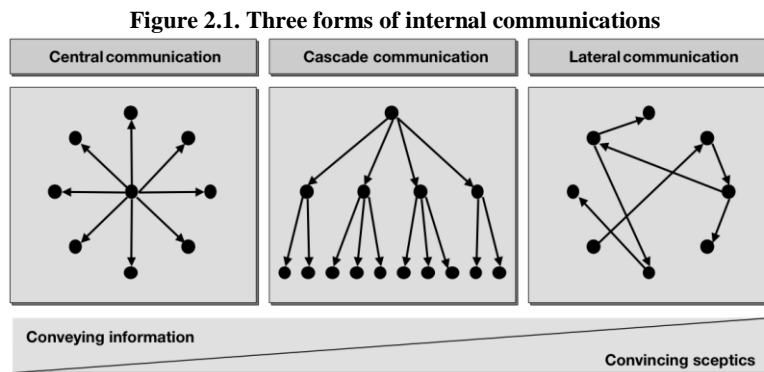
### **2.7.3. The use of internal communications to generate brand awareness and understanding**

Developing congruence between personal and organisational brand values only through HR activities may create issues, due to the fact that such correlation would exist only unconsciously and therefore may lead to non-supporting brand actions; to avoid such issues it is necessary to make the employees consciously aware of the brand and its values (Piehler, Hanisch and Burmann, 2015; Piehler *et al.* 2016). As long as the employees do not recognise the importance of the brand and that they have a key role in influencing the brand experience of their customers, they will not be interested in understanding their organisation's brand identity (Burmann and Zeplin, 2005). The role of internal communications to generate brand awareness and understanding will now be addressed, moving from *what* needs to be communicated to *how* it can be communicated.

### **2.7.4. What to communicate? The nature of the brand message**

To successfully achieve understanding of the brand identity by the employees, it is necessary to make the message easily understandable and appealing (Burmann and Piehler, 2013; Piehler, Hanisch and Burmann, 2015; Müller, 2017). Such message needs to be understandable by the wider audience despite of their background, rather than only the marketing department (Burmann and Zeplin, 2005), and needs to be overall accurate, touching all the important points of the brand identity, and memorable, capable of sticking in the targets' mind (Ind, 2007; Thomson *et al.*, 1999). A tool that could encompass the aspects of the brand identity would be a *brand book*, for instance, even though it would hardly be memorised by the employees, failing in meeting the previously mentioned second requirement (Aaker and Joachimsthaler, 2000; Piehler, Hanisch and Burmann; 2015). Nonetheless, brand books would still be useful to serve as guidelines to these responsible for creating and developing internal branding activities, such as HR and internal communication staff (Burmann and Zeplin, 2005; Piehler, Hanisch and Burmann, 2015). Many companies attempted to simplify the transmission by creating *brand value statements* as guidelines, which still are usually generic and too long, hard to remember (Burmann and Zeplin, 2005). Infact, the author (Burmann and Zeplin, 2005) suggests that "in order to be memorable, a brand value statement has to be short and to the point" (p. 289). Such

idea is supported by the fact that, the human memory is limited and can memorise up to seven parts of information at the same time (Miller, 1956). Keller (1999) embraces the limitation of human memory proposing the concept of brand mantra, defining them as “short three to five-word phrases that capture the irrefutable essence or spirit of the brand” (p. 45). Such brand mantras can be seen as simplified versions of the brand identity concepts and are useful to provide directions to employees’ behaviour while being easily to memorise (Burmans and Zeplin, 2005). While brand books, statements and mantras come from an attempt of defining the brand identity with words, literally verbalising it, and then cut these words down to facilitate memorisation, different approaches (Aaker and Joachimsthaler, 2000) in regards to the verbalisation of the brand identity can be observed. Aaker and Joachimsthaler (2000), for instance, suggest some brand value statements’ weaknesses, explaining that these are “ambiguous and uninteresting, especially because such lists fail to capture the emotion of the brand and its vision” (p.45). The authors (Aaker and Joachimsthaler, 2000), instead, suggest the use of internal role models, involving tools such as programmes, stories, events, policies and people that are capable of encompassing and represent the organisational brand identity. Burmann and Zeplin (2005) suggest that strong personalities can results in very strong influential role models but note that cantering the internal perception of the brand on a single individual may backfire on the organisation. Brand books, brand statements, brand mantras and role models follow a rational approach. Thomson *et al.* (1999), suggests that a successful transmission of the brand identity, and the consequent generation of internal brand commitment, requires the existence of an emotional element. To be able to have an impact on the emotional level, the use of internal communications, developed and managed at professional standards, is required and essential (Burmans and Zeplin, 2005). Burmann and Zeplin (2005), recognise three forms of internal communication, stressing the importance of aligning them and explaining that each one of them adopts specific communication media and communication channels; the three types of internal communications highlighted are: central communication, cascade communication and lateral communication.



The three types of internal communication, presented in figure 2.1 above, show the different flows of communications and the aim of the specific type. Central communications appear clearly aimed at conveying information, whilst lateral communication favour informal exchanges aimed at increasing credibility and convincing sceptics. Cascade communication is seen as a balanced type of communication, capable of conveying information whilst carrying an adequate degree of credibility.

The following sections provide more details on the types of communications, highlighting the benefits and implications of each of them.

#### 2.7.4.1. Central communications

Central communications concern those types of communication transmitted by a central department (eg. the communication department) and can be carried out through a push principle, a pull principle and interactive communications (Burmann and Zeplin, 2005; Ravens, 2013). The push principle tends to be the most adopted and involves the use of written materials, such as house journals and newsletters, which does not provide a delivery guarantee due to the fact that their distribution is carried out regardless of whether the chosen target receives them or not (Burmann and Zeplin, 2005; Ravens, 2013). Effective push strategies should be supported by the adoption of pull strategies, involving the pull principle (eg. intranet), due to the fact that those require employees to actively search for information rather than just passively receiving them, limiting the phenomenon of information overload in the push stage (Burmann and Zeplin, 2005; Ravens, 2013). Finally, central communications' push and pull strategies can be complemented by the use of interactive communication in form of organised events (Burmann and Zeplin, 2005; Ravens, 2013). The importance of such central

communication can be addressed by its capacity of creating brand awareness as well as its usefulness in transmitting updated information about the organisational brand (Ravens, 2013; Piehler, Hanisch and Burmann, 2015). It is important to note that, despite of all the internal efforts, the external communications will still play a role in affecting employees (Piehler *et al.*, 2016).

#### **2.7.4.2. Cascade communication**

Cascade communications follow a hierarchical approach, through a top-down communication (Piehler *et al.*, 2016). In this type of communication, the delivery of information starts at the top level and then it is gradually passed down to the lower ones (Ravens, 2013). Burmann and Zeplin (2005) suggest that, on the one hand, the transmission of information in this approach tend to be more time-consuming, but, on the other hand, succeeds in be more effective “as information from a direct superior will probably be more relevant and more credible to an employee than information from a central department” (p.291). Some organisations’ brand and communications departments tend to develop toolboxes to serve as guides for managers when preparing brand workshops, as part of hierarchical communications (Burmann and Zeplin, 2005). However, such brand workshops tend to be even more effective when the manager is missing, preferring to hierarchical communications a self-learning approach where employees need to question the topic and elect themselves a moderator. This kind of meetings can be also supported by managers through the use of visualisation tools (Burmann and Zeplin, 2005). An example of tool that can be used is a *learning map*, a graphical representation of a topic of interest, which can help representing and transmitting the concept of brand identity (Burmann and Zeplin, 2005). Summed to the self-assessment nature of the team workshops, these tools can inspire reflection on the brand through the visual factor, and lead to the development of action plans by the employees individually and as groups (Piehler *et al.*, 2016).

#### **2.7.4.3. Lateral communication**

The last described type of communication concerns lateral communication, a type of information transmission that happens between employees regardless of their role in the organisation (Ravens, 2013). This tends to be the most effective type of communication, due to the fact that information flows naturally and appear to be less manipulated. However, as

Burmann and Zeplin (2005) note, even though very powerful, this type of communication is “very difficult to control and exploit for internal communication purposes” (p. 291). However, some interesting and useful approaches exist, such as organisational storytelling (Piehler, Hanisch and Burmann, 2015). Schein (1985) encompasses the usefulness of the organisational storytelling explaining that “stories and myths about how the organisation dealt with key competitors in the past, how it survived a downturn in the economy, how it developed a new and exciting product, how it dealt with a valued employee [...] not only spell out the basic mission and specific goals, but also reaffirm the organisation’s picture of itself, its own theory of how to get things done and how to handle internal relationships”(p. 80). The use of shared storytelling can be useful to develop a collective alignment around the organisational brand concept (Boyce, 1995) due to the fact that they do not only born and spread randomly but can also be planted and organised in order to serve the brand purpose and transmit the brand identity concept (Martin *et al.*, 1983; Dennehy, 1999; Denning, 2004).

The current section addressed the topic of brand commitment, observing different approaches needed to generate it. Three levers were recognised as necessary to develop brand commitment (brand-centred human resources (HR) activities, brand communications and brand leadership) and two of those were explored and critically described. The last lever, brand leadership, will be presented in the following sections.

### **2.7.5. Brand leadership**

Brand leadership can be seen as leaders’ behaviour that succeeds in influencing the aspiration of the employees by affecting their value systems and driving them to overcome their own self-interests giving priority to the brand (Piehler, Hanisch and Burmann, 2015; Piehler *et al.*, 2016). Such potential for the internal branding strategy is consequence of leaders’ capacity of influencing groups of people toward the fulfilment of objectives and the achievement of specific goals (Drouillard & Kleiner, 1996). In an organisation, leaders have a huge impact in shaping orientations and values (Jordan, 1973; Hambrick & Mason, 1984) and similarly can affect employees’ behaviour and shape their values in line with the corporate brand. Different authors suggest that leaders’ influence can be caused by their values (Webster 1988), characteristics and demographics (Smith *et al.*, 1994) as well as by their experience and

capability in organisation and planning (Felton, 1959). Leaders are recognised as capable in managing and promoting activities and changes within their organisation (Kotter 1990a, 1990b). Due to such potential, leadership is regarded as a key foundation to establish and develop within organisations when aiming at implementing effective marketing plans (Dibb & Simkin, 2000). Similarly, research on internal branding recognises to leaders and their characteristics the potential to influence internal branding practices (e.g., Burmann & Zeplin, 2005; Vallaster & de Chernatony, 2009; Piehler, Hanisch and Burmann, 2015; Piehler *et al.*, 2016). More specifically, Burmann and Zeplin (2005) observe that there are two brand-relevant levels in an organisation, a macro and micro level. The authors argue that the macro level concerns the higher levels, such as CEO and executive board in the brand management process, while the micro level addresses the personal leadership of the several executives across the institution. Therefore, leadership can be implemented from the top to the bottom levels, having the potential of affecting the organisation as a whole, rather than limited to specific levels. Vallaster and de Chernatony (2009) recognise such potentials, recognising to leaders as capable of creating a link between top management and ordinary employees. The authors identify leaders as the ones capable of defining and driving the corporate brand's identity as well as developing the connection between desired organisational brand identity and employee's behaviour. Vallaster and de Chernatony (2006) explain that leaders have the potential to create such top-bottom link and positively affect internal brand building through inspiring and supporting employees' behavioural changes aligned to the desired brand. The behavioural changes aligned to the brand that leaders are likely to inspire can lead to the desired employees' brand supportive behaviour (Mosley, 2007; Kunde, 2000). Postmes *et al.* (2001) agrees, suggesting that leaders' communications can be considered the best predictors of organisational commitment and, therefore, leaders have a key role in ensuring an effective employees' delivery of services aligned to the brand promise. Communications are not simply verbal or visual; the behaviour of leaders represent itself a form of communications of the brand message (Burmann & Zeplin, 2005; Piehler *et al.*, 2016) and can define and enhance the meaning of the brand to the employees, as well as inspiring them to cooperate and work effectively as a brand-supportive team (Ind, 2007). Vallaster and de Chernatony (2005, 2006) also agrees on the potential of influential leaders, explaining that leaders boost brand supporting behaviour in employees by promoting social interaction and providing a clear brand vision. Moreover,

Burmann and Zeplin (2005) note that employees tend to receive internal branding efforts efficiently only when leaders support them with words and actions. King and Grace (2005) support such view, showing that leadership is one of the most important factors in creating and enhancing brand supportive behaviour in employees. Consequently, to ensure that leaders adapt behaviours aligned to the brand, capable of fostering the supportive behaviour of employees, Henkel *et al.* (2007) suggest the adoption of leadership training. As mentioned above, previous studies (Schein, 1983; Kotter & Heskett, 1992) suggest that leaders can influence the culture of the organisation, affecting the employees' behaviour and encouraging brand commitment, and Wallace and de Chernatony (2009) regard leadership as a necessary condition for employees to live the brand. This kind of process may be the result of what Jaworski (1988) defines 'informal control' mechanisms, explaining that informal controls can be seen as "unwritten, typically worker-initiated mechanisms, which influence the behaviour of individuals or groups" (Jaworski, 1988, p.26). Such informal controls involve personal interactions between leaders and employees in processes of "social control" and/or "culture control" (Jaworski, 1988; Henkel *et al.*, 2007). Whether the processes in act are type or informal control or not, the literature highlighted so far (e.g., Vallaster & de Chernatony, 2003; Burmann & Zeplin, 2005; Wallace and de Chernatony, 2009; Piehler, Hanisch and Burmann, 2015; Piehler *et al.*, 2016) seems to indicate that leadership has potential to affect internal branding implementation. In line with these considerations, Berry and Parasuraman (1991 cited in Simoes & Dibb, 2001, p.219) highlights the reasons where leadership may result in a key asset for internal branding, stating:

"Internalising the brand involves explaining and selling the brand to employees. It involves sharing with employees the research and strategy behind the presented brand. It involves creative communication of the brand to employees. It involves training employees in brand-strengthening behaviours. It involves rewarding and celebrating employees whose actions support the brand. Most of all, internalising the brand involves *involving* employees in the care and nurturing of the brand."

Berry and Parasuraman's (1991) definition reflects on the process required for employees to internalise the brand, clarifying the importance of explaining and communicating the brand to the employees, and the importance of training them in behaviours aimed at supporting the



brand. Furthermore, Berry and Parasuraman (1991) emphasize the importance of involving the employees in the care of the brand, seen as a necessary step to internalise it. Leaders appear the most suitable, and possibly the only ones, capable of influencing and inspiring employees and implement such process, as confirmed by several internal branding studies (e.g., Vallaster & de Chernatony, 2003; Burmann & Zeplin, 2005; Morhart *et al.*, 2009; Piehler *et al.*, 2016). Among the existing leadership theories, transformational leadership (Burns, 1978) has been increasingly gaining interest as one capable in affecting followers' brand related behaviour, as previous studies suggest (e.g., Vallaster & de Chernatony, 2003; Burmann & Zeplin, 2005; Morhart *et al.*, 2009, Kaewsurin, 2012).

The theory is presented in the next section along with links to internal branding.

#### **2.7.5.1. Transformational leadership and internal branding**

Transformational leadership focuses on the involvement of one's followers toward the achievement of great results and hard work (Burns, 1978; Northouse, 2004). The effects of transformational leadership also involve employees attempting to make extra efforts to exceed what is normally expected from them (den Hartog, van Muijen & Koopman, 1997; Northouse, 2004). Transformational leadership processes focus on the employees, seen as followers who have potential that can be developed, and on their overall performances (Bass & Avolio, 1990; Avolio, 1999).

Burns (1987) explains that influential leaders are able to understand needs and demands of potential followers and, further to that, they search potential motives in such followers, in order engage them, satisfying their needs at a higher level. Northouse (2004) follows from Burns (1987), concluding that transformational leadership "refers to the process whereby an individual engages with others and creates a connection that raises the level of motivation and morality in both the leader and the follower" (Northouse, 2004, p.171).

Transformational leadership presents several characteristics (Bass & Avolio, 1990; Northouse, 2004): 1) leaders that represent models for their employees and are capable of providing them with a strong sense of mission and a clear vision, tend to be charismatic, influential on their followers and idealised by them. These employees fascinated by their leaders who show 'charisma' tend to identify with them and imitate them. 2) leaders show 'inspirational

motivation' when they succeed in communicating to employees the high expectation towards them, and are able to inspire and motivate them to commit to the organisational vision and become active part of it; 3) leaders present 'intellectual stimulation' skills when they are capable of inspiring and driving their employees to be innovative and creative and critical, capable of questioning their own values and ideas as well as those of their leader and their organisation; 4) transformational leaders are capable of providing 'individualized consideration', recognising that every follower may have specific needs and therefore needs specific support to improve its commitment and results; the leaders capable of delivering individualized consideration are able to develop a supportive climate.

Following the transformational leadership characteristics highlighted by Burns (1978) and Bass (1985), Burmann and Zeplin (2005) suggest that brand leadership could be considered as a form of transformational leadership applied to internal branding. In line with Burmann and Zeplin (2005) and building upon Burns (1978) and Bass (1985), brand leadership can be seen as transformational "leaders' behaviour that succeeds in influencing the aspiration of the employees by affecting their value systems and driving them to overcome their own self-interests giving priority to the brand" (Burmann and Zeplin, 2005, p.293).

A qualitative study carried out by Burmann and Zeplin (2005) shows that during the interviews, the transformational characteristics of 'inspiration' and 'charisma' were mentioned several times and recognised as important for successful internal branding, but the same did not apply for these of 'intellectual stimulation' and 'individualized consideration' previously mentioned. Nonetheless, a more recent research from Kaewsurin (2012) in HE, suggests that leaders' attention and positive feedback towards the employees may play a role in generating brand support behaviour. However, Burman & Zeplin (2005) argue that it is difficult to define what characteristics of transformational leadership have an impact on internal branding and, consequently, the overall effect of transformational leadership on internal branding requires more attention. The same study from Kaewsurin (2012) offers interesting perspectives in HE, although within the specific setting of Thai universities, suggesting a need for further research in different settings. Finally, another study by Morhart *et al.* (2009) shows that leaders showing transformational leadership characteristics appear to be influential and inspire brand building

behaviours in their followers, contributing to identify the topic as valuable for the current research.

The reviewed brand leadership literature and the characteristics of transformational leaders seems to suggest the existence of a link between internal branding and leadership. Nonetheless, previous studies (eg. Burmann & Zeplin, 2005; Kaewsurin, 2012) suggest the need for further research since the topic requires more attention, as well as the need to explore the practical application of topics discussed at theoretical level (Sujchaphong, Nguyen & Melewar, 2015). The next chapter will proceed in highlighting the gaps that this study aims to fill, and brand leadership will be further discussed, considering its importance as one of the objectives of this study. However, before moving to the next chapter, the next section discussed the concept employee brand support in universities.

## **2.8. The concept of employee brand support in universities**

As previously suggested, institutions' employees should ideally present values similar or at least related to those of their institution (Trim, 2003). Then, it has been showed the institutions need to develop activities based on their brand's values to influence the employees in supporting their brand in their operations and overall behaviour. The current section will now address the concept of employee brand support in universities and the related literature will be reviewed and explained. A definition for the concept of employee brand support in universities will be provided and then the review of literature will concern the academic staff in the universities. In a branding perspective, Judson *et al.* (2006) and Boone (2000) explain that delivering the brand promise to employees has the same importance of delivering it to the external audience, especially due to the fact that the employees play a key role in such delivery. Karmark (2005) notes that there is a connection between employees' commitment to the brand and their performance, and that those factors are linked to the customers' perception; the author then relates such concepts to branding and service marketing. Schultz (2006) recognises the importance of employees in delivering brand promise in corporate branding. The branding literature, as previously explored, conceptualise the connection between employees and their organisation's brand as their capacity and interest in 'living the brand' (e.g., Ind, 2007;

Karmark, 2005; Gotsi & Wilson, 2001). It has been discussed that when employees live the brand they have different roles (Karmark, 2005) such as brand champions (Ind, 2007), brand deliverers (Kunde, 2000), brand ambassadors (Gotsi & Wilson, 2001), brand co-creators (Schultz, 2005) and, finally, brand citizenship (Piehler *et al.*, 2016). A further role is provided by Gummesson (1987), who recognises the role of ‘part-time marketers’ for the employees that, despite not being directly involved in marketing or sales, play a key indirect role on the customer brand experience through their duty of ensuring the quality of the institution’s services and products, and their role in supplying and providing services to the other employees with direct customer interaction duties. Furthermore, as previously stated, Burmann & Zeplin (2005) recognise the supporting behaviour of employees towards the brand as ‘brand citizenship behaviour’, suggesting that when employees are essentially asked to support and live the brand, they show some kind of citizenship behaviour showing: “individual voluntary behaviours outside of role expectations (non-enforceable functional extra-role behaviours) that are not directly or explicitly acknowledged by the formal reward system and which, in aggregate, enhance the performance of the organisation” (Organ, 1988 cited in Burmann & Zeplin, 2005, p.282).

When observing employees’ brand support from the brand commitment perspective, such commitment can be generated by transferring the organisation’ brand values to the employees, through the use of training programmes and internal communication (Piehler, Hanisch and Burmann, 2015; Piehler *et al.* 2016), suggesting that employees may have a positive perception of the relationship with their institution and recognise it as worthy of maintaining (King & Grace, 2008). However, as previously stated, brand commitment is also defined as “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, p.284). Morhart *et al.* (2009) also regards the brand building activities carried out by employees out of their normal role as ‘employee brand building behaviour’.

Reconnecting to the different roles that employees can have (eg. brand champions, brand ambassador, etc.) discussed above, Karmark (2005) recognises different kinds of employees’ behaviour that show commitment and support towards the brand: understanding the brand and its value; delivering efficiently the brand and its values to others; representing the brand, in

form of a brand ambassador; becoming/being the brand. Such behaviours can be linked back to the NVCBP and the MCBP perspectives. The NVCBP acts through organisational culture control, believing that employees should be able to represent the brand and become/being the brand, whilst the MCBP focuses on communication activities and the belief that employees should only be able to understand and the brand and deliver it (Karmark, 2005).

Considering that the current study aims to examine the effects of internal branding in universities and employees' reactions and resistances from a marketing and communication based perspective, the employee's behaviour toward the brand will be defined as 'academic staff's acceptance and resistances toward internal branding activities'.

### **2.8.1. Focusing on employee support in HE**

Studies in universities (Judson *et al.*, 2006, 2009) note that there is a positive correlation between the existence of employees' supportive behaviour and the employees' understanding of the institution's brand values and their adoption in the daily work practices. Such correlation may fade when employees do not clearly understand their institution's brand and brand values, as they would not be able to internalise the external values and would consequently act according to their own values, which may not necessarily align to their institution's brand ones (Baker & Balmer, 1997; Jevons, 2006; Whisman, 2009).

Moreover, as previously mentioned, if employees do not carry and present their institution's brand characteristics, it will affect the institution making its brand unreliable (Stensaker, 2005), suggesting that universities should try to align the behaviour of their staff to the institutional brand values. In fact, when the brand message lacks support from the employees', it tends to lose credibility (Schiffenbauer, 2001 cited in Judson *et al.*, 2006, p.99). As the external brand communication are affected by the employees' behaviour, the internal brand communications become just as important as the external, due to their indirect potential of affecting the brand message delivery (Boone, 2000). In fact, Boone (2000) suggests that employees should be involved in internal branding activities in order to allow them to make the brand "come alive" (Boone, 2000, p. 36). Stensaker (2005) agrees on the fact that universities should attempt to align their employee behaviour with their brand values, because when employees and students of an institution feel left out from the branding process "even the most creative branding will

not be trustworthy” (p. 16). It can be argued that, considering that brands relate to the perception people have of them, such brands are built and created according to the way in which people, both internally and externally, experience them (Belanger *et al.*, 2002; Stensaker, 2005). Whisman (2009) suggest that universities’ employees should be their institution’s “biggest fans” (p.370). As universities belong to a specific set of educational services, expectations are high and, to be fulfilled, demand experienced staff capable of showing skills and knowledge, as well as experience in their job (eg. teaching) and overall activities (Moorthi, 2002). Knowledge is not the only important characteristic of an employee; more aspects, which relate to service personnel, may be addressed such as attitudes, appearance and social skills (Kotler & Andreasen, 1991). Previous studies (e.g., Naude and Ivy, 1999; Ivy, 2001) carried out in important and long-established universities show the correlation between employees and their institutional brand, recognising to such employees huge influence when representing their institution in public contexts, due, for instance, to the staff reputation, high quality teaching and research output associated to the institutional brand. The introduction of marketing and branding approaches in HE, as previously suggested, appear to be the consequence of the increasing competition between universities, as well as their increasing shift towards corporate enterprises (Henkel, 1997; Gumport, 2000; Belanger *et al.*, 2002; Brookes, 2003; Stensaker, 2005). Still, Barry *et al.* (2001) argues that more attention should be directed to the inclusion of managerial practices in universities as well as to how far they got and the response they receive.

## **2.9. Literature Review Summary**

In this chapter the literature concerning internal branding and brand supportive behaviour of employees, specifically academic staff, in HE institutions has been identified and reviewed. Across the chapter, internal branding perspectives have been discussed, highlighting the potential of brand training and communications. Then, a specific focus was dedicated to leaders’ influence on internal branding in universities, as well as their role in influencing employees’ behaviour and generating supportive behaviour toward the brand, as several studies recognised the potential impact of such organisational roles (e.g., Vallaster & de Chernatony, 2003, 2006; Burmann & Zeplin, 2005; Morhart *et al.*, 2009; Piehler, Hanisch and Burmann,

2015; Piehler *et al.* 2016). As previously observed, the authors who have explored HE internal branding in-depth (Chapleo, 2010, 2012, 2015) or related it to different areas such as brand architecture (Spry *et al.*, 2018), brand co-creation (Dean *et al.*, 2016) and brand support and leadership (Sujchaphong, Nguyen & Melewar, 2015), all concur that further investigation is required, providing calls for research that this study aims to address. In line with that, the next chapter presents a conceptual framework for this research, clarifying the way in which the research questions have been created to address the gaps and the objectives that this study aims to fulfil.

## **CHAPTER 3**

### **CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK**

#### **3.1. Mapping the work**

The previous chapter provided an overview of the concept of internal branding in HE, introducing the terms and showing how they apply to the HE context. The literature review outlined interesting factors as the importance of understanding the terms internal branding and brand values, and the issues caused by uncertainty about them. Furthermore, the review of the literature identified different concepts related to internal branding and/or holding the potential of influencing internal branding application in HE, such as internal branding training and development activities, internal branding communications, employee brand support and, finally, brand leadership. Finally, the overall review suggested that there might exist obstacles and resistances when applying internal branding, and reasons behind such issues may be different. Such possible connections have been identified following the application of business concepts, often related to private companies, to the context of HE, interesting due to the shift to a quasi-market with university starting to resemble private businesses, as introduced in the previous chapter. Consequently, the degree of applicability requires further investigation, in order to understand to what extent these business concepts can be adapted to HE institutions. The current research aims, therefore, to explore the concept of internal branding in HE focusing on the perspectives of management and academic staff of the business school. The aim is to understand how management and staff, both sides of the same coin, perceive the concept of internal branding and its application on their business school. The eventual knowledge of the brand values of the interviewee's HEI will be investigated, as well as the perceived relationship of such values to the working routines of both sides. Furthermore, it will be investigated whether the academic staff supports the brand of their institutions or not and how this affect its way of dealing with the students, as well as the management attempts to develop such supporting behaviour in the staff. A specific focus will be dedicated to the development of brand training and development activities and the use of brand internal communication activities. From the management perspective, it will be examined what training activities and



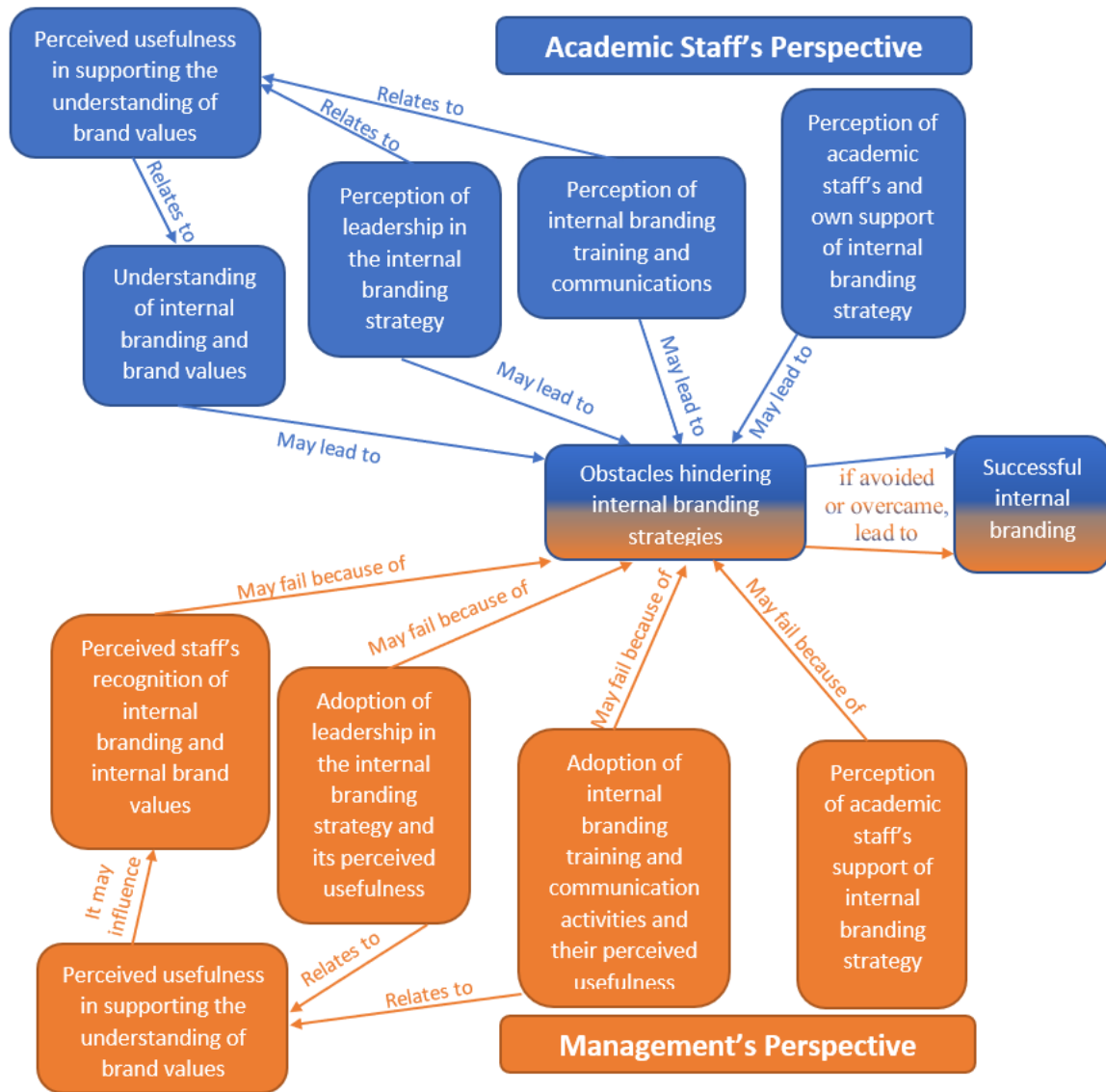
communication are organised and how those are perceived to influence the understanding, acceptance and incorporation of brand values by the academic staff, as well as their consequent support of the brand and delivery of such brand values to the other stakeholders (eg. students, peers, etc.); it will also be explored the opinion of management on how brand training and communication support the brand message. From the academic staff perspective, instead, it will be analysed their awareness and recognition of brand training activities and communication, their perceived usefulness of such brand activities and communication in helping them understanding the brand values and acquiring the skills necessary to deliver them, the perceived influence on their brand supporting behaviour and, finally, their opinion on how those brand training activities and communication support the brand message.

A focus will be reserved to the perception towards the topic of leadership and its capacity of generating brand supporting behaviour. From the management perspective, it will be explored managers' perception towards leaders' capacity of involving the staff in the creation and delivery of the brand values, supporting them in understanding and committing to the internal branding strategy of their business school and involving them in the overall branding programme. On the other hand, from the academic staff's perspective, it will be analysed how and where academics get the information about their organisation brand values and how involved they feel with the creation and delivery of brand values. Furthermore, the study will address academics' perception of leadership usefulness in developing their understanding and commitment towards the internal branding strategy, as well as leadership support of the internal branding strategy of the business school; then the academic staff involvement with the branding programme of the institution will be explored.

The overall investigation will focus on understanding what may be the factors hindering the internal brand strategy of a business school. This will be achieved by asking to management and academic staff what are the perceived existing and potential obstacles in their institutions; then, conclusions and ideas will be drawn from the data analysis, focusing on the potential obstacles that may emerge across the interviews.

A visual conceptual framework of the process is provided below (Figure 3.1), addressing the different areas of the research. Then, the different areas are discussed in the following sections.

**Figure 3.1. Visual Conceptual Framework**



Source: developed by the author of this study

### 3.2. Understanding of internal branding and brand values

As introduced at the beginning of this chapter, the literature review highlighted the importance of understanding the terms internal branding and brand values for members of an organisation, as well as the fact the issues might arise from uncertainty about these concepts. Different studies (eg. Davis and Dunn, 2002; Urde,2003; Whisman, 2009; Karmark, 2005) reflect on the need of understanding the meaning of internal branding and the values of the brand. Davis and

Dunn (2002) points out the importance of understanding the nature of brand, specifying that if an organisation wants its employees to deliver effectively the brand promise, it needs to communicate to them ‘what the brand stands for’ and why the brand is different and unique. Urde (2003) supports Davis and Dunn (2002)’ view, explaining that defining the brand clearly would help to describe what are the essential brand values, and ensuring that employees clearly understand such values would allow them to deliver efficiently what it is expected from the brand. Along with Urde (2003) and Davis and Dunn (2002), the importance of the internal audience is suggested by Whisman (2009) who observes that delivering the brand promise to the internal staff is essentially as important as delivering it to the external audience. Karmark (2005) agrees with the studies just mentioned, suggesting that employees represent target audience for the organisational brand communications and that the main challenge for management is to define the brand values and carefully and efficiently communicate them to the employees. More specifically, Karmark (2005) builds upon the idea that risks of misinterpretation may arise when leaving to employees the responsibility of interpreting the brand and understanding brand values (Kunde, 2000). Therefore, capacity of understanding of brand may vary according to individual perception of the brand (Kunde, 2000), identifying a potential issue. Further to the perception of individuals, difficulties in understanding the brand can be associated to the complexity of the brand itself. As Kotler (2002) explains, brands can present up to six levels of meaning: *attributes*, when a brand can be associated to certain attributes; *benefits*, when a brand can be associated to potential benefits on emotional and functional levels; *values*, when a brand says something about its organisation/producer; *culture*, when the brand is associated and represents a certain culture; *personality*, when the brand can project a certain type of personality; *user*, when a brand suggests the kind of user that chooses that brands’ product/service.. However, being internal branding the main area of investigation for the current research, this study focuses on the level of meaning of *value*, considering the internal branding purpose of transmitting brand values to the employees (Mosley, 2007; Whisman, 2009) in order to aligning these values to the employees’ ones (Punjaisri and Wilson, 2011).

In the specific context of HE, several studies recognised the importance of understanding the brand for employees. Studies in universities (Judson *et al.*, 2006, 2009) note that there is a

positive relationship between the employees' understanding of the institution's brand and related values, and their adoption of such values in their daily work practices. Such correlation may fade when employees do not clearly understand their institution's brand and brand values, as they would not be able to internalise the such values and would consequently act according to their own values, which may not necessarily align to their institution's brand ones (Baker & Balmer, 1997; Jevons, 2006; Whisman, 2009). If employees do not totally understand what are the brand and the brand values of their institution, ending up reflecting their own values instead of the university's one (Jevons, 2006) a high risk of failing the brand promise of the institution arises, with consequent danger of damaging the credibility of the brand (Stensaker, 2005). The danger of damaging the reputation of a HE institution is direct consequence of the high influence of academic staff. Previous studies (e.g., Naude and Ivy, 1999; Ivy, 2001) carried out in important and long-established universities show the correlation between employees and their institutional brand, recognising to such employees huge influence when representing their institution in public contexts, due, for instance, to the staff reputation, high quality teaching and research output associated to the institutional brand. The overall importance of having employees that understand and the brand of their organisation is clarified by Chapleo (2015). Chapleo (2015) identified a lack of understanding of branding concepts among management/staff, which ended up influencing their delivery of the brand promise and consequently the positioning of the university, suggesting internal branding as a solution to reach the desired differentiation for HEIs. Indeed, the researcher (Chapleo, 2015) explains that further research addressing the understanding of branding among university employees is required, in order to clarify what is understood and what actually represent an obstacle for such understanding.

The current research recognises the importance of understanding the concept of internal branding and the brand values of an organisation from both academic staff and management perspective. This study builds upon the idea that a lack of understanding of such concepts in the management would affect its delivery of them to academic staff. Similarly, a lack of understanding of internal branding and brand values in the academic staff may reveal problems at both staff and management level. Staff may be not predisposed and ready to learn and understand the brand; managers may not understand the nature of their institution's brand or

face challenges when communicating those concepts to the academic staff. As previously explained, being internal branding the main area of investigation for the current research, the study focuses on the level of meaning of *value*, considering the internal branding purpose of transmitting brand values to the employees (Mosley, 2007; Whisman, 2009) and the purpose of aligning these values to the employees' ones (Punjaisri and Wilson, 2011).

Chapleo (2015) identified a lack of understanding of branding concepts among management/staff, which ended up influencing their delivery of the brand promise, suggesting that further research is required to investigate managers and academics' understanding of branding as well as potential internal branding implementations. Clark, Chapleo and Soumi (2019) maintain that "the role of internal branding as part of brand management strategy is poorly understood in the higher education context" (p.4), calling for further research IH. To address such calls, and following the idea that the literature of internal branding in universities is little and the concept requires further investigation (Mampaey, 2020), the current study aims to explore perceptions of academic staff and management towards the concept of internal branding and their institution's brand values, in order to contribute to the existing literature and to provide a starting point for the current research.

The first question proposed to address such need is:

*1) What does internal branding mean to academic staff and management in a Business School context?*

### **3.3. Academic staff brand support**

Organisations that wish to have a coherent brand require their employees to share the values of the organisation's brand (de Chernatony, 2002). Based on the literature review (eg. Punjaisri and Wilson, 2011; Tosti and Stotz, 2001; Hatch and Schultz, 2001). The previous section explained that internal branding can be useful in order to align values of employees and organisations, by clarifying the meaning of the brand and facilitating the understanding of the brand values. However, aligning the values of brands' and employees is only the preliminary step of internal branding, with the final aim of influencing employees' behaviour to have it reflecting such brand values (Vallaster & de Chernatony, 2004; Hankinson, 2004; Aurand *et*

*al.*, 2005). The literature review identified the connection between employees and their organisation's brand as their capacity and interest in 'living the brand' (e.g., Ind, 2007; Karmark, 2005; Gotsi & Wilson, 2001). It has been discussed that when employees live the brand they have different roles (Karmark, 2005) such as brand champions (Ind, 2007), brand deliverers (Kunde, 2000), brand ambassadors (Gotsi & Wilson, 2001), brand co-creators (Schultz, 2005) and, finally, brand citizenship (Burmann & Zeplin, 2005), presenting different levels of support shown in their interest acting according to the brand, delivering the brand efficiently and getting involved in the creation of the brand. As, explained in the literature review, the current study analyses the brand support in employees building upon the marketing and communication perspective. Such perspective, identifies the support of employees in their interest in understanding the values of their organisation's brand and incorporating them in their working operations (Karmark, 2005; Ind, 2007). Burman and Zeplin (2005) explains that by using internal brand communications and training and development activities, identified in the literature review as internal branding tools from the marketing and communication based perspective (Karmark, 2005), it is possible to affect the behaviour of employees by generating and improving brand commitment and support. The authors (Burman and Zeplin, 2005) provide a definition to employee brand support regarding it as "the extent of psychological attachment of employees to the brand, which influences their willingness to exert extra effort towards reaching the brand goals (p. 284)". For employees to show commitment and support toward the brand and carry brand values, it is pre-requisite that they recognise and understand the organisation's brand values (Abbott, White and Charles, 2005). When employees are committed to the organisation brand's values and are aligned with those, they tend to work harder and make extra efforts of their own will to support the achievement of their organisation's goals (Iverson, McLeod and Erwin, 1996). In the HE context, according to the marketing and communication based perspective, internal branding activities can be addressed as formal control activities which hold the potential of affecting academic staff behaviour, leading them to commit and support their university's brand (Jaworski, 1988). Such potential is confirmed by studies in HE (Judson *et al.*, 2006; Whisman, 2009), showing that the implementation of internal branding in universities is likely to lead to an increased understanding of the institution's brand values in employees, as well as to increase the employees' capacity of reflecting such values in their daily work practices.

However, the studies based on quantitative research (Judson *et al.*, 2009) and secondary research and reviews (Whisman, 2009) focused on finding correlations between internal branding and employees' understanding on the brand, without really investigating in-depth the nature of such correlation and, more specifically, the relationships occurring between the implementation of internal branding and the eventual birth or improvement of brand supporting behaviour in the university's staff.

The importance of academic staff's brand support in HE represents one of the key focuses of this research, due to the lack of research available in the specific field and the potential usefulness for practice, as recognised by Chapleo (2010) who explains the importance of having staff supporting the brand in universities and recognises the process of "getting staff behind the brand" (p. 180) as one of the greatest challenges for universities.

Due to the exploratory nature of the study, this research aims to explore in-depth through qualitative investigation the existence of relationships between internal branding and brand supporting behaviour in HE and to understand the nature of such correlation. The ways in which internal branding succeeds, or eventually fails, in developing brand supporting behaviour are explored in this study, as well as the reasons behind academic staff's interest in supporting the brand through eventual incorporation of brand values in their daily operations. Also, the perspective of both academic staff and management about the delivery of such values from staff to students is explored, to understand how theoretical information about the institutional brand are included and influence the daily working practices. The question proposed to address the gap in the literature is:

*2) How does the academic staff of a Business School support the internal branding strategy?*

### **3.4. Brand-training and development activities and internal communications**

It has been shown both in the literature review and in the previous sections that internal branding as the capacity of transmitting brand values to employees and influence them behaviour in order to have them act according to the brand values (de Chernatony, 2002;

Vallaster & de Chernatony, 2004; Hankinson, 2004; Aurand *et al.*, 2005).

Several studies (eg. Iverson, McLeod and Erwin, 1996; Burmann and Zeplin, 2005; Abbott, White and Charles, 2005; Piehler, Hanisch and Burmann, 2015; Piehler *et al.* 2016) showed that when employees understand the brand values and are committed to them, they are likely to present a supporting behaviour and are willing to make extra efforts and working harder than their standard to achieve the organizational goals. Burmann and Zeplin (2005), in particular, suggest that when brand training and development activities and brand internal communications are used in organisations to convey brand values to the employees, it is possible to generate and increase commitment in employees towards the brand of their organisation. The literature review outlined that the development of internal branding activities can aid the effective brand delivery, with brand-related training and development activities focused on conveying brand values and aligning the behaviour of employees (eg. Punjaisri & Wilson, 2007). Furthermore, the adoption of brand-related internal communications was outlined as useful in transmitting internally the brand and facilitate the understanding and adoption of its values (Burmann & Zeplin, 2005; King & Grace, 2008; Piehler, Hanisch and Burmann, 2015; Piehler *et al.* 2016).

The two topics of interest, brand-centred training and development activities, and brand-centred internal communications, are now discussed in line with the objectives of this study.

### **3.4.1. Brand Centred training and development**

The literature review outlined that previous research (eg. King and Grace, 2008; Punjaisri and Wilson, 2011; Piehler, Hanisch and Burmann, 2015; Piehler *et al.* 2016) recognises an important role and a significant potential to brand-centred training and development in conveying an organization's brand values to its employee. More specifically, focused research (eg. Gotsi and Wilson, 2001; Aurand *et al.* 2005; Punjaisri and Wilson, 2011) showed that when activities are aligned to brand values, they are likely to succeed in influencing employees to commit to the brand and reflect the brand values.

Examples of activities that can positively influence the behaviour or the employees are: orientation programmes, to provide an initial direction to follow for the employees, and development courses, to make sure that employees follow the path outlined by the orientation



programmes (Punjaisri and Wilson, 2011); performance evaluation (Aurand *et al.*, 2005) and appraisal (Gotsi and Wilson, 2001), useful to evaluate how the employees are performing and, in a certain way, driving them to behave in a certain way when the importance of such evaluation is previously expressed (Aurand *et al.*, 2005); brand training (Gotsi and Wilson, 2001), to allow the employees to acquire and/or improve the skills and knowledge necessary to behave coherently with the brand.

Even though the potential of brand-centred training and development has been widely recognized, research concerning the HE context is limited and almost inexistent. The few existing study addressing the topic at practical level (Kaewsurin, 2012) and theoretical level (Sujchaphong, Nguyen & Melewar, 2015), address the need for further research identifying another gap that the current research aims to fulfil.

### **3.4.2. Branded Internal Communications**

To inspire supporting brand behaviour in employees it is necessary to make the employees aware of the brand and its values, explaining to them their key role in influencing the brand experience of their customers; otherwise they will not be interested in understanding their organisation's brand identity (Piehler, Hanisch and Burmann, 2015; Piehler *et al.* 2016). To successfully achieve understanding of the brand identity by the employees, it is necessary to communicate internally the brand, making the message appealing and easily understandable by the wider audience (Burmann and Zeplin, 2005), while keeping it overall detailed, touching all the important points of the brand identity, and memorable, capable of sticking in the targets' mind (Ind, 2007; Thomson *et al.*, 1999).

Burmann and Zeplin (2005), recognise three forms of internal communication, stressing the importance of aligning them and explaining that each one of them adopts specific communication media and communication channels. The three types of internal communications highlighted are: central communication, cascade communication and lateral communication.

Even though studies (eg. Burmann and Zeplin, 2005, Piehler, Hanisch and Burmann, 2015; Piehler *et al.* 2016) discussed the usefulness of brand internal communications in supporting internal branding programs, there is little research (eg. Kaewsurin, 2012) addressing the

application of brand internal communication in HE, from the perspective of the academic staff, and no existing research focusing on the HE management's perception. Such lack of research represents one of the gaps that this study aims to investigate, as also suggested by Sujchaphong, Nguyen & Melewar (2015) who reviewed the HE internal branding literature and called for research in a practical setting. Indeed, the literature review outlined that the development of internal branding activities can aid the effective brand delivery, with brand-related training and development activities focused on conveying brand values and aligning the behaviour of employees (eg. Punjaisri & Wilson, 2007). Furthermore, the adoption of brand-related internal communications was outlined as useful in transmitting internally the brand and facilitate the understanding and adoption of its values (Burmamann & Zeplin, 2005; King & Grace, 2008).

The two topics of interest, brand-centred training and development activities and internal communications, are now discussed in line with the objectives of this study.

Further justification for the gap is provided in the following sections.

### **3.4.3. Brand-centred training and development activities and internal communications in HE**

In the HE context, limited research (eg. Judson *et al.*, 2006; Whisman, 2009) investigated the phenomenon of internal branding and the capacity of employees to understand and carry brand values. However, when referring to the use of internal branding application through brand-centred training and development activities and internal communication, there is no research on HE management perspective and the same academic staff's perspective is limited. The only study that appears to explicitly address the relationship between internal branding and internal training and communications activities is Kaewsurin (2012) who focused on academic staff perspective. However, Kaewsurin (2012) looked at the topic from a different stance, developing and testing hypothesis rather than adopting an explorative approach, limiting the acquired information to the set hypotheses, and suggesting a further in-depth exploration of the topic. Sujchaphong, Nguyen & Melewar (2015) reviewed the existing literature, noting that, at theoretical level, brand-centred training and communications activities may support the internal branding implementation, nonetheless addressing the need to explore the concept in a

practical setting. The limited literature on academic and management's perceptions towards the topics of brand-centred activities and communication and the call for further research consequently outline a gap that this research aims to fill. In line with that, an eventual connection between the concepts of brand-centred training and developments and brand-centred internal communications is explored, to identify possible connection useful to guide further research as well as capable of being considered in practices when implementing internal branding.

The question proposed to address the gaps identified in the current section is:

*3) How do Business School's academics and management perceive internal branding training and communications?*

### **3.5. Brand leadership and internal branding**

As previously mentioned, the current study is interested in exploring the perception towards brand leadership in HE, and more specifically, the capacity of leaders in generating brand commitment and serve the internal branding purposes. Leaders can be seen as individuals capable of influencing groups of people toward the fulfilment of objectives and the achievement of specific goals (Drouillard & Kleiner, 1996). In an organisation, leaders are able to provide skills, time and human capital commitment (Hill & Jones, 1992) and, due to their influence, they tend to have a huge impact in shaping organisations' orientations and values (Jordan, 1973; Hambrick & Mason, 1984). Leadership is also a key foundation to establish and develop within organisations when aiming at implementing effective marketing plans (Dibb & Simkin, 2000). Similarly, research on internal branding recognises to leaders and their characteristics a potential influence on internal branding practices (e.g., Burmann & Zeplin, 2005; Vallaster & de Chernatony, 2009). Vallaster and de Chernatony (2009) recognise to leaders the capacity to greatly influence internal branding in organisation, due to their responsibility in defining and driving the corporate brand's identity and their capacity of developing the connection between desired organisational brand identity and employee's behaviour. Vallaster and de Chernatony (2006) explain that leaders have the potential to

positively affect internal brand building through inspiring and supporting employees' behavioural changes aligned to the desired brand. The behavioural changes aligned to the brand that leaders are likely to inspire can lead to the desired employees' brand supportive behaviour (Kunde, 2000; Mosley, 2007). Postmes *et al.* (2001) suggest that leaders' communications can be considered the best predictors of organisational commitment and, therefore, leaders have a key role in ensuring an effective employees' delivery of services aligned to the brand promise. Communications are not simply verbal or visual; the behaviour of leaders represent itself a form of communications of the brand message (Burmamann & Zeplin, 2005), can define and enhance the meaning of the brand to the employees, as well as inspiring them to cooperate and work effectively as a team (Ind, 2007).

Previous studies (Schein, 1983; Kotter & Heskett, 1992) suggest that leaders can influence the culture of the organisation, affecting the employees' behaviour and encouraging brand commitment. Morhart *et al.* (2009) recognize to leaders the capacity to positively influence and enhance the supporting behaviour of employees towards their organisation's brand. Pandley *et al.* (2009) focused on leadership in the public sector, analysing its effects on the intrinsic motivations of employees, and found out that leaders are capable of affecting the employees by involving them in the organisational values and giving them a reason for their work and a meaning to their job. Furthermore, the same study (Pandley *et al.*, 2009) shows that, as in the public-sector organisations serve the community, leaders tend to represent role models and make their organisation's goals more appealing and attractive, succeeding in stimulating intellectually the employees involving them in the achievement of the organisation's objectives for good causes. Pandey and Wright (2009) identify three main processes executed by leaders to influence the employees toward the support of the organisation and the commitment to its cause: 1) leaders provide an interesting and attractive organisational mission, succeeding in motivating and inspiring the employees; 2) leaders behave as role models and examples to follow, by encouraging the employees to work toward the achievement of the organisational mission and assisting them in the process; 3) leaders challenge the employees on the intellectual side, driving them to question their beliefs in order to influence and shape these coherently with the message of the organisation.

When reviewing past studies about leadership in the education field, interesting effects can be

noted. Leithwood (1992) recognizes to leaders the capacity of inspiring academic development, increased effectiveness in supporting employees in the resolution of their issues and an overall capacity of creating and maintain a professional and collaborative collegiate culture, resulting in a satisfactory environment for the employees. Plus, Sergiovanni (1990) shows that when leaders in education institutions are the ones attempting to influence the behaviour of their employees through communications, rewards system and direct interpersonal support, they appear to be the most influential force in generating employee commitment. In the education field, leaders are recognized as individuals capable of aligning the actions of employees to their institution's values and driving them towards a common goal (Leithwood, 1992; Roberts, 1985). Consequently, leaders in the HE field may be able to influence the behaviour of employees to guide them toward the brand values of their institution.

In the specific context of HE, some authors (e.g., Jarrett Report, 1985 cited in Barry *et al.*, 2001, p.89; Cohen & March, 1986; Pounder, 2001) reflected on the role of leaders, concluding that leadership is a core requirement for HEIs that want to perform efficiently. Dearlove (1995) argues that academics tend to be individuals who prefer to be left alone to focus on their work, usually teaching in universities and researching, and therefore they may be keen and “prepared to trust empathetic leaders to do their organisational thinking for them” (Dearlove, 1995, p.167).

Plus, the previously introduced changes in government politics granted increased freedom, responsibility and authority to universities, making the choice of a good leader a key concern for these institutions as a quality leadership would extremely benefit the institution's management (Askling *et al.*, 1999), especially due to the previously mentioned increasing competition among HEIs and their gradual change towards business-like institutions (Davies, Hides & Casey, 2001). Quality leadership is seen as a key factor for these institutions that aim to be flexible and capable of changing (Dearlove, 1995) and Ramsden (1998) supports the idea that leadership in HE has the potential to inspire and produce changes, as well as to align and motivate employees.

The topic of leadership holds interest for the current research, as the change-inspiring characteristics of the previously discussed transformational leaders can be reconnected to the

internal branding's interest in influencing employees in order to have them internalise the brand and the brand values and behave in a manner that supports the brand of the organisation, coherent with its values. Existing research linked to brand leadership in HE is limited (eg. Kaewsurin, 2012; Dean *et al.*, 2016). Kaewsurin (2012) investigates the context of Thai universities from the academic staff perspective, testing the applicability of internal branding and leadership theories from the commercial setting to the HE context, nonetheless without an in-depth exploration of the topics; the same author suggest the need for further research in the area of brand leadership in HE. Dean *et al.* (2016) provides a very interesting study on the topic of brand co-creation exploring the views of several employees in the context of Mexican HE institutions. The study suggests that employees' experiences and interactions within HE institutions affect the way the brand meaning is generated. Indeed, leaders will play a role in the interactions of employees, either by taking part in such interactions or facilitating them, consequently gaining attention of this study. In fact, the same Dean et al (2016) suggest the need for further research involving the different stakeholders of the co-creation process. Of the existing studies concerning the academic staff's perspective, none has attempted to explore in-depth the relationship between internal branding and leadership in HE. Then, from the perspective of the HE management, there are no studies available that explored such concepts. The available literature becomes even scarcer when focusing on the context of HE in the United Kingdom. The limited research from academic staff perspective and lack of research from the management perspective identify another gap that the current research aims to explore.

This study will focus on the perception of both management and academic staff in universities. From the management perspective, it will be explored managers' perception towards leaders' capacity of involving the staff in the creation and delivery of the brand values, supporting them in understanding and committing to the internal branding strategy of their business school and involving them in the overall branding programme. From the academic staff's perspective, it will be analysed how and where academics get the information about their organisation brand values and how involved they feel, or eventually felt, with the creation and delivery of brand values. Then, the study will explore the perception of academics towards brand leadership's usefulness in developing their understanding and commitments towards the brand, as well as the potential benefits of brand leadership for the internal branding strategy of business schools.

The question that will address the current gap is:

4) *How do Business School's academics and management perceive the role of leadership in the internal branding strategy?*

### **3.6. Obstacles and hindrances to internal branding application**

The last focus of the current research concerns the eventual obstacles that may emerge when attempting to implement internal branding in HE field. The previous sections identified gaps that the current research aims to fill, namely: the perception towards the brand and brand values in management and staff; the perception of staff and management toward the support of the academic brand; the perception of management and academic staff towards the application of brand-centred training and development activities and the use of internal communication, as well as the perceived usefulness of such application and use; the perception of academic staff and management towards the topic of leadership and its capacity of affecting the implementation of internal branding. The current section relates to all of these mentioned areas, aiming to identify eventual issues that could hinder the implementation of internal branding in universities.

First of all, as introduced at the beginning of this chapter, the literature review highlighted the importance of understanding the terms internal branding and brand values for members of an organisation, as well as the fact the issues may arise from uncertainty about these concepts. If employees do not totally understand what are the brand and the brand values of their institution, ending up reflecting their own values instead of the university's one (Jevons, 2006) a high risk of failing the brand promise of the institution arises, with consequent danger of damaging the credibility of the brand (Stensaker, 2005). Difficulties in understanding the brand can be associated to the complexity of the brand itself considering that, as previously explained, brands can present up to six levels of meaning: *attributes, benefits, values, culture, personality, user* (Kotler, 2002). Even when employees succeed in focusing on the meaning of values, there is still a risk that these may be misunderstood (Karmark, 2005). The use of brand-centred training and development activities and internal communications may help ensuring a meaningful transmission of values (Karmark, 2005; Burmann & Zeplin, 2005; Punjaisri &

Wilson, 2007, 2011). However, even those training and development activities and internal communication need to be carefully aligned to the brand values otherwise they may not be effective (Gotsi and Wilson, 2001; Aurand *et al.* 2005; Punjaisri and Wilson, 2011). Another useful process capable of positively influencing the application of internal branding in education institutions (Vallater & de Chernatony, 2003; Burmann & Zeplin, 2005) and HE institutions (Ramsden, 1998; Pounder, 2001) has been identified in the leadership. However, even though recognized as effective in influencing the employee of behaviours, leadership influence may not be necessarily positive. While good leaders have the potential of energizing and motivating employees to be committed to their job and work hard (Tronc, 1970; Ellis and Shockley-Zalabak, 2001), poor leaders hold the same potential of negatively influencing the employees, influencing negatively their mood, decreasing their performance and, eventually, causing them to leave (Jablin, 2001). Such negative result would most likely bring to failure the implementation of internal branding.

However, these mentioned are only few potential issues related to the areas previously mentioned. The cause of failures may be different and caused by specific dimensions rather than mistakes in implementation of activities and communications or not-suitability of leaders. Mahnert & Torres (2007) identified seven possible dimensions (table 3.1) that can affect the effective implementation of internal branding: organisation; information; management; communication; strategy; staff; education. It is important to notice that the current research selects only a limited number of dimensions addressed in the framework. The reasons that drove the author of this study to select such dimensions of the framework, rather than exploring it as a whole, are: 1) the need of narrowing down the areas investigated, in order to ensure a deeper focus and provide consistent contribution; 2) the existence of relevant literature capable of supporting the importance of this research and justify the objectives; 3) the qualitative nature of the study, which attempts to explore in-depth the topic and identify themes and relationships, rather than select variables and test correlations; 4) the consideration that the framework is adapted from a single study, which the author of the current study considers adequate to support a single objective but not enough to support an entire thesis.

The framework (table 3.1) is now explored, and the different dimensions reviewed.



**Table 3.1. Dimensions and Crucial factor for internal branding.**

Dimension	Crucial factor for internal branding
Organization	Structure
	Culture
	Insular thinking & internal competition
Information	Market research
	Measurement & feedback
	Specific knowledge of brand direction
Management	Jurisdiction
	Leadership support
	Deeds communication
	Brand teams
Communication	Multi-directional communication
	Formality of message
	Alignment of internal & external messages
	Internal Clutter
Strategy	Alignment of business & brand objectives
	Budget
	Timing
Staff	Employee participation and support
	Recruitment
	Remuneration
	Segmentation
Education	Legitimacy and acceptance
	Guidance
	Mental models

**Source: Mahnert and Torres (2007, p.56)**

The dimension of ‘organization’ concerns its structure, its culture and the existence of insular thinking and internal competition (Mahnert & Torres, 2007). The dimension of ‘information’ concerns the need of searching information about the institution, which can be achieved through market research (Berry and Parasuraman, 1992 Mitchell, 2002; Schultz, 2002; Beagrie, 2003), and the usefulness of measurement and feedback to evaluate the programmes (Reynoso and Moores, 1995; Lings and Brooks, 1998; Bruhn, 2003), in order to identify eventual required changes (Jacobs, 2003). The dimension of ‘management’ concerns one of the main focuses of this current study, addressing the involvement of the management in the internal branding programme. Management is required to support and respect the program to ensure credibility (Farrell, 2002; Jacobs, 2003) and guide, through forms of leadership, the employees (Tosti and Stotz, 2001). The formation of brand teams is seen a useful way to positively influence the branding programme application. The next dimension, ‘communication’, has

been introduced previously and reflects on the necessity for the internal brand message to be aligned to the external message and communicated to all the internal stakeholders in a clear and understandable way (Ind, 2007; Mahnert and Torres, 2007). The dimension of ‘strategy’ implies that the organisation should have a strategy coherent with brand and organisational objectives (Jacobs, 2003). Conflicts between brand and objectives of the organisation will cause confusion and damage the credibility of the brand and the internal branding programme (Mahnert and Torres, 2007). Ideally, an internal branding programme should attempt to find the most suitable timing and allocate the right budget (Heyman, 2000; Frook, 2001; Simms, 2003; Thomson, 2003). The next dimension, ‘staff’, concerns the other main focus of this study and recognise the importance of recruiting, motivating and rewarding staff to influence their readiness to internal branding programmes (Bergstrom, Blumenthal and Crothers, 2002) as well as the importance of segmenting the internal audience in order to convey the right message to the specific segment, increasing the effectiveness (Joseph, 1996). Furthermore, internal branding programmes are seen as most effective when staff members are involved in the creation of such programmes (Thomson *et al.*, 1999; Davis, 2001; Jacobs, 2003; Buckley, 2002; Pappasolomou-Doukaki, 2003) highlighting the importance of involving the staff in the creative process. The final dimension ‘education’ concerns the fact that management and employees may have different experience and knowledge and, therefore, the outcome of the internal branding programmes may be negatively affected due to ignorance (de Chernatony, 1997) and flawed preconceptions (Mahnert & Torres, 2007). It is therefore suggested to verify beforehand the eventual existence of prejudices, beliefs, attitudes and mental models (de Chernatony, 1999) and the alignment to organisational objectives through education (Quester and Kelly, 1999; Varey and Lewis, 1999; Mortimer, 2002; Pappasolomou-Doukakis, 2003).

The review suggests that there are many factors to take in consideration when implementing internal branding programmes that could lead to success or, eventually, to failure. However, such factors have been generalised and mostly retrieved from the private sector.

Research exploring possible obstacles of internal branding implementation in universities is not available, identifying a gap for the current study. The classification from Mahnert and Torres (2007) retrieved from business practices, provides guidelines for an investigation in the HE sector. The current research aims to explore the implementation of internal branding in HE

alongside the dimensions provided by Mahnert and Torres (2007), in order to extend the knowledge to the HE context and provide specific guidance that may drive further research as well as improve practical applications in HE institutions.

The question that will address the current gap is:

*5) What are the factors that may hinder the internal branding strategy of a Business School?*

### **3.7. Summary**

Within this chapter, the areas of interest for this study have been discussed in relation to the research questions, discussing gaps providing justifications for this research. Key topics discussed include: the understanding of brand and brand values; the perception towards internal brand training and development activities and internal brand communications; the perception towards leadership as an internal branding asset; the obstacles that may occur when implementing internal branding programmes. Following the clarifications about the areas to investigate, the next chapter addresses the way in which such areas will be explored, clarifying the methodological implications of the study. Research paradigm, methods and approaches are discussed, with a focus on sampling choices and processes of data collection and analysis.

## CHAPTER 4

### METHODOLOGY

*“Methodology is a branch of knowledge that deals with the general principles or axioms of the generation of new knowledge. It refers to the rationale and the philosophical assumptions that underlie any natural, social or human science study, whether articulated or not. Simply put, methodology refers to how each of logic, reality, values and what counts as knowledge inform research” (McGregor and Murname, 2010, p. 2).*

McGregor and Murname (2010) suggest that when attempting to acquire new knowledge, the way in which such knowledge is researched needs to be based on specific assumptions, justified and consistent with the research questions. Indeed, when deciding to conduct an investigation, the views and the beliefs of the researcher influence shape the process of acquiring knowledge, with several approaches that can be chosen, each of them holding potential and limitations, requiring the research to choose carefully how to proceed.

The previous chapter addressed gaps in the existing literature, outlining the focus of this study and the research questions that it aims to answer. Indeed, in order to contribute to the existing literature, the acquisition of new data from the participating subjects, with the consequent analysis of the information collected, are necessary steps to answer to the proposed research questions. The current chapter will discuss the methodological implication of the study, both at theoretical and practical level. Starting from the philosophical stance of the researcher, the chapter will outline the approach and the techniques adopted to fulfil the requirements of the study, clarifying the context of the research and the roles of the participants.

The following section discusses the ontological and epistemological assumptions underpinning the current research and the way they influence the approach chosen to collect and analyse data.

#### **4.1. Research Philosophy**

When shaping the research process, it is important to account for the research philosophy underpinning such process. The research philosophy is useful in clarifying the assumptions underpinning the research design, and provides a direction for the research strategy, reflecting on the nature of knowledge and on the development of such knowledge (Saunders *et al.*, 2009). Furthermore, the research philosophy is useful in addressing the patterns of existing knowledge and associates those to the research methods, refining the adequate method relevant for knowledge sought (Benton and Craib, 2001). Indeed, research tends to be carried out based on a research paradigm, taking in account the context of the study and reflecting on the nature of the research questions. A research paradigm can be considered as a framework that addresses the researcher's process in theory building, influencing its perspectives about the world and knowledge, and developed on its point of views about how knowledge is acquired and things are connected to each other (Voce, 2004, as cited in Hasan, 2011). The assumptions that shape research paradigms can be classified as ontological assumptions, epistemological assumptions and, finally, methodological assumptions (Guba and Lincoln, 2008). Epistemology and ontology are branches of philosophy that address the nature of the existence, although approaching it from different perspectives. More specifically, epistemology tries to explain the nature of knowledge and how it is created, while ontology focuses on existence in relation to reality, attempting to understand how something exists (Krauss, 2005). Epistemology can be seen as the branch of philosophy that addresses the relationship between researcher and reality (Carson *et al.*, 2001), while ontology addresses the nature of reality itself (Hudson and Ozanne, 1988). The third branch of philosophy, the methodology, focuses on the methods to fulfil the previous branches objectives, outlining the processes required to obtain knowledge for both epistemology and ontology. Even though there are several possible assumptions when considering 'knowledge claims' (Creswell *et al.*, 2003), there are two most popular paradigms in the context of social and marketing research: positivist paradigm and interpretivist paradigm (Hussey & Hussey, 1997 cited in Malhotra & Birks, 2003, p.139; Crotty, 1998; Corbetta, 2003). The two paradigms are now introduced in order to explain which one supports the current research.

#### **4.1.1. The Positivist perspective**

According to the positivist perspective, the world exists as something external (Carson *et al.*, 2001) and the reality of each situation or phenomenon is objective, regardless of the researcher's beliefs and point of views (Hudson and Ozanne, 1988). Therefore, positivism itself can be seen as an ontological perspective, addressing the concept of reality as something external, whilst objectivism its epistemological stance, seeing such external reality as something detached from the researcher who observes it, rather than interacting with it. Positivism supports the use of a structural controlled approach in research, through the identification of a clear and defined research topic, the construction of clearly defined hypotheses and the support of an aligned adequate research methodology (Churchill, 1996; Carson *et al.*, 2001). Positivist researchers support the idea that researcher should stay detached from these involved in the research, in order to avoid any possible influence of feelings and personal involvement and maintain a neutral position based purely on reason (Carson *et al.*, 2001). Positivism highlights that there is a clear distinction between personal experience and science, as well as value judgement and fact; such belief is sustained by the positivist attitude in pursuing objectivity through rational and logical approaches in research (Carson *et al.*, 2001). Due to the interest in seeking objectivity avoiding personal influences, positivist researchers adopt mathematical and statistical techniques, following clearly structured approaches to reach single and objective reality (Carson *et al.*, 2001). The attempt of this school of thought is to create generalisations that are always applicable despite of the context of the time. Such idea is supported by the positivist belief that the actions of humans are a result of causes deeper than their behaviour and that researcher and participants have no connection, being both independent (Hudson and Ozanne, 1988).

#### **4.1.2. The Interpretivist perspective**

The interpretivist perspective can be considered as directly opposed to the positivist. Interpretivists stress “the dynamic, respondent-constructed position about the evolving nature of reality, recognising that there may be a wide array of interpretations of reality or social acts” (Malhotra & Birks, 2003, p.193). Interpretivists believe that there is not an objective reality but a number of relative realities (Hudson and Ozanne, 1988). Reality is created by individuals

and, consequently, knowledge is as well, with the interpretivist researchers believing that there is no objective knowledge but rather knowledge socially constructed (Carson *et al.*, 2001) and perceived (Hirschman, 1985).

Considering that there is not a unique reality and an objective knowledge to acquire, interpretivists adopt flexible frameworks (Carson *et al.*, 2001) in order to be able to focus on specific details of the human interaction (Black, 2006) and to be capable of understanding the perceived subjective reality (Carson *et al.*, 2001). In contrast to positivism, which support independence of the parts, interpretivism suggests that researcher and participants in the research are interdependent and present mutual interactivity (Hudson and Ozanne, 1988). Rather than predicting the results of the research in advance and expecting a specific result, the interpretivist researchers engage the investigation starting from an insight and moving towards a general direction, assuming that, due to the complex, unpredictable and multiple nature of reality, it is impossible to start with a fixed research design (Hudson and Ozanne, 1988). Interpretivists keep a flexible position and stay open to acquisition of knowledge along the study, developing it through the process with insights from the participants. Such interactive approach focused on collaboration sits on the belief that humans change and adapt, changing consequently their social reality, requiring a direct interaction to grasp the continuously changing knowledge, highlighting the importance of time and context in shaping social realities (Hudson and Ozanne, 1988). The interpretivist aim can be consequently seen as the interpretation and understanding of meanings in human behaviour, rather than an attempt to generalise and forecast causes and effects (Neuman, 2000; Hudson and Ozanne, 1988). Interpretivists seek to understand meaning, motivations, reasons and other factors related to subjective experience, experiences influenced and shaped by time and context (Hudson and Ozanne, 1988; Neuman, 2000).

The differences between the two perspectives are presented in the following table (Table 4.1).

**Table 4.1. Positivism and interpretivism.**

<b>Issue</b>	<b>Positivist</b>	<b>Interpretist</b>
<b>Reality</b>	Objective and singular	Subjective and multiple
<b>Relationship of research and respondent</b>	Independent of each other	Interacting with each other
<b>Values</b>	Value-free= unbiased	Value-laden=biased
<b>Researcher language</b>	Formal and impersonal	Informal and personal
<b>Researcher/research design</b>	Simple determinist Cause and effect Static research design Context-free Laboratory Prediction and control Reliability and validity Representative surveys Experimental design Deductive	With free will Multiple influences Evolving design Context-bound Field/ethnography Understanding and insight Perceptive decision-making Theoretical sampling Case studies Inductive

**Source:** Creswell (1994 cited in Malhotra & Birks, 2003, p.139).

The current research undertakes an interpretivist approach, which drives and shapes the researcher's aims to explore opinions and perceptions of HE institutions' management and academic staff. The alignment to the interpretative approach is supported by the fact that the current research questions aim to understand behaviour, thoughts and feeling of participants and their unique situation (Bryman, 2001). Furthermore, the researcher agrees that, in line with the interpretivist perspective, in order to understand the world, it is mandatory to have a social interaction, which has to be analysed and considered according to the context in the values of time and place (Wallimann, 2006). The next section addresses the research approach of the current study, to further clarify the ways in which the research objectives will be achieved.

## **4.2. Research Approach**

Following the assumptions that define the nature of knowledge and the beliefs toward the acquisition of such knowledge, researchers tend to develop and test theories using two main approaches: the deductive approach and the inductive approach. The first school of thought, the positivist one, tends to adopt a deductive approach while the interpretivist, instead, adopt the inductive approach (Malhotra & Birks, 2003). The deductive approach involves a clear area of investigation, starting from a clearly developed theory and seeks evidences in support of



such theory, matching the positivist position toward a structured framework and expectation of specific results in a pre-selected direction. The inductive approach, on the other hand, involves the researcher selecting an area of interest and investigating it with flexibility to achieve abstract generalisations and ideas, rather than adopting a clearly structured framework aimed at specific results (Malhotra & Birks, 2003; Neuman, 2003). Researchers adopting an inductive approach observe events and collect data and then develop their ideas and theories according to the information acquired during the research process (Malhotra & Birks, 2003). This study aims to explore different areas within the domain of internal branding in HE, approaching the subject without any pre-formed hypothesis or belief. Consequently, the current research adopts processes of inductive reasoning with the aim of developing ideas about the analysed reality and the aim of ‘theory-build’ (Oliver, 2010) on the acquired information. In order to fulfil the research objectives, the inductive approach is usually associated to research that focuses on richness of information, which results in the adoption of qualitative methodologies (Taylor & Bogdan, 1984). Qualitative and quantitative methodologies are introduced in the following sections, with justifications behind the chosen methodology provided.

#### **4.2.1. Qualitative research**

In the previous sections, the philosophies of social research have been addressed, and it has been explained that different assumptions can underpin a research and that, according to such assumptions, researchers approach the acquisition of information and the development of theories in different ways. When discussing the way in which knowledge can be acquired, there are two key methodologies that can be highlighted: quantitative and qualitative. Such methodologies are aligned to the previously introduced positivist and interpretivist positions, adopting tools in line with such philosophies. More specifically, a researcher adopting quantitative methods follows a positivist philosophy, assuming that there are facts that are objectively real, not connected to the beliefs and experiences of individuals (Taylor & Bogdan, 1984). As such, the main purpose for quantitative research is to define the causes behind changes in social facts, mainly through the adoptions of objective measurements and quantitative analysis (Taylor & Bogdan, 1984). To fulfil its purpose, quantitative research involves the use of correlational or experimental designs to reduce bias, errors and other factors that may influence the analysis of social facts (Cronbach, 1975). Quantitative

researchers attempt to find “regularities in human lives by separating the social world into empirical components called variables which can be represented numerically as frequencies or rate, whose associations with each other can be explored by statistical techniques and accessed through researchers’ introducing stimuli and systematic measurement” (Payne & Payne, 2004, p.180). Techniques adopted by quantitative researchers can involve surveys, questionnaires and quantitative observation strategies, such as recording the behavioural patterns of individuals, objects and events in a systematic way, in order to achieve information about the studied phenomenon (Malhotra & Birks, 2003).

Differing from quantitative research, qualitative research tends to follow the interpretivist paradigm (or social constructionism) (Crotty, 1998; Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2003; Deshpande, 1983) believing that reality is defined by individuals through collective definitions in a specific time and context (Taylor & Bogdan, 1984). Qualitative research seeks to understand “how ordinary people observe and describe their lives” (Siverman, 1993, p.170) involving the researcher studying the participants’ perspectives through direct involvement in their life (Taylor & Bogdan, 1984). Examples of qualitative research techniques involve the use of interviews, in-depth interviews, participants observations, focus groups, storytelling and ethnography, techniques capable of reaching the individual’s conscious, subconscious and/or unconscious level, to capture the details of individuals’ behaviours and acquire deep and meaningful knowledge (Malhotra & Birks, 2003). Qualitative research is more concerned with the meaning of specific behaviours of individuals rather than with outlining or explaining specific statistical trends or patterns in such behaviours (Malhotra & Birks, 2003; Payne & Payne, 2004).

A table encompassing the main differences between quantitative and qualitative research is presented below (Table 4.2).

**Table 4.2. Quantitative versus Qualitative Research**

	<b>Quantitative Research</b>	<b>Qualitative Research</b>
<b>Purpose</b>	Deductive: verification and outcome oriented Precise measurement and comparison of variables Establishing relationships between variables Interface from sample to population	Inductive: discovery and process oriented Meaning Context Process Discovering unanticipated events, influences and conditions Inductive development of theory
<b>Research questions</b>	Variance questions Truth of proposition Presence or absence Degree or amount Correlation Hypothesis testing Causality (factual)	Process questions How and Why Meaning Context (holistic) Hypotheses as part of conceptual framework Causality (physical)
<b>Research methods</b>		
<b>Relationship</b>	Objectivity/ reduction of influence (research as an extraneous variable)	Use of influence as a tool for understanding (research as part of process)
<b>Sampling</b>	Probability sampling Establishing valid comparisons	Purposeful sampling
<b>Data collection</b>	Measures tend to be objective Prior development of instruments Standardisation Measurement/testing-quantitative/categorical	Measures tend to be subjective Inductive development of strategies Adapting to particular situation Collection of textual or visual material
<b>Data analysis</b>	Numerical descriptive analysis (statistics, correlation) Estimation of population variables Statistical hypothesis testing Conversion of textual data into numbers or categories	Textual analysis (memos, coding, connecting) Grounded theory Narrative approaches
<b>Reliability/Validity</b>	Reliable Technology as instrument (the evaluator is removed from the data)	Valid Self as instrument (the evaluator is close to the data)
<b>Generalisability</b>	Generalisable The outsider's perspective Population oriented	Ungeneralisable The insider's perspective Case oriented

**Source:** Maxwell and Loomis (2003) and Steckler, McLeroy, Goodman, Bird and McCormick (1992)

Further differences between quantitative and qualitative research involve the way in which the information gathered is studied and analysed (Malhotra & Birks, 2003). Quantitative research follows the philosophical belief that social processes are something external to individuals' comprehension whilst qualitative research identifies the individual as active part of the social processes (Corbetta, 2003). Quantitative research aims to test hypotheses and generalize the result to large numbers of individuals, while qualitative research is interested on understanding the specific social interaction, focusing on the specific context generated by

the actors involved (Corbetta, 2003).

The main differences between the two types of research result in respective strengths and weaknesses that need to be addressed. A problem of quantitative research could be the fact that research tend to be inappropriate for exploring deep factors such as experiences, feelings, beliefs, attitudes and behaviours participants (Malhotra & Birks, 2003). Additionally, due to the nature of the quantitative approach and the underpinning assumptions of positivism, quantitative research is likely to fail in addressing the subjective dimension of behaviour, being mostly capable of drawing collective generalisations (Marsh, 1982). However, it is important to notice that if limitations of quantitative research coincide with the strengths of qualitative research, the same can be said for the qualitative research limitations and quantitative research's strengths. In fact, when reflecting on qualitative research, since the methods adopted are neither statistical nor numerical, but rely heavily on personal experience and subjective perspective, this type of research tend to be addressed as incapable of providing findings objectively recognizable as valid (Malhotra & Birks, 2003). Furthermore, due to its focus on quality of information rather than quantity, qualitative approaches tend to focus on few sources analysed in depth; such limited number of sources results inevitably in difficulties in defining a representative sample (Malhotra & Birks, 2003). Quantitative methods, instead, tend to focus on many participants with acquisition of superficial information, sacrificing the richness of information in exchange of a higher number of participants (Malhotra & Birks, 2003). It could be argued that one method could be more suitable than the other according to the objectives that the research aims to fulfil. In fact, those researchers who decide to use a qualitative approach are deeply interested in understanding individuals' perception and opinions about the world, looking for insights and cues instead of statistical information (Bell, 2005). Since the current research wishes to explore in-depth the perception of universities' managers and academic staff towards the concept of internal branding in HE, qualitative methods appear ideal to fulfil the research objectives. In fact, the scope is not to prove or fail a specific statement but to explore a topic with limited theory, aiming to collect opinions, ideas and information rather than data, numbers and percentages. Such approach would allow the researcher to acquire information, get a deep understanding of the studied context and proceed to theory-building. However, in order to achieve the objectives of the research, a

strategy addressing all the different steps in a logical and coherent way is required. Such strategy can be regarded as the research design, an essential step to systematically plan the research process in each of its components. The next section introduces the research design for the current study, clarifying the different steps that have been adopted to fulfil the research objectives.

### **4.3. Research design**

In Kerlinger and Pedhazur (1973, p.300) research design is defined as: *“the plan, structure, strategy [used] to obtain answers to research questions. [...] The plan is the overall scheme of program of the research. It includes an outline of what the investigator will do [...]. The structure of the research is [...] the outline, the scheme, the paradigm, of the operation of the variables. Strategy [...] includes the methods to be used to gather and analyse the data. [It] implies how the research objectives will be reached and how the problems encountered in the research will be tackled”.*

The current section will address the research design, introducing the context analysed and the tools and approaches used to carry out the investigation.

#### **4.3.1. Research Context**

As previously introduced, a qualitative researcher holding interpretivist assumptions believes that the time and the context are strictly related and influence the topic investigated. The current study aims to explore the concept of internal branding in the specific context of HE. Such application of internal branding can be recognised as a useful measure to support and enhance the overall branding efforts of HE Institutions. This appears particularly relevant since in the recent years there has been a growing interest in developing reputation among the UK HE Institutions (Yu *et al.*, 2018), outlining a specific time of interest for the current research. However, further than time, it is important to clarify the focus of this study. Rather than focusing on the institution as a whole, the current research investigates the business schools of UK universities. The decision of focusing on business schools can be linked to two main reasons: 1) the need of focusing on a narrow research setting, in order to ensure consistency with the research objectives and 2) the necessity of approaching contexts where branding and,

ideally, internal branding programmes are implemented and a minimum degree of understanding about the topic exist. Specifically, on this second point, business schools appear to be more advanced in terms of corporate branding implementation and activities, when compared to other HE schools and departments (Melewar & Akel, 2005; Istileulova, 2010). Furthermore, research suggests that business schools present higher levels of recognition of corporate branding importance, as well as acknowledgement of employees' role in the brand building process (Istileulova, 2010).

The next section narrows the research area to the specific analysed context, providing a background of the HE context the United Kingdom, which represent the research setting for the current research, explaining the reasons for such choice.

#### **4.3.1.1. HE in the United Kingdom**

Some months after the lunch of the first academic ranking, Academic Ranking of World Universities (ARWU), in an important meeting was discussed the fact that only 10 European universities were recognised among the top 50 in the world and was highlighted the necessity of reforming Europe's education systems (Robertson, 2012). This event backed up by the increasing competition among Universities led to changes in many countries.

“UK HE has been subject to a gradual process of marketization since the early 1980s” (Brown, 2015, p. 5). A massive change followed the lunch of the Academic Ranking of World Universities, when the UK government requested an improvement in reputation. University tuition was at that time free, but Universities started introducing fees that slowly rose during the years, justifying them as necessary to increase quality as well as achieve uniqueness and distinctiveness (Alley and Smith, 2004). Foskett (2011) explains that UK universities have been pushed by the government to adapt market-focused approaches, with marketing becoming a key solution to face the increasing competitiveness.

A study by Smith *et al.* (1995) showed that in the early 1990s UK universities were already getting involved in marketing activities, even though most of them did not have an organised approach being not familiar with the term and related activities. Today's situation is very different, with most universities being familiar with the concept of marketing and including organised marketing activities in their strategies (Chapleo, 2015; Clark, Chapleo and Soumi,

2019). In the current UK university context, “institutional rankings and other aids to consumer choice are proliferating whilst universities and colleges devote increasing resources and energy to marketing and branding” (Brown, 2011, p. 11). The current section attempted to provide information about the context of UK HE, addressing the changes that have influenced it in the recent years. However, the current research takes place in the even more specific context of UK business schools, which, although sharing broadly strategies and challenges of universities, present some particularities which required a more detailed focus.

Consequently, the next section discussed more in-depth the specific setting of UK business schools, highlighting its importance for the current research.

#### **4.4. The context of Business Schools**

The decision of focusing this research on business schools can be linked to five main reasons: 1) Business Schools are increasingly resorting to branding, seeing it as a way to define their identity and achieve a competitive advantage (Balmer and Liao, 2007); 2) the fact that business school tend to be autonomous semi-independent entities from their institution, often with their own separate brand (Gopalan, Stitts, and Herring, 2006); 3) the fact that business schools play a huge part in the finance of their universities (Times HE, 2013); 4) the need of focusing on a narrow research setting, in order to ensure consistency with the research objectives (Conant, Mokwa and Varadarajan, 1990) and 5) the necessity of approaching contexts where branding and, ideally, internal branding programmes are implemented and there is a minimum of understanding about the topic (Istieulova, 2010). Specifically, on the fifth point, business schools appear to be more advanced in terms of corporate branding implementation and activities, when compared to other HE schools and departments (Melewar & Akel, 2005; Istieulova, 2010). Furthermore, research suggests that business schools present higher levels of recognition of corporate branding importance, as well as acknowledgement of employees’ role in the brand building process (Istieulova, 2010).

To emphasize the fact that business schools could be considered independent entities, especially from a corporate brand perspective, more information is provided in the next section.

#### **4.4.1. The history and purpose of business schools**

Although the first business school establishment in the United Kingdom can be traced in 1901 with the University of Birmingham, the business schools' advent can be reconnected to the years of the World War II (Balmer and Wang, 2016a). In the immediate World War II era, universities' business education experienced an exponential growth in Great Britain, signing the beginning for a trend which ended up in the establishment of business-focused entities that shaped the current HE institutions (Balmer and Wang, 2016a). The result was the creation of the oldest business schools, together with Birmingham, in London, Manchester and Bradford (Balmer and Wang, 2016a). Since then, most universities established their own business schools, and these evolved along with their institutions.

The forces that played a key role in driving universities toward the need of corporate branding (Balmer and Gray, 1999) did not spare business schools, which shared with the main institutions some drivers such as: 1) increased competition in the public and non-profit environment, with universities and business schools that focused on the creation of distinctive and attractive branded platform; 2) globalization, with business schools getting gradually aware of their competition on global scale and their need to market themselves globally, rather than locally; 3) limited number of high calibre personnel, with leading business schools seeking the best scholars; 4) public expectation for corporate social responsiveness, with business schools becoming aware that society favours these corporate brand that show social responsiveness and commitment (Balmer and Wang, 2016a). Since the establishment of the first Business schools, the ones who considered the influences of these forces and managed to deal with them, experienced larger success and growth (Balmer and Wang, 2016a). Furthermore, Business schools that have been successful can be identified in those who behaved in an international perspective and considered the importance of high calibre research and teaching, attempting to establish a strong reputation in the market (Balmer, Liao, and Wang 2010). Such reputation may have been established through a marketing-oriented approach, with schools considering the needs of the different stakeholders achieved high scores in business school accreditation bodies and league tables (Balmer, Liao, and Wang 2010).

The brief background provided above helps clarifying the necessity of considering business schools as entities with their own history and, consequently, their own evolution. Similarly, the



nature and the objectives of business schools' brands, which often but not necessarily play a role in HEIs' branding strategies (Gopalan, Stitts, and Herring, 2006), should be separately considered and analysed in order to gain a deep understanding of the context of the current research. Such information is provided in the next section.

#### **4.4.2. Identifying the gap**

The essential role of business schools should be to promote and promulgate good practice in terms of organizational management (Balmer and Wang, 2016b). Such role can be achieved in many ways, but the focus that most of the business schools tend to share is on their outputs in terms of the "quality, saliency and practicability of their research and teaching" (Balmer and Wang, 2016b, p11).

However, limiting the purposes of business schools to research, teaching and leadership development could be considered as oversimplifying business schools' roles, influence and obligations. In fact, business schools' needs are not limited to preach management theories and practices but also require the schools to be the first ones embracing what they preach, requiring them to be "exemplars of 'best practice' in terms of input of the management of their organisations, and, of course, their corporate brands. Nonetheless, sometimes business schools experience difficulties in implementing successful internal branding. For instance, Pitt, Berthon, Spyropoulo, and Page (2006) asked directors and senior administrators to rate their own business school, concluding that the majority of the participant did not perceive their organisation as managing effectively their brand, suggesting that even though Business Schools teach brand management, the effective management of some own brand is done poorly. This non-alignment between external delivery and internal implementation, offers clues for further research as well as opportunities for the current study.

Existing research addressing corporate brand building and corporate brand management in business schools is limited and have disparate focuses (eg. Balmer and Wang, 2016a; Balmer and Liao, 2007; Roper and Davies 2007; Gopalan, Stitts and Herring 2006; Opoku, Abratt and Pitt 2006). Balmer and Wang, (2016a) focuses on senior management cognitions of corporate brand building in leading British schools. The results show that senior managers within top British business schools fully appreciate their custodianship role in managing and maintaining

the corporate brand and that they recognise the importance of satisfying both internal and external stakeholder groups' interests. Furthermore, senior managers' opinions indicate that corporate brand building and management in business schools is broad in scope and multidisciplinary in character. Balmer and Liao (2007) investigated social identity theory and student corporate brand identification within a leading business school. The authors found out that students were conscious of the reputation and prestige of their business school and that the corporate ethos and the identity traits of the school were found to be of material importance for them. It is very interesting to note that "whereas students studying in the UK had a strong and positive affinity with the business school brand (and a lower affinity to the university brand) undergraduates studying at the overseas partner institute only associate with the University brand" (Balmer and Liao, 2007, p. 365) showing that in the specific context of the UK, chosen for the current study, business schools brands acquire even more significance.

Roper and Davies (2007) explored internal stakeholders' perceptions of Manchester Business School, from the perspectives of employers, students and staff. The study found out that those three groups have different perspectives and different indicators of satisfaction, suggesting that internal communications should be adapted according to the targets and that every general corporate communication should address the different stakeholder groups in a tailored way. This specific aspect redirects to the need of adopting internal branding to have internal stakeholders develop a positive opinion towards the corporate brand. Gopalan, Stitts, and Herring (2006) explored business schools and MBA branding strategies, finding out that top ranked business schools' brands are often branded separately from the university they are affiliated to. Opoku, Abratt, and Pitt (2006) investigated South African business schools corporate brand personality, noting that many brand dimensions used in their MBA programs corresponded to the ones used for consumer products. Also, the use of websites was identified as a powerful branding tool to communicate the Business School's brand personality to achieve positioning objectives with both national and international students.

Even though these studies prove an interest in choosing business schools, none of the aforementioned studies explored the perceptions of management and staff regarding the implementation of internal branding in UK's business schools and the possible difficulties in doing so. Such point outlines a narrow research area that this research aims to help filling. The

next section will not present the techniques adopted to explore the context, as well as their limitations.

## **4.5. Interviews**

Considering the exploratory nature of the current study, the study adopted interviews as a means of data collection. Interviews are techniques used by researchers to acquire information through an interactive conversation with the participant. This type of technique seeks to gather data through interaction with participant, listening of its opinion and belief, and consequent evaluation of the information acquired (Mason, 1996). However, just as any other approach, interviews present some benefits as well as some weaknesses, requiring the researcher to reflect on the effective benefits of adopting such techniques.

In terms of strengths, interviews allow the researcher to explore a topic by asking many questions, which allow the acquisition of deep knowledge and rich data. This allows the possibility of capturing the complexity and depth of responses concerning the analysed project, with researchers capable of getting insights from the participants' conscious reason (Burns and Bush, 2006). Furthermore, the number of interviews is often flexible, and the number of interviewees can be changed along the research to achieve saturation (Edwards and Holland, 2013), meaning that further interviews would not provide any additional information. Moreover, researchers have the possibility of repeating interviews in case of problems, as long as the sample units and elements are respected and the criteria to ensure trustworthiness are respected (Guba and Lincoln, 1981). A decision of interviewing twice the same subject may be taken to repair to the first interview, in case of issues, or to progress with the acquisition of knowledge, in case the first one opened path worth exploring. In qualitative research, interviews provide the materials that will be shaped into findings, providing information required to build theory and reconnect the people involved to the specific situation of the research (Edwards and Holland, 2013). Limitations of interviews can be associated to the fact that the interviewer plays a key role in the acquisition of knowledge. In fact, in case the researcher has no clear understanding of the topic or difficulties in interacting with the participant, the outcome of the process could be drastically affecting, failing in acquiring reliable and accurate data. The role of the researcher is essential also because interviewees are

not provided with answers to select, but are required to talk openly and freely, granting to the interviewer the role of the facilitator of the process. Furthermore, interviews tend to be time consuming and expensive, especially when requiring face-to-face interactions, with long processes of data collection, transcription, analysis and interpretation.

When discussing interviews, there are commonly four types that can be adopted, each type with its own suitability according to the specific research. The four types discussed are: structured interviews; semi-structured interviews; open-ended interviews; focus groups. The four types are presented in table 4.3 below and discussed thereafter.

**Table 4.3. Types of interviews and relevant skills required**

<b>Interview type</b>	<b>Skills required</b>
<b>Structured interview</b>	Neutrality; no prompting; no improvisation; training to ensure consistency
<b>Semi-structured interview</b>	Some probing; rapport with interviewee; understanding the aims of the project
<b>Open-ended interview</b>	Flexibility; rapport with interviewee; active listening
<b>Focus group</b>	Facilitation skills; flexibility; ability to stand back from the discussion so that group dynamics can emerge

**Source: adapted from Noaks and Wincup (2004, p.80)**

### *Structured interviews*

Structured interviews are the ones with highest control over the process of collecting information from the interviewees. Such control is consequence of a pre-structured and planned interview, where the questions to be asked are clearly defined before the interview takes place (Alsaawi, 2014). This type of interview allows the interview process to be extremely focused on the topic, avoiding the risk of moving away from it, and facilitating comparisons across the results due to the common structure (Bryman, 2008). However, this type of interview also presents some limitations. For example, the tight structure results in lack of flexibility and reduced capacity to elaborate on specific areas of the conversation, making this type of interview non-ideal for in-depth studies (Alsaawi, 2014). The literature suggest that this type

of interview may be suitable for researchers who are seeking pre-defined information (Dörnyei, 2007), arguably making it non-ideal for exploratory study.

### ***Open-ended (or unstructured) interviews***

Open-ended or unstructured interviews can be regarded as the counterpart of structured interview, since the main focus is their lack of pre-organised structure and, consequently, increased flexibility (Alsaawi, 2014). This type of interview can involve open questions where the interviewee can freely choose the amount and the depth of information to answer (Bryman, 2008). Due to the notable amount of freedom for the interviewees, and the multiple directions the interviews can take, this method appears useful for studies who want to focus on one specific topic and explore it in depth (Alsaawi, 2014). However, may not be ideal for studies that are exploring pre-defined dimensions, since the high level of uncertainty on the directions may result in failure to address such dimensions.

### ***Semi-structured interviews***

Among the type of interviews, semi-structured interviews are perhaps the most common (Alsaawi, 2014). The reason for it may be that this specific type of interview positions itself halfway between structured and unstructured interviews (Noaks and Wincap, 2004). In fact, semi-structured interviews share with structured interviews the process of pre-organising the questions, but, similarly to unstructured interview, the interviewees have the chance to expand and discuss in-depth topics of interest (Alsaawi, 2014). This type of interviews is particularly suitable to studies where there are some initial directions or predefined dimensions and the researcher wants to explore such dimensions in-depth, allowing the interviewees to fully share their views. This method may be preferable to structured interviews, since the structured constrains may limit the richness and depths of the interviewees' views (Bryman, 2008). Due to the nature of the open-ended questions, it would be useful to pilot the questions in advance (Dörnyei, 2007).

### ***Focus group interviews***

The last type of interview concerns groups of participants and is defined as focus group interviews. As the name suggest, the focus is on interviewing a group of participants at the same time, and in these interviews, questions can be structured, unstructured or semi-structured

(Alsaawi, 2014). The particularity of this type of interviews is the opportunity for brainstorming across the group of participants, allowing debates and potential in-depth conversations (Dörnyei, 2007). However, due to the shared conversation, confidentiality is normally an issue in this kind of interviews, making them not ideal to collect sensitive information.

This type of interview originated in market research in the early 1990s (Robson, 2011). Dörnyei (2007) argues that the role of the interviewer and the format of this type are different from the above types. However, with regard to this argument, the main characteristics are similar to the above types. It can be structured, semi-structured or unstructured. This type involves a brainstorming focus group of usually six to twelve interviewees (Dörnyei, 2007:144). It can generate “high quality data” which is fruitful for the interviewer. Interviewees can challenge, argue and debate with each other, and this technique usually leads to the emergence of in-depth and rich data. Carey (1994) states that focus groups are the best approach for sensitive topics. It is an enjoyable experience for the interviewees, and applicable for illiterate people (Robson, 2011). However, this type of interview needs to be set up in advance. Moreover, it is difficult to transcribe, especially when overlapping occurs (Dörnyei, 2007). The number of questions tends to be fewer than those in the other types of interview. Also, confidentiality is an issue with this approach (Robson, 2011). In fact, Bloor *et al.* (2001) note that “when it comes to documenting behaviour, focus groups are less suitable than individual interviews: there is an understandable tendency for atypical behaviours to be unreported or under-reported in group settings” (p.8). Consequently, adopting focus groups may result in participants sharing a biased or incomplete version of the discussed events.

Having reviewed the different types of interviews available, in order to explore in-depth the different dimensions of internal branding in the UK HE setting, semi-structured interviews appear the most suitable type. Unstructured interviews could have been useful due to their suitability for explorative studies, but the lack of specific directions could have resulted in failure in addressing the dimensions of interest for this study. Structured interviews could have successfully framed the dimension into targeted questions, but at the same time would have sacrificed the depth of information necessary for this research. Focus groups could have been useful to discuss broadly the topic of interest, although the lack of confidentiality could have

resulted in biased and/or incomplete data. Consequently, with their suitability for exploratory studies and possibility for the interviewer to address the dimensions of interest, semi-structured interviews appear the most adequate for the current study.

The topic of semi-structured interviews is further discussed in the following section.

#### **4.5.1. Semi-structured interviews**

The previous section addressed the techniques that can be used in qualitative research, identifying in semi-structured interviews the technique chosen for the current research.

Semi-structured interviews are useful tools to collect qualitative data as confirmed by Yin (2003) who believes that interviews can help finding insights in complex and non-standard situations. Semi-structured interviews give the possibility of obtaining qualitative information in a way that allows the interviewer to set up and organise the structure according to his main concerns and interest points, whilst giving the opportunity to the interviewees of expressing their views and talk freely, even moving away from the main question and touching others interest points (Woods, 2006). The semi-structured interview power lies in its nature of interactive self-developing technique where the interviewer has a sort of guideline questions to ask but can vary them according to the interviewee answers in order to develop a two-ways dialogue more than an alternate one-way communication (Montesperelli, 1998). This kind of approach develops in-depth discussions where different individual aspects and opinions emerge while following a common path (Woods, 2006).

As a way to gather data in accordance with the interpretivist paradigm, semi-structured interviews recognise an important role to the interaction between the researchers and the subject studied. Consequently, the next section introduces the studied subjects, clarifying the sampling choices and the selection of participants for the study.

### **4.6. Sampling**

Sampling is one of the key processes in research, considering that the effectiveness of a research is direct consequence of an adequate choice of participants in such research. One of the key requirements to carry out effective research is the selection of the sample of

people who will be participating in the study (Malhotra and Birks, 2003). The identification of such target population is carried out through the selection of ‘elements’ and ‘sampling units’ (Malhotra and Birks, 2003, p.358), where the units contain the elements that can be chosen in the sampling activity. For the current research, the HEIs’ business schools in the United Kingdom represent the sampling unit, while management and academic staffs represent the elements. It should be also identified a sampling frame, which relates to the total amount of sampling elements, in order to understand if the sample chosen reflects the nature of the frame and is therefore able to represent it.

When considering sampling, the options available tend to be grouped in two main categories: 1) probability sampling and 2) non-probability sampling (Churchill, 1996). Probability samplings tend to be preferred and seen as a better choice in survey studies because “the resulting sample is likely to provide a representative cross-section of the whole” (Denscombe, 2002, p.12). Churchill (1996, p.479) suggest that when adopting a probability sampling method “each member of the population has a known, nonzero chance of being included in the sample. The chance of each member of the population to be included in the sample may not be equal, but everyone has a probability of inclusion”. Contrarily, Churchill (1996, p.479) adds that, when adopting a non-probability sampling method, “there is no way of estimating the probability that any population element will be included in the sample”. Even though a probability sampling method may be preferred, due to its higher degree of representativeness, sometimes it may not be possible, due to the limitations and strict requirements or the nature of the investigation. In such cases, adopting a non-probability sampling technique is considered a valid alternative, even though this method presents its own limitation, such as a relative limited possibility of generalising the statistical results (Baker, 2002; Denscombe, 2002). Some example of non-probability sample methods can be identified in convenience samples, quota samples and judgement samples (Churchill, 1996).

Sampling in qualitative research is often carried out selecting the participants considered relevant to the research theory, in order to allow the researcher to gather information relevant to the explored topic and, successively, to use such data to proceed to theory building (Edwards and Holland, 2013). Therefore, a research could start with a sample that could change along the study, due to the emerging information. (Edwards and Holland, 2013). Such idea reflects



the researcher's epistemological interpretivist view that knowledge is acquired along the process, with the idea that the number of participants should be concerned with the acquisition of relevant perspectives rather than statistical representativeness.

The sampling adopted for the current research involved the use of judgement sampling, one of the non-probability sampling techniques which takes in account the judgement of the researcher in selecting participants capable of representing the population of interest and adequate for the research (Churchill, 1996). Judgement sample is used when seeking valid point of views on research questions, rather than cross-sections of opinions (Churchill, 1996).

The study explored the perception of management and academic staff towards internal branding in universities. To explore such topic, the selection included management members and academic staff from UK universities' business schools. To achieve an adequate sample, this research adopted a judgement sample, or purposeful sample, meaning that the sample presented some level of randomness, in terms of selection of participants, but there were a minimum set of criteria that the participants had to meet. The sampling unit, the business schools selected, were required to have some level of branding involvement, in order to acquire information relevant to the research questions exploring the related dimensions of internal branding. The sampling elements, management and academic staff, were selected according to the duties of the participants. The sample included by managers without academic duties and academic staff without managerial involvement, in order to divide clearly the two categories analysed and avoid mixed perspectives, to ensure *trustworthiness* by respecting the criteria of *transferability*, allowing the study to be 'transferred' and adapted to other specific settings and contexts (Guba and Lincoln, 1981).

The number of interviews were selected aiming for saturation. Saturation is achieved when all the available information has been collected and further interviews would not tell anything new to the researcher (Edwards and Holland, 2013). Guest, Bunch and Johnson (2006) suggest that saturation is achieved with 12 interviews. However, there is no standard number of interviews to acquire saturation and it may change according to the characteristics of the study, the researcher and the data.

The current research aimed to achieve saturation, selecting the number of interviews along the process according to the information gathered. For the purpose of the research, 12 interviews per sample element group were selected, in line with the suggestion from Guest *et al.* (2006).

The sample involved 6 universities and included a total of 24 participants. The universities were chosen according to their ranking in 2017: 2 were chosen from the 1-43 range, 2 from the 44-87 range and, finally, the last 2 from the 87-129 range. The decision of such division is based on the desire of exploring different settings where universities are competing to improve, reinforce, and/or maintain their ranking. The reason for having 2 universities instead of 1 for each range is related to the interest in exploring in-depth the different ranges, in order to theory-build and offer insights for future studies. For each university, 2 management members and 2 academic staff members will be interviewed, in order to achieve a total of 12 interviews for each group, and respect Guest *et al.* (2006) saturation's target.

Even though the inductive approach of this research does not build on hypothesis but is open to exploration, a minimum degree of expectation is required for the judgement sample which, in this case, consisted in the expectation that participants will be able to provide perspectives and opinions on the topic of this research, fulfilling the research objectives. Consequently, when emailing the potential participants to request their participation, the researcher asked if they believed their school had undertaken/was undertaking/planning any marketing and/or branding effort and whether the participant would have been willing to discuss it. As previously mentioned, business schools' staff tend to present major understanding and applications of branding practices compared to other schools (Melewar & Akel, 2005; Istileulova, 2010), due to the taught discipline closely related to the topic of this study. Such familiarity with the marketing topics aided the process since all the participants were able to indicate whether their school had been involved in marketing and/or branding activities, consequently fulfilling the minimum criteria to take part in the study.

In order to clarify the sample who took part in the study, a table including both institutions and relevant stakeholders (academics and managers) has been provided below (table 4.4) along with the codes assigned to the participants during the analysis to ensure anonymity of the data. The 'data analysis codes' indicated in the table are consistent with those adopted in Chapter 5,

in order to provide a direct link between the two chapters and provide clarifications about the participants data analysed in the following chapter.

**Table 4.4. Sample table, including organisation, participant roles and data analysis code.**

Organisation	Data Analysis Code	Role	Organisation	Data Analysis Code	Role
University A = Rank 1-43	A7	Ac Staff	University B = Rank 1-43	A10	Ac Staff
University A = Rank 1-43	A8	Ac Staff	University B = Rank 1-43	A9	Ac Staff
University A = Rank 1-43	M5	Manager	University B = Rank 1-43	M7	Manager
University A = Rank 1-43	M6	Manager	University B = Rank 1-43	M8	Manager
University C = Rank 44-87	A1	Ac Staff	University D = Rank 44-87	A11	Ac Staff
University C = Rank 44-87	A2	Ac Staff	University D = Rank 44-87	A12	Ac Staff
University C = Rank 44-87	M11	Manager	University D = Rank 44-87	M3	Manager
University C = Rank 44-87	M12	Manager	University D = Rank 44-87	M4	Manager
University E = Rank 88-129	A5	Ac Staff	University F = Rank 88-129	A3	Ac Staff
University E = Rank 88-129	A6	Ac Staff	University F = Rank 88-129	A4	Ac Staff
University E = Rank 88-129	M1	Manager	University F = Rank 88-129	M10	Manager
University E = Rank 88-129	M2	Manager	University F = Rank 88-129	M9	Manager

**Source: Created by the author according to the research sample.**

#### 4.6.1. Pilot study

Pilot studies allow researchers to test the data collection approach and, upon testing the effectiveness, decide whether changes are required for the final study (Yin, 2015). Interview questions were piloted before the data collection process occurred. At the beginning of the data collection, two pilot studies were performed in total, one with an academic member of staff, and the other with a manager, within one of the institutions studied. The goal of the pilot studies was to understand how well the questions would be understood by the respondents and to assess if there were conflicting questions that would possibly need to be rephrased or omitted. In the final samples, the interviewees who took part in the pilot studies were not included. Further to help assessing the potential understanding of the questions, piloting helped the investigator to identify important and relevant areas for the concepts studied. This resulted in minor amendments in the terminology adopted aimed at enhancing the neutrality of the researcher and reducing the risk of biasing and influencing the participants.

The pilot study also provided the researcher with useful experience in the related administrative procedures, such as contacting the respondents, explaining the study's intent and allocating the adequate time for each process (Oppenheim, 2000). Furthermore, it allowed the investigator to uncover the ways of thinking of the participants towards interview questions, ultimately allowing the researcher to evaluate the adequacy of the tools adopted for the data collection (Yin, 2015). Following the pilot interviews, the subjects who took part in the process were asked to share their feedback towards the interview experience and provide some comments regarding structure, contents and length of the interview. The information acquired allowed the research to approach the final study in a prepared and informed way.

## **4.7. The interview process**

This section addresses the interview process, discussing the role of the researchers and the different steps of data collection, transcription and analysis in detail.

### **4.7.1. The interview process: the researcher**

In a qualitative study based on semi-structured interviews, researchers play a key role, being just as important as the participants involved in the research. Researchers should be sensitive, capable of interpreting deeper meaning underlying words and intuitive, capable of perceiving the direction of the interview in order to follow and grasp the quality in the information acquired (Madge, 1962) Furthermore, a qualitative researcher should possess sociological imagination, in order to be able to switch between different perspectives without limitations, and flexible and open, being prepared to find the unknown rather than seeking expected results (Madge, 1962). In fact, in line with such views, Madge (1962) explains that “flexibility, alertness for the unexpected observation, and the exploration of unforeseen opportunities are the signs of a good researcher and not merely of an erratic one (p. 225). Researchers should reflect on their own role, on the adopted choices and the options discarded, on the process and development of the research, on the unexpected events (Montesperelli, 1998).

Semi-structured interviews recognise to researchers an important role in the practical interaction of the interviews. In fact, the interviewer should carry soft skills that allow a

maieutic interaction, capable of bringing the participant to reflect on the topic and, eventually, help him/her in the rediscovery of the own latent knowledge (Addeo and Montesperelli, 2007). As the name suggest, in semi-structured interviews the interviewer does not have a clearly structured questionnaire, but rather a generic guide which he/she will not apply rigidly but rather change according to the flow of the discussion (Addeo and Montesperelli, 2007). Therefore, the researcher should be capable of asking questions capable of facilitating the exchange of opinions. Ideally, the interviewer should adapt to the interviewee, adjusting to his/her verbal and non-verbal language, as well as taking in consideration his/her own perspective on things (Addeo and Montesperelli, 2007), highlighting once again the importance of subjectivity for the qualitative school. Furthermore, when conducting interviews, the researcher should also reflect on the social and geographical environment where the interview happens, as well as the ‘unofficial’ comments, preceding and following the effective interview (Montesperelli, 1998), as these factors would constitute the frame, essential to better understand the overall picture. Finally, an interviewer should actively *listen* the interviewee, rather than *hear* him/her, as listening is a psychological act that implies the interviewer to effectively comprehend what the interviewee says, reflecting on his/her messages and requesting explications about the messages communicated (Lombardi Satriani, 1987).

#### **4.7.2. The interview process: data collection**

The first contact with the interviewee is considered an important step for the interviewer, with researchers managing their image in order to appear approachable and promote a positive interaction (Montesperelli, 1998). Likewise, it is important for the researcher to outline the drivers for the research, explaining to the participant the reason behind its choice in a clear and easily understandable way, offering availability in clarifying doubts and answering questions (Montesperelli, 1998). For the current research, the researcher ensured an open and friendly attitude, to create a comfortable environment, and explained clearly the aims of the research and the importance of the participant in the investigation.

The interviews started with a general question, capable of putting at ease the interviewee, and drew from the response the specific directions to follow and the most adequate phrasing to use in the following questions (Montesperelli, 1998). Every single word of the participants was

considered potentially meaningful for the study, and therefore the researcher paid full attention while facilitating the flow of the communication, rather than interrupting it by suddenly change topic (Montesperelli, 1998); the interviews were shaped as comfortable discussions, following the idea that the ideal interview should resemble an ordinary conversation, nevertheless without resulting in a too superficial chat (Montesperelli, 1998). The interview also included pauses, which allowed the participants to take time to think before answering, reducing the risk of rushed answers. The importance of pauses is outlined by the fact that hurrying the discussion may put pressure on the participant and create anxiety, resulting in the risk of distorted information (Marradi, 1987). Furthermore, silences can hide deep meaning, and therefore the interpretive process of the researcher was not limited to the words spoken, but also extended those hidden in pauses and silences (Marradi, 1987). The researcher carried out the interviews in a context close to the interviewees that they were familiar with, in order to make them comfortable, and ensuring privacy, in order to facilitate communications and avoid the participants to hold back in sharing their opinions due to the fear of being seen/heard by other individuals (Edwards and Holland, 2013).

Interviews have been considered as long processes, starting from the preparation until the end of the official discussion. The researcher considered that what may appear easy for the interviewer may be complicated and stressful for the interviewee. Consequently, participants' physical and mental status were taken in consideration, in order to ensure the interviewees' wellbeing and be ready to suspend the interview in case of signs of tiredness (Marradi, 1987).

An interview guide prepared for the interview has been provided in Appendix 4.

### **4.7.3. The interview process: data transcription**

The researcher transcribed the verbal communications with the interviewee, being the one involved in the interaction and, therefore, the one mostly aware of the context where the interview took place and the non-verbal messages of the interviewee (Marradi, 1987). The transcription could not happen at the same time of the interview, and therefore the exchanges of messages were recorded and then transcribed at a different time (Montesperelli, 1998). Recording is usually seen as a standard procedure, but there may still be issues in case of participant refusing to be recorded. In such cases, recording without a consensus would be

unethical, due to the violation of the ethical procedures against the will of the participant, and counterproductive, due to the impossibility of using such information obtained without permission (Addeo and Montesperelli, 2007). The researched requested permission to record and adopted a *verbatim* transcription, meaning that the interview was reported word-by-word, including all the details and the particularities; such type of transcription appeared since every single word of the participants could have been relevant for the research, as well as because a detailed transcription would allow the opportunity of a deeper formal-linguistic analysis (Montesperelli, 1998).

The current research's interviews were conducted according to the guidelines provided in the previous sections. The researcher considered the importance of the interviewer in the process, as facilitator and first point of contact with the interviewee. The interviewees' characteristics were considered, and the interviewer ensured a clear communication aligned to the language and preference of the interviewee. The geographical and social context were taken in account when deciding the location where the interviews would take place, in order to provide the participants with a suitable location capable of putting them at ease. The interviews were recorded, prior agreement with the interviewees, who were asked to sign a consent form (Appendix 1) after reading an information sheet containing all the information (Appendix 2). Once recorded, the interviews were verbatim transcribed, in order to ensure detailed information and provide the data necessary for the analysis.

The next section introduces the techniques that were used in the analysis.

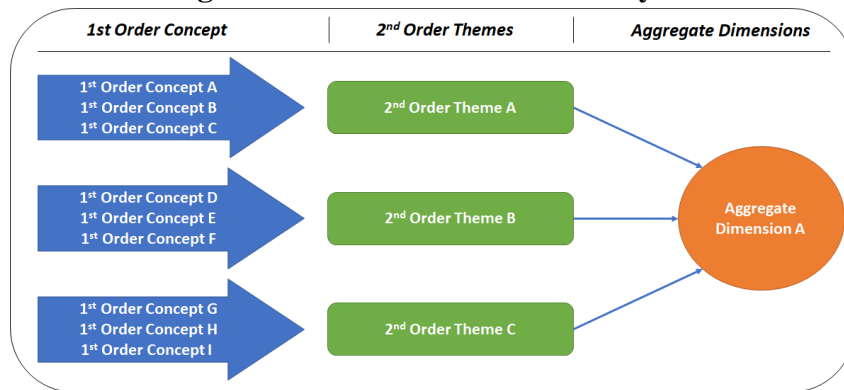
#### **4.7.4. The interview process: data analysis**

The data analysis for the current research has been carried out through the use of thematic analysis. Thematic analysis is widely used in qualitative research, recognised as one of the most common form of qualitative analysis (Greg, 2012). This type of analysis focuses on recognising, examining and recording patterns, also defined 'themes', within data collected in research (Braun and Clarke, 2006). These themes can be seen as patterns that are relevant in the description and analysis of a research topic and are usually matched against research questions (Daly, Kellehear, and Gliksman, 1997). These patterns, identified as themes, shape the categories that the data will be grouped into in the analysis stage (Fereday and Muir-

Cochrane, 2006). The thematic analysis usually follows six steps to identify and create relevant pattern in the research: familiarization with data, generating initial codes, searching for themes among codes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and producing the final report (Braun and Clarke, 2006). Nonetheless, several qualitative/interpretive researchers suggest that treating the stages of data collection and analysis as two separate steps, can be seen as artificial and unnatural (Gioia *et al.*, 2012; Langley, 1999; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Locke & Golden-Biddle, 1997). In fact, at the early stages of the research, different terms, codes and categories start appearing (Gioia *et al.* 2012) in a process similar to what Strauss and Corbin (1998) discuss as open coding. At this stage a 1st-order analysis took place, in which the terminology chosen by the interviewees was respected as much as possible and the researcher started grouping the terms into a multitude of concepts/categories (Gioia *et al.* 2012). At this stage, the number of categories tends to be high and can cause the researcher to feel overwhelmed, although Gioia (2004) notes that this stage of uncertainty is important since the feeling of being lost will allow the researcher to find the right path. With the study progressing, such a path started appearing, with the researcher identifying differences and similarities among the many terms (Gioia *et al.* 2012), in a process that resembles Strauss and Corbin's (1998) axial coding. Such process resulted in narrowing down the disparate 1st order categories into more manageable 2nd order themes, each with a label or phrasal descriptor ideally evoking the interviewees' terms. From there, the researcher adopted an all-inclusive approach, comprising both interviewees' terms, 1st order concepts and 2nd order themes, in order to acquire a comprehensive view of the situation (Gioia *et al.* 2012). Then, upon reflection on the relationships across the different elements of 1st and 2nd order levels, the emerging themes have been grouped into aggregate dimensions, allowing the researcher to develop a data structure as shown in figure 4.1. below.



**Figure 4.1. Data structure for analysis.**



**Source:** developed by the author, based on the categories from Gioia *et al.* (2012)

The data structure and the emerged patterns allowed the researcher to organise the results in sections, in order to express how the different dimensions' address the objective of this study. The themes identified have been organised in two tables listing themes and sub-themes emerged from the interviews with managers (Table 4.3) and academics (Table 4.4).

The two tables are provided in the following pages, and the themes are presented and discussed in detail in Chapter 5.

**Table 4.5. List of Managers' themes and sub-themes**

<b>Respondents</b>	<b>Section</b>	<b>Themes</b>	<b>Sub-themes</b>
<b>Managers</b>	<b>Branding and Internal branding</b>	Perception towards branding	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● <b>Internal branding vs external branding</b></li> </ul>
		Brand architecture	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● <b>Overarching brand and sub-brands: University brand vs school Brand</b></li> </ul>
		Perception towards internal branding	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● <b>Top-Down approach vs Collective efforts</b></li> <li>● <b>Perceived internal branding implementation</b></li> </ul>
		Staff involvement in the creation of the brand (Co-creation)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● <b>The bottom-up approach</b></li> <li>● <b>The top-down approach</b></li> <li>● <b>The mixed approach</b></li> </ul>
		Brand values	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● <b>Brand built around the staff or around the university history</b></li> <li>● <b>Gap between aspiration and reality</b></li> </ul>
	<b>Academic Staff Support of the Branding Strategy</b>	Perception towards academic staff understanding of the brand	
		Perception towards academic staff support of the brand	
		Perceived academic staff's consideration of brand values when dealing with students	
		Perceived degree of brand values inclusion into daily operations for staff	
	<b>Internal Branding Training and Development Activities</b>	Types of Internal branding training and development activities and reasons behind their selection	
	<b>Internal Branding Communications</b>	Types of Internal branding Communications and their potential	
	<b>Brand, Leadership and Brand Leadership</b>	Formal Leadership and Brands	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● <b>Leadership support towards internal branding strategy</b></li> <li>● <b>Leadership efforts in facilitating understanding and support of the brand</b></li> </ul>
		The link between brands and leadership – brand leadership	
	<b>Obstacles to Internal Branding</b>	Organization	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● <b>Size</b></li> <li>● <b>Industry</b></li> <li>● <b>Brand Architecture: University vs School brand</b></li> </ul>
		Information	
		Management/Leadership	
		Communications	
		Strategy	
		Staff/Job Role	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● <b>Subjective perception</b></li> <li>● <b>Cynical Behaviour</b></li> <li>● <b>Reluctance towards change</b></li> </ul>
	Education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● <b>Familiarity with marketing and branding topics</b></li> </ul>	

Source: developed by the author, based on the themes identified in the study.

**Table 4.6. List of Academics’ themes and sub-themes**

<b>Respondents</b>	<b>Section</b>	<b>Themes</b>	<b>Sub-themes</b>
<b>Academics</b>	<b>Branding and Internal branding</b>	Interpretation of branding and internal branding	
		The cynical approach: looking beyond	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● <b>Internal branding vs external branding</b></li> </ul>
		Brand architecture in the HE context	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● <b>University brand, School brand and ‘Academics’ brand</b></li> <li>● <b>Contrast between University and School values</b></li> </ul>
		Perception towards creation and internal delivery of the brand	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● <b>Gaps between aspiration and reality</b></li> <li>● <b>The role of accreditation in the branding process</b></li> </ul>
	<b>Academic Staff Support of the Branding Strategy</b>	Perception towards academic staff understanding of the brand	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● <b>The need to walk the talk</b></li> </ul>
		Academic staff’s consideration of brand when dealing with students	
		Academic staff’s inclusion of brand values into daily operations	
	<b>Internal Branding Training and Development Activities</b>	Academic staff’s identification and perception of IB training and development activities	
	<b>Internal Branding Communications</b>	Academic staff’s identification and perception of IB Communications	
	<b>Brand, Leadership and Brand Leadership</b>	Brand and Formal Leadership	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● <b>Managers and Leaders</b></li> <li>● <b>The importance of interactions</b></li> <li>● <b>Freedom and Leadership</b></li> </ul>
		Brand and Informal Leadership	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● <b>Endorsers and Influencers</b></li> </ul>
	<b>Obstacles to Internal Branding</b>	Higher Education Context	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● <b>University Positioning</b></li> <li>● <b>Applied vs Research</b></li> <li>● <b>Present and Future of Higher Education</b></li> <li>● <b>The brand wall</b></li> <li>● <b>Universities and Academics: the focused competition</b></li> </ul>
		Internal Obstacles to Internal Branding	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● <b>Organisation</b></li> <li>● <b>Information</b></li> <li>● <b>Management/Leadership</b></li> <li>● <b>Communications</b></li> <li>● <b>Strategy</b></li> <li>● <b>Staff/Job Role</b></li> <li>● <b>Education</b></li> </ul>

Source: developed by the author, based on the themes identified in the study.

To ensure validity of data and coherency with the objectives of this study, a number of analysis criteria retrieved from the existing internal branding literature have been identified for both management and academic members of staff. A table listing the criteria used for data analysis

is provided in Appendix 5. The concepts of reliability and validity are discussed in the next section.

## **4.8. Reliability and Validity**

As previously introduced, to be considered useful, research need to be conducted with rigor, assuring reliability and validity of the information, requiring therefore the selection of a reliable and valid method (Morse *et al.*, 2002). Differing from quantitative research, which relies strongly on data and statistical information, qualitative research has been experiencing difficulties in proving reliability and validity (Morse *et al.*, 2002). More specifically, the argument of qualitative researchers concerned the fact that the recognition of rigor as consequence of reliability and validity was not applicable to qualitative research, being these concepts prerogative of the quantitative paradigm (Altheide & Johnson, 1998; Leininger, 1994). It was suggested to find new terms and concepts pertinent to the qualitative field, which could ensure rigor in qualitative research (Leininger, 1994; Rubin & Rubin, 1995; Lincoln, 2007). Guba and Lincoln (1981) argued that the concept of trustworthiness would have been more appropriate, constituted by four main aspects: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Even though one of the authors defined the criteria as "primitive" (Guba, 1981, p. 90), and should be considered guidelines rather than rules to follow strictly (Guba & Lincoln, 1982) the criteria have been largely used in qualitative research and contributed to the evaluation of the quality of the qualitative inquiry (Morse *et al.*, 2002). The current research ensured rigor by respecting the four criteria of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability.

### **4.8.1. Respondent Validation**

In order to increase validity of the data, this study adopted in one occasion a technique called 'respondent validation'. Torrance (2012) notes that, among the approaches uses to validate qualitative data collect, respondent validation is an increasingly gaining attention. Respondent validation consists of a process intended to check for accuracy of the data collected, through the re-involvement of the participants who provided the data (Silverman, 2014). Example of the data that can be validated consists of transcripts of interviews and observation of activities,

in a process aimed at checking accuracy and clarifying interpretive claims made (Bloor, 1978; Lincoln, 2007). However, whilst the method is receiving increasing attention, there are some critiques that can be noted. Silverman (2014) observes that respondent validation may be inappropriate in some cases, since studies (eg. Bloor, 1978; Abrams, 1984) have reported some potential limitations for the approach. Bloor (1978) noted that participants may not, or may not want to, recognise themselves or their own opinions in the researcher's report. Abrams (1984) notes that "overt respondent validation is only possible if the results of the analysis are compatible with the self-image of the respondents" (p.4), suggesting once again the need for participants to see themselves in the actual research-made analysis. Nonetheless, Bloor (1983) observes that, regardless of whether the approach can be useful for validation, it is certainly useful to acquire further data which can help clarifying the first collection. The benefits of going back to the data are supported by Reason and Rowan (1981), who criticises those researchers who are afraid of contaminating their data with the participants' experience, encouraging the investigator to gain further knowledge and refine the results.

Due to the controversial nature of respondent validation, a 'light' respondent validation approach was undertaken in specific occasions. The term light refers to the fact that, rather than collecting and transcribing data before going back to the participant to validate it, the actual validation was carried out during the actual interview. The researcher asked the participants to expand on topics discussed to evaluate whether specific statements had been made intentionally or caused by inaccuracies. In one specific occasion, for example, during the interview one of the participants discussed two concepts (here defined as C.A and C.B) and related to them two statements (here defined as S.A and S.B), which the researcher perceived as contrasting with each other (S.A associated to C.A; S.B associated to C.B). Therefore, in order to clarify the doubts arisen, the researcher asked the participant to further discuss the area just mentioned, without providing any comment or adding anything that could influence the answer. When discussing further, the participant repeated the statements to reinforce her point. However, interestingly, this time S.A was associated to C.B whilst S.B was associated to C.A, fitting nicely with the overall argument. Through the adoption of this live form of respondent validation, the researcher was able to reduce the risk of integrating in the analysis data

mistakenly provided, whilst reducing the risk of altering the data by going back to it at a later stage.

## **4.9. Ethical Considerations**

Any type of research should be carried in an ethical way and take in account the wellbeing and the safety of the participants (Ryen, 2004). Silverman (2014) notes that ethical research should: “ensure that people participate voluntarily, making people’s comment and behaviour confidential, protecting people from harm, ensuring mutual trust between researcher and people studied” (p. 148). In order to achieve such ethical goals, researcher should adopt “thoughtful and ethically responsible research practice” and “ethical guidelines” (Silverman, 2014, p.149). In line the University of Salford regulations, this study underwent the approval of the Research Governance and Ethics Committee (RGEC) and was structured according to the ethical norms of the university. The researcher clearly stated the research’s purpose, the confidential treatment of the information acquired, the roles of the participants and their eventual responsibilities. An information sheet (Appendix 1) and a consent form (Appendix 2) were created in order to provide information to the participants, according to the previously stated procedure, and request their consent for the collection and use of data. All the interviewees were asked to accept to participate to the project knowing the norms and the rules adopted, agreeing to sign the specific consent form after reading the attached information sheet. Bryman (2015) explains that interviews are often recorded and then transcribed. Once obtained the permission from the participants, the interviews were recorded and transcribed. To ensure the safety of the data provided the participants, the recordings and the transcriptions were stored safely on a password-protected hardware. The data collected was only used for research purposes, as agreed with the participants, and not shared with third parties. The researcher ensured comfortable environments to conduct interviews and avoided any possible harm to participants, with reasonable length to avoid causing physical distress to them. The data was anonymised to respect the privacy of the participants and the policies of their institution, to avoid any possible harm to their image and their reputation.

## **4.10. Methodology Summary**

This chapter discussed the methodological implications of the study, both at theoretical and practical level. The philosophical underpinnings of this research were explained, and the stance of the researcher addressed, explaining that the study follows an interpretivist perspective. Research approaches and methods were critically reviewed, and justifications for the adoption of an inductive approach with qualitative methods were provided. Then, research context and setting were addressed, clarifying the importance of business schools in the UK HE context. Thus, the sample choices (ie. Managers and academic staff members) were discussed, with a focus on reasons for their selection and relevancy for the research objectives. Finally, reliability and validity were clarified, to address the way in which the researcher ensured rigor, and the ethical considerations were addressed, to clarify the good practices adopted in the study. Overall, the chapter outlined the methodological implications of this study, how the research questions will be addressed, and the way in which the research objectives will be fulfilled.

Following the need of answering to the proposed research questions, the next chapter presents the data analysis and the results, framing the results according to the different questions addressed. The comprehensive analysis of the results provides a clear picture of the interviewees' perspectives towards the topic studied, setting the basis necessary to proceed to the following discussion chapter.

## CHAPTER 5

### RESEARCH FINDINGS AND DATA ANALYSIS

#### 5. Introduction

This chapter presents the results from the inductive thematic analysis, explaining the process adopted to identify the relevant themes for the current study. The main focus of this chapter is to present the results, highlighting the different themes emerged. The analysis of academic staff and management staff interviews are presented separately here, in order to offer a coherent view of each group's perspectives. Then, the joint review of both groups perspectives is presented in the following discussion chapter, in relation to the literature review and the original research questions of this study.

Within the chapter, the themes are linked to excerpts from the semi-structured interviews, in order to support the analysis and explain the perspectives of the participants. The results are divided in sections and, within each section, are addressed through different levels of themes – the main themes and correspondent subthemes. The reason to use both levels lies in the fact that themes are useful in capturing “...something important about the data in relation to the research question, and represents some level of patterned response or meaning within the data set” (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p.82). Whereas subthemes are “themes-within-a-theme” (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p.92), which help addressing different shades of the larger themes and give them structure.

As previously mentioned, when generating themes and sub-themes, the analysis of academic staff and management staff interviews were conducted separately, in order to present a coherent review of each group's perspectives. To comply with the ethical requirements of the research and ensure anonymity of the interviewees, the participants from both groups have been assigned a code, generated from the combination of letters and numbers. The academic staff members have been assigned the letter A whereas the management members have been assigned the letter M. Then, numbers have been added to ensure differentiation among academic staff (eg. A1, A2, A3) and management members (eg. M1, M2, M3). A table



including the list of institutions and participants, along their anonymised codes has been provided in table 4.4, in the section 4.6 of the methodology chapter.

The chapter has been divided in two parts. Part A addresses the analysis of managers' views whilst part B presents the results and analysis of academics' interviews. Within each part, the work is structured in sections and maps are provided to show respectively the themes and subthemes identified for each of the relevant groups. Within the maps, the sections are presented in orange circles, the main overarching themes in green circles and the correspondent sub themes are presented in blue circles.

The sections are aligned to the research questions in order to show how the findings address the objective of this research. Table 5.1 shows the sections in which each research questions is addressed throughout the chapter.

**Table 5.1. Research questions and relevant sections addressing them.**

<b>Research Questions</b>	<b>Section addressing the question from the Managers' perspectives</b>	<b>Section addressing the question from the Academics' perspectives</b>
RQ1) What does internal branding mean to academic staff and management in a Business School context?	<b>5.1.1</b>	<b>5.2.1</b>
RQ2) How does the academic staff of a Business School support the internal branding strategy?	<b>5.1.2</b>	<b>5.2.2</b>
RQ3) How do Business School's academics and management perceive internal branding training and communications?	<b>5.1.3 (training)</b> <b>5.1.4 (communications)</b>	<b>5.2.3 (training)</b> <b>5.2.4 (communications)</b>
RQ4) How do Business School's academics and management perceive the role of leadership in the internal branding strategy?	<b>5.1.5</b>	<b>5.2.5</b>
RQ5) What are the factors that may hinder the internal branding strategy of a Business School?	<b>5.1.6</b>	<b>5.2.6</b>

**Source: developed by the author, based on the research questions and the themes identified in the study.**

In line with the table, the next section will now introduce the findings related to RQ1.

## 5.1. Data analysis and results of Managers' interviews

### 5.1.1. Section 1 - Branding and Internal Branding

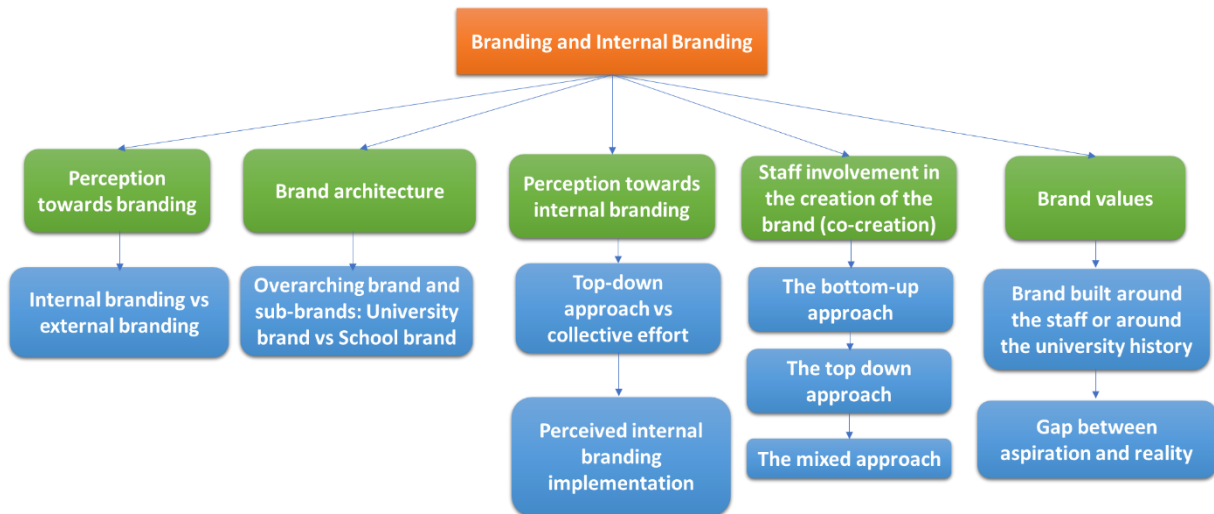


Figure 5.1. Section 1 (Management): Branding and Internal Branding.

The first section presented embraces the perception towards the concept of branding and internal branding. Although this research emphasizes the importance and significance of internal branding, the semi structured interviews revealed interesting perspectives that seem to suggest that the perception towards the branding discipline as a whole may have some kind of impact upon the way in which the internal branding efforts are perceived.

Within the first section, five main themes have been identified, each one of them highlighting specific areas of interest. The main themes classified are: 1) Perception towards branding, 2) Brand architecture, 3) Perception towards internal branding, 4) Staff involvement in the creation of the brand (co-creation) and 5) Brand values.

The five themes and relative sub-themes are now presented in detail, with excerpts from the interview provided to support the analysis.

#### 5.1.1.1. Perception towards branding

All the interviews started with questions designed to explore the participants' perception towards the concept of internal branding. The general trend saw the participant starting from a conceptualisation of the topic of branding and a successive application of that to the internal

perspective. From the interviews, it emerged that, possibly due to their business school context, the participants with management duties were in most cases familiar with the concept of branding. Looking at the opinions, participants were clear about the fact that branding is a collective concept that goes beyond the visual element, embracing working culture, ways of learning and communicating.

*“Branding is giving the organization a name and also a way of thinking. It's much more than just a logo. A lot of people think about the visual element of it. What it really means is a way of working, learning, a series of channels that we all agreed to in the way we kind of show ourselves and how we talk to the external audience.”(M3)*

Along with that, brand values were identified as important and regarded as something that every stakeholder should be capable of understanding, seen as the way to define what the university stands for.

*“I think a brand is underpinned by values that every member of staff, student, stakeholder should be able to understand.”(M11)*

Moreover, brands were acknowledged as capable of directing the behaviour of the employees towards the representation of what the university stands for and its vision.

*“I think the brand kind of direct us all into behaving in a way that represents how the university feels, its responsibilities and what kind of organization it wants to be.”(M11)*

The brand was identified as important, and the discussion moved towards the importance for organisations of having staff ‘living the brand’ and seeing value in it, antecedent for the implementation of internal branding.

*“I think with our organization would want everybody living and breathing brand values. Whether the people want to do it is a different matter. But I would agree that we would like everybody to do that.”(M3)*

The next section introduces the views of the participants towards internal and external branding efforts.

### ***Internal branding vs external branding***

One of the interesting points that emerged from the interviews concerns the opinions about internal branding and external branding, which in some cases were identified as separate

concepts, whilst in others were considered the same concept targeted and tailored to different audiences. When asked about their opinions towards internal branding, participants found it difficult to identify and encompass a coherent concept, suggesting that different ideas could be associated to the topic.

*“I think it could be many things from the use of a logo, how the business is represented on stationery and in general, how we deal with students on a daily basis and with staff members. That brand could be new, could be fresh. We could have a name change and just make sure that's understood by people as well. And say for example, the business schools just launched a new kind of sub-brand. So, internal branding it's making sure that's communicated to staff, the students and also make people feel they are part of this body and sense this organization.”(M11)*

The interviews show that, in some cases, universities tend to focus more on branding on an external level, rather than an internal. External efforts were recognised in some cases as a priority over the internal, being necessary to make the brand attractive and have the external audience (ie. Students) engaging with the organisation and, eventually, provide funding through tuition fees. External recruitment was highlighted as a priority for business schools.

*“A lot of what we're doing is external recruitment. We have to be really targeted in how we speak to those people. And because we need those people to be on-board in terms, because they are the way we make money. (...) I would say we do value what we do externally a little bit more because we need to make sure that the brand externally is attractive, because if the students will engage with us, they will come to university. They will spend the tuition fees here. So it's imperative that our priority is to recruit students.”(M3)*

The efforts appear then directed to the students, who otherwise may not select the university, whilst limited towards the staff, with the belief that a basic information pack at the beginning of the new role and the everyday working life would eventually convey the brand.

*“We provide some initial information for new starters, but then I believe they really get to know the brand once they start their role and get involved with the activities.”(M4)*

*“Well, the staff is indeed important. However, what keeps us going is primarily the students. So you may say that they are necessarily a priority for us.”(M7)*

The initiatives seem to be mainly focused on preparing the new staff for the working duties benefits and overall expectation, with limited efforts on the values behind the job, primarily due to the need ‘to make everything work’.

*“Due to pragmatic reasons, and the need to make everything work, we tend to focus more on communicating the requirements for the role, more than the values in it.”(M1)*

Whilst reflecting on the current practices, the participant recognised that increasing the branding efforts internally could have a positive effect, suggesting the acknowledgement of the internal branding benefits.

*“It's probably something that could improve.(...)I think it will be good to do more branding internally. I think we have still, probably, a bit of catching up to do in that area.”(M3)*

Although most of the organisations seem to put the focus on students, in one case the manager explained that the brand experience is equally important for both students and staff. The participant suggested that brand experience is important for student satisfaction but also to retain staff and reduce the risk of them leaving the organisation.

*“Brand experience for the students and for the members of staff, because don't forget we have to employ staff. We have to attract staff to work here. How we attract academics and how we keep them is equally important as keeping our students happy. So, you've got both sides of that brand experience but for different outcomes.”(M10)*

#### **5.1.1.2. Brand architecture**

One of the most interesting points identified in this research concerns the concept of brand architecture, a challenging concept when applied to universities, as highlighted in the literature review (section 2.1.3).

The participants were asked about the relationship between the university brand and the business school brand, and to express their views towards the existing situation of multiple brands within the same organisations. Several opinions were collected, showing different approaches in different universities, identifying challenges and benefits.

#### ***Overarching brand and sub-brands: University brand vs School brand***

When discussing the organisational brand, some of the participants highlighted the fact that the business school did not have a specific brand and was acting as an extension of the main university brand.

*“The business school doesn't have brand values. We don't have a brand in that way because we stick to university brand.”(M7)*

In some other cases, instead, whilst still tied and associated to the university, the schools seemed to hold a higher level of independence, although such independence was mostly identified at visual level.

*“We have the overarching university brand and each school has its own identity that works with the main visual identity. So, they've all got their own identity. That's part of the main visual and was approved. (...) They use (the school brand) every day basically, and that's how it's represented, but that's very much visually.”(M3)*

The same participant recalled a challenging situation where the staff was adopting the business school logo but not the university logo. Therefore, the university rebranded the logo and created a version for each school that contains elements of the main university brand. The approach was interesting as it attempted to adjust to the staff preferences, rather than asking the staff to adjust.

*“We altered the branding last year because some schools didn't have any of their own brand. The business school had their own logo. Some schools were happy to have the university logo. Some schools wanted their own logo. So, we ensured that everybody had an adaptation of the university logo, so that, in a process of standardisation, everybody's got their own version, but it still sits within the university branding. So although they have got their own identity, it's still through the main university.”(M3)*

In a different case, the gap between overarching brand and school brand was identified at a deeper level, highlighting the existence of separate identities within the same organisations. The accreditations were identified as elements tied to the identity of business schools.

*“I think that there are very clear set of values that are associated with the University and I think there is a sort of separate identity associated with the University business school, and that ties in with our accreditations, with our aspirations, with the context experience that we give to students. So, kind of teaching quality, research quality and also kind of public engagement in terms of the ways in which they interact with local businesses.”(M9)*

The participant made such gap clear, by stating that there is a difference between university and school brands, suggesting a strength in the possibility of having two different brands. Its views are expressed as follows.

*“I would say that the school brand is different from the overarching university brand, although there are areas that are shared. So I think that it's very important for the business school to be part of a Russell Group University. I think there are areas where we kind of want to enjoy that overarching brand as well as areas where we want to be more specialist. This because as well as having competitors who are, you know, generic members of the Russell Group, we also have a series of competitors who are also specialist business schools and those are people who we largely benchmark ourselves against. So, I think having both helps creating a competitive advantage for both university and school.”(M9)*

Other opinions seemed to favour a more cohesive approach, although acknowledging the challenging situation, suggesting that schools cannot have their own independent brand as they are ultimately part of the university brand.

*“Although there may be different levels of independency, ultimately the school brand is necessarily linked to the university brand.”(M7)*

*“I guess you would normally get different views at different levels within big organisations, because each level will be involved in different activities. It's not a negative thing, it just happens.(...)It certainly poses challenges to create a unique brand.”(M8)*

One manager noted that managers and academics may feel part of their school but not of the university, and consequently, may not identify with the university brand.

*“I think this is both at management and (academic) staff level. I think there's definitely, at this university, a feeling that some people, is not clear whether they feel they're part of the university or whether they think they're just part of the school. And people that think that they are only part of the school, and forget that they're part of a wider university tend to not like the brand as much and don't see the value in it.”(M3)*

The identification with a specific school may also lead to competition between schools, with the manager explaining that this should not happen because all schools are part of the same organisation. In the view of the manager, members of staff should go beyond the individual schools and join a collective effort and university level. Through internal branding at university level, the institution tried to achieve such outcome.

*“You may feel that some schools are a lot stronger and a lot more developed than others and competing with each other, but what is supposed to be moving forward is one big organization. So, taking yourself out of that and say, well, ‘I just want to push my own agenda’ it's really not looking at the bigger picture. You're just kind of looking at your own small group. And that's what we've tried to do by developing the brand last year.”(M3)*

In few cases, the participants clarified that the internal branding efforts were focused at university level, rather than school level, in order to centralise the outcomes towards a central cohesive brand. Although the need for schools to share the university strategy was prominent across the interviews, the degree of flexibility of schools varied among the universities. The findings suggest that universities seem to provide directions to schools, although recognising the need to give some level of independence to schools and avoid forcing brand policies upon them.

*“The brand strategy is created and decided by the university. Then the schools are supposed to act in line with that strategy. However, that is mostly about the type of messages to send and the objectives to achieve.(...)There is some flexibility to the individual customisation of materials.”(M5)*

However, in line with previously noted, in another case the efforts of the university seemed to be aimed at incentivising joint efforts towards the brand, whilst respecting the individuality of the schools in some aspects of their activities (eg. teaching).

*“When it comes to teaching, the school is given a lot of freedom. However, there is still an expectation that the way they brand their contents is still aligned to the university.”(M4)*

Finally, accreditations also seemed to be extremely important in shaping universities and schools. The words of the participants suggest that accreditations play an important role in shaping the identity of the school, and, sometimes, represent the main driver for changes in the schools.



*“So, our mission and our vision, which will be the things that we've determined in our away days. I think those are kind of carried through and we've done that very deliberately because again, in terms of accreditation, we need to be able to evidence what's different about our school and another accredited school.”(M9)*

Taking in account all the mixed opinions towards university and school brands, the next section attempts to clarify further how managers feel towards the concept of internal branding.

### **5.1.1.3. Perception towards internal branding**

In the previous themes, it has been discussed the fact that managers appear familiar with the concept of branding. Whilst some discussion occurred about the potential aims and targets of branding activities addressed the importance of internal stakeholders, for example reflecting on the priority of external over internal audiences, a focussed review of the perception towards internal branding has not been yet provided. The current section discussed the managers' perception towards internal branding and its implementation.

#### ***Top-down approach vs collective effort***

When discussing the concept of internal branding, the definition chosen in the literature review (section 2.2.1) was provided to the participants, in order to explore their opinion and drive a discussion. Although most of the participants seemed to agree with the definition, in some cases some of the managers showed reluctance in accepting the definition as a whole. The words from the participants suggest that a link between internal branding and organisational culture could exist, based on synergy across the organisation.

*“I think that it's very much a language of something being done onto someone rather than a collaborative approach, whereas it's about embedding the ethos in the culture of an organisation and harnessing that as a collective. There is an argument that yes, we shouldn't be asking people to change their behaviour to align with an organisational brand. Actually, should the organisational brand reflect the people and their behaviour? I don't know. There should be synergy, I guess.”(M1)*

The researcher then suggested to the participant that the definition was referring more to an effort to drive an implicit change in employees, rather than explicitly telling them what to do. The participant explained that the disagreement with the definition came from the suggested

level of engagement, which saw employers and employees as distinct sides of the process, rather than collectively engaged.

*“I think that it’s the part in the definition about the engagement of the employers with employees as separate things. I would say staff engagement as a whole is something that reinforces the collective nature rather than employers on employees.”(M1)*

A similar view regarding the need for a collective approach, was shared by other participants, although in that occasion the challenging nature of obtaining such results was addressed.

*“I see that you stress the relationship of employers with employees. I guess ideally you can have involvement at all levels. In an ideal world, you would have that kind of input and understanding and that level of engagement. Maybe that would be an idealised view of internal branding.”(M12)*

### ***Perceived internal branding implementation***

After being asked about their opinions towards the concept of internal branding, the participants were asked how they felt about the actual implementation of internal branding activities and whether they regarded eventual cases of implementation as successful.

One of the participants explained that he felt the internal branding was not implemented particularly well in his organisation, identifying some potential issues of the process at communications level.

*“I don’t think it’s implemented particularly well. The communication channels don’t exist. The internal communication structure doesn’t exist to support a good, effective kind of internal brand management job campaign. Not only are you dealing with kind of disparate buildings and faculties and this kind of things, but also the kind of everyday life. So, the ability to build that brand and kind of bring it into the day to day work. It hasn’t been achieved it hasn’t been done to its maximum.”(M11)*

The participant then looked back at what happened in his school, reflecting on the internal branding implementation over time. Continuity was identified as a necessity to keep the interest towards the brand active in the staff.

*“I think it's difficult to reinforce the message. People got the posters on their walls, when the new vision and values were released. People referred to them, used them. And then, because that didn't continue, the momentum didn't continue. People then stopped referring to them, and the impetus and the motivation kind of start getting lost for various reasons.”(M11)*

To obtain a successful internal branding strategy, indeed brand has to exist first. Several participants indicated that their schools were going through, or recently had, a re-branding exercise. The next section looks at the approaches adopted by business schools when creating the brand, reflecting on the role played by the staff in the process.

#### **5.1.1.4. Staff involvement in the creation of the brand (co-creation)**

One of the areas investigated concerned whether the academic staff played a role in the creation of the brand. Even here the results outlined different approaches, showing different opinions towards the process of internal branding and co-creation of the brand. Three main approaches were identified, below presented as *‘Top-Down Approach’*, *‘Mixed Approach’* and *‘Bottom-Up Approach’*.

##### ***The Bottom-Up Approach***

Some schools adopted a fully inclusive approach, attempting to involve the totality of the staff and valuing the opinions of the individual members through a clearly organised process.

In such process, organisations attempt to involve all members of staff in the creation of the brand, with the brand seen as something that should reflect the staff. The opinion of the staff members and middle managers is extremely valued, and there are efforts in co-creating the brand and co-deliver it internally. The underpinning belief is that if the staff members are not involved from scratch in the creation of the brand, they would not feel connected to it.

The words from the managers interviewed are useful in explaining the idea. The involvement of the staff is regarded as important and the participant recalled efforts to ensure a joint effort in the shaping of the brand:

*“We have involved the staff from the beginning, explaining why we were doing what we were doing, how it would have helped the school, and how important their opinion was for a successful process.”(M8)*

In similar cases, the values and interests of the staff were aligned to the aspiration of the school, which facilitated the creation of a cohesive brand. It can be argued that this facilitated the positioning of the school which, according to the interviews, managed to attract further members of staff whose interest were aligned to the brand.

*“I think that everybody can have an active role in creating the brand. So, I think there were enough people interested already in that kind of area that people were quite happy to think about that in terms of the school. So, there were just people that were willing to look at that and accept that and talk about it. And then there's other people who've come in, who kind of build to those research areas and trying to build up the staff who will have the same kind of values.”(M12)*

### ***The Top-Down Approach***

If the bottom-up approach held the belief that involving all members of staff was a necessary requirement for building a brand, some managers explained the impossibility of implementing such inclusive process.

One of the main reasons addressed was the challenge behind satisfying the disparate individual opinions.

*“If we took everybody's personal opinion, we would have never been able to create a brand, but it'll still be here 20 years late.”(M3)*

Time was identified as a further constraint, with limited timeframes potentially inadequate for the task.

*“We just literally can't go to every lecturer and say, what do you think about our brands, and then get all that information back. We just can't do that because we were tasked with doing a brand update within six months. So if you think of the logistics and the timeframes, it's just not possible.”(M3)*

The approach seemed to be built around a different perception of the internal branding process, regarding the top executives (Vice-chancellor, deans, etc.) as the ones in charge of defining the brand. In such process, there is little or inexistent input from middle management and/or staff and the focus is on the internal delivery of the brand, rather than its co-creation. The underpinning belief is that the staff should automatically buy into the brand, without necessarily requiring to be involved in the process.

*So certainly, in terms of our brand identity, that has been very widely discussed and pushed down from the very top of the university and into the business school in our away days.”(M2)*

It could be argued that the perspective towards internal branding influenced the belief towards the efforts necessary to implement a successful strategy, with the difficulty of including everyone in the process seen more as an inevitable limitation rather than an obstacle to overcome. One of the participants recognised a trend in having this kind of approach do define and communicate the brand, explaining the process he experienced.

*“Often, you find someone at the top who wants to change culture. Then, what happens, is that the cultural change happens at the top and then cascades down. And then is kind of brought up with them and kind of refined and then communicated, agreed and then communicated.”(M11)*

Nonetheless, whilst some believed this type of implementation was necessary or inevitable, the participant who was involved in it observed the limitations of this approach, deeming it to fail that due to its non-involving nature.

*“About it being a top-down? I think people find it's a kind of an imposition. That is, if you're not involved with it, and asked your opinion in those things, then you don't necessarily buy into it.”(M11)*

Also, the participant reflected on the nature of the HE context, with employees that tend to work for the same institution for many years experiencing different management efforts and, eventually, losing trust in the initiatives.

*“There's another aspect to it as well. If you worked in an organization for a number of years, the case of most universities on the region that have some quite long serving members of staff and they've probably seen management iterations. They've probably been through a process like this over a number of times and it's pretty much harder for them to buy into it, because they kind of say, 'Well, this has happened before and nothing happened'. Or 'something did happen but it wasn't follow through and it was a bit superficial'.”(M11)*

### ***The Mixed Approach***

When looking at top-down and bottom-up approaches, these could be seen as the extremes of a spectrum going from a point with huge efforts to include every single member of staff to another point with very limited efforts of inclusion and the decision-making process restrained

at the top. However, possibly due to the drastic position of both approaches, a more balanced approach was identified, which could be positioned in between the two previously mentioned. Such approach has been defined as the Mixed Approach, since it touches on areas from both sides in what could be seen as an attempt to reconcile the two extreme views.

The mixed approach concerns the brand created by involving representatives from each department to provide influential input, recognising an important role to middle management as spokespeople having the power to involve the staff. Although there may not be a consistent effort to involve any single member of the organisation, the approach seeks the involvement key figures for each department, showing moderate efforts in co-creating the brand as well as co-deliver it.

The underpinning belief for the Mixed Approach is that departments' representatives involved would speak for their members and consequently those would buy into the brand.

*“We involved the head of departments and others with key management roles.(...) We assumed they would speak for their people.”(M6)*

#### **5.1.1.5. Brand values**

One of main interests for the research revolves around the importance of brand values. Managers were asked about their school brand values in order to explore their understanding, recognition and perceived importance of such values.

In terms of understanding, all the managers seemed to be somehow familiar with the brand values, although most struggled with listing the exact words chosen to define such values and felt more confident with describing them instead. Interesting to note, the vast majority of the participants linked straight away the topic of branding to the concepts of mission and vision and seemed to believe no difference existed between brand values, mission statement and vision statement.

Then, when looking at the actual transmission of the values, different processes were identified. Some of the organisation studied, for example, seem to attempt conveying the values by including them in their teaching, how they treat stakeholders and behave, and identifying research topics.

*“I think we try to embody these values in terms of what we teach, how we treat people, what kind of research we do. I am not saying it’s perfect. There are other things that can be done, of course. But I think there is a link between our values and what we stand for.”(M12)*

Another participant explained that although there are some kind of defined values and headlines in his organisation, he felt that what really defines the values is the everyday behaviour of the employees in the organisation.

*“It’s about how you treat the people and you are used to be treated and, kind of projecting that in the work you do as well.”(M11)*

Also, when reflecting upon the creation and transmission of values, the participant explained that there is a gap between what the university try to define as values and what actually is embraced internally.

*“We have got our main strapline and then we’ve got underneath a range of outcomes around research, teaching and learning. Um, and how interact to staff. Unfortunately, lot of those were kind of created in a sea level bubble cascading through the organization but didn’t really have much input from staff. So, you probably find that they were rolled out to the organization and people were citing them when they were looking for an advantage for citing them. And then after that, people are supposed to figure it out.”(M11)*

The participant also expressed his views regarding the potential outcome of such process, with values generated from the top and little input from the bottom of the hierarchy, expressing concern towards the effectiveness of such one-sided approach.

*“I think the meaning is having something that people buy into, believe, project forward and kind of reinforce. But when you are not involved in that process, it feels like, it’s being done to you rather than being done with you. So, you don’t feel part of it.”(M11)*

Similarly, the act of pushing down the brand from the top, appears to be quite common, with other participants noting the same process:

*“So certainly, in terms of our brand identity to being around, applied, that has been very widely discussed and pushed down from the very top of the university and into the business school in our away days.”(M2)*

***Is the brand built around the staff or around the University history?***

Regarding the process of creating the brand, the results of the interviews show different beliefs on the most adequate approach, with some opinions standing on different extremes of the spectrum. In fact, on the one side some participants had a strong belief that the organisational brand should encompass the history of the university and its positioning in the map, rather than the staff members' perception.

*“What we have to do is to take the strategy and we look deep into the actual history and the strategy of the university rather than that personal opinions. It's basically trying to explain to people that it's not your personal thing. It's a higher level one not really. And although you might not agree, it's kind of not for you to kind of decide on a personal level whether you do want or like a brand because it's a more subjective thinking of it that way. You can't look at it subjectively. It's got to be more.”(M3)*

On the other hand, some other participants regarded the inclusion of the staff perspectives as a must in order to develop a successful brand.

*“The whole university, all staff, all levels, were encouraged to engage in the focus groups and discussions and so on about the brand and about what are values and about what we offer. And this is being distilled from those discussions. It's nice and shows it to the point and doesn't waffle around and it's not too predictable. So, it's much more coherent and much easier for us to implement. It's based on who we are. And I think that we do this already in the business school. So, it fits nicely.”(M7)*

### ***Gaps between aspiration and reality***

An interesting point that emerged from the investigation concerns the attitudes towards the creation and definition of the brand. According to the participants, it appears that the process of establishing a corporate brand, with the creation of relative values and definition of what an organisation stands for, can be challenging due to the gap between actual position and desired position in the market.

Managers identified as a problem the fact that often the top leadership initiating the branding process attempts to portray and create a brand that does not reflect what the organisations stands for, but rather what the person in charge wishes it to be. The interviewees noted that a branding process built upon ambitions and desired position, rather than reality, is deemed to fail due to



messages that do not reflect the actual organisation as well as the impossibility of maintaining a promise that often exceeds the possibilities of such organisation.

*“My feeling is that (the brand) should come from that authentic place where our real position is. For example, we could say our brand is like the top 5 universities and the leadership team could say yes, that's our brand, but it's not true. The authentic reality is we are what we are, we sit in a certain position and that's what the brand should be. And I think leadership sometimes thinks the brand as a reflection of what they require rather than what we actually are. (...)A brand that is built around leadership's opinion will most likely fail since it will create expectations that the organisation may not be able to meet, and also the staff won't be able to identify themselves in it.”(M3)*

*“I often came across some ‘interesting’ comments about ‘our mission’ and ‘who we are’ during my work activities. And I remember thinking ‘is this who we really are? Probably not’. And just like I questioned that statement, others may have done the same. Perhaps being less ambitious and more honest would have been more beneficial.”(M12)*

The current section explained that without a realistic and authentic brand, the already challenging process of ‘getting staff behind the brand’ (Chapleo, 2015) can get even more complicate and difficult to achieve.

The next section is aimed at understanding more about managers opinion towards staff support of the brand.

### 5.1.2. Section 2: Academic Staff support of the branding strategy

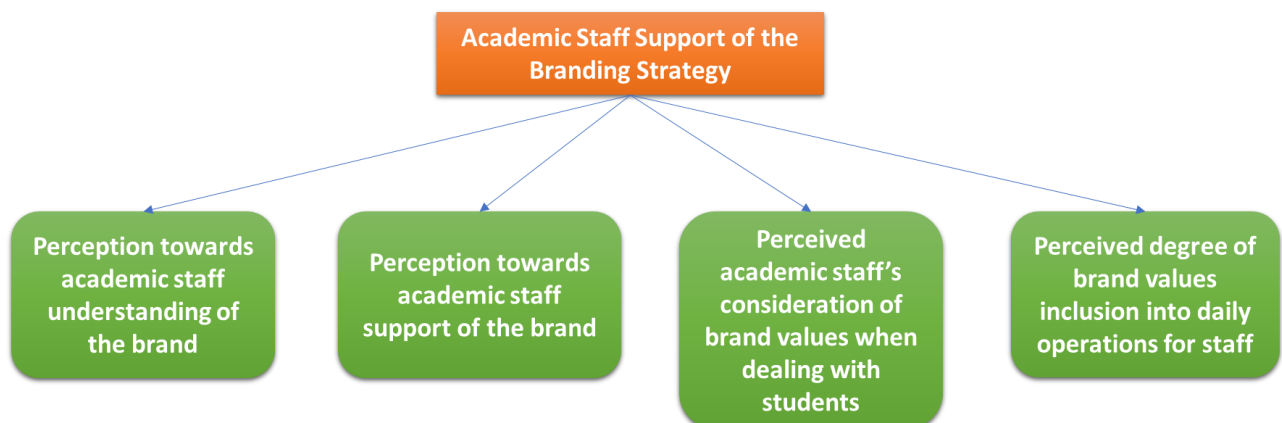


Figure 5.2. Section 2 (Management): Academic Staff's support of the Branding strategy.

The second section presented concerns the perceived academic staff's understanding and support of the branding strategy, in the form of behaviour and commitment, from the management perspective.

Management members were asked about their thoughts regarding this topic, and their opinions were clustered into four main themes: 1) Perception towards academic staff understanding of the brand; 2) Perception towards academic staff support of the brand; 3) Perceived academic staff's consideration of brand values when dealing with students; 4) Perceived degree of brand values' inclusion into daily operations for staff.

The four themes and relative sub-themes are now presented in detail, with excerpts from the interviews provided to support the analysis.

### ***Perception towards academic staff understanding of the brand***

The first topic discussed concerns the perceived understanding of the brand for staff members. When the managers were asked about whether they believed the academic staff understood the brand and the brand values or not, different opinions emerged.

One of the managers interviewed argued that new staff should know about the brand of the school/university they have chosen to work for, and they should be acting in a way that aligns to it.

*“If they started working with university, whatever department they're in, they should know about the brand and kind of being involved in the brand. So, we would expect they would know about that. They should be acting in a way that the university has approved. It's through all those kinds of ways that they learn, in their introductory documents and the way they go to their initial meetings. They have training initially. All those will give them an understanding of the brand.”(M3)*

Another participant suggested that the working background of the academic members may play a role in their understanding and interest towards the brand.

*“I think probably the people who work within marketing understand how brands are used and what brands are needed for, but I think maybe some of the colleagues who work in finance or in human resources maybe are less interested in the characteristics of the brand.”(M9)*

### ***Perception towards academic staff support of the brand***

When asking the managers about their opinion towards the academic staff's brand support, different opinions emerged. For example, one of the managers explained that academic staff tends to contribute to the development and growth of the brand, although there is cynicism in some cases.

*"Well, academics have always something to say about everything! So, I guess they are happy to contribute. I mean there is a certain cynicism about how important our views are, but I suppose you always get that in the big organisations."*(M12)

Another participant seemed to agree that issues may be caused by the actual academic context, where academic staff tend to be independent and not particularly inclined to get involved in areas outside of their specific interests.

*"I also think there's an issue within academia, which is that, you know, what you have is a number of very broad range of specialists who have lots of very different sorts of interests and I think sometimes they're a little bit sceptical about being part of a kind of coherent whole. So, they understand the need, I think, to have a brand but they wouldn't necessarily support it. They're individuals with a particular line of research and they may be only interested in that."*(M9)

The participant identified a key issue in the difficulties around standardising approaches in such diverse context.

*"I noticed sometimes when we try to standardize approaches, which obviously makes it easier in terms of wanting to present a coherent brand, I find some staff who will kind of buy into that, while some others don't want to."*(M9)

### ***Perceived academic staff's consideration of brand values when dealing with students***

Participants were asked whether they felt academic staff included the brand values into their daily operations. The words from the manager suggests that in the design and the delivery of the course there is an effort to align the course to the brand values.

*“I think that, through their teaching, they would be engaging with the students and organizations in a way that reflects the brand. It might well be, you know, the course leaders and the module leaders that in the first instance, they'll may put the backbone of the modules and the module descriptors together and so on. Um, and perhaps engage with the different organizations about what our input may be, but the teaching team would be briefed. And I would be very surprised if they didn't recognize it, what we were doing and why we are doing it.”(M2)*

### ***Perceived degree of brand values inclusion into daily operations for staff***

When questioned about their perception towards the academics' inclusion of values into daily operations, one of the participants linked back to the previously mentioned issue of cynicism explaining that some academics may accept to use branded tools, such as branded templates and mails whilst others may not.

*“Whether it's something like a kind of page on the website which describes the interest, research interests and maybe staff profile, some of them want to do it in their own very different unique way. We have a standardized template in terms of email signatures, which carries our accreditations. Some people want to use that. Other people don't. Some people want to customize it, some people don't. So, there's a very broad range of diversity and there are a lot of individuals who want to do their own thing.”(M9)*

The participant further reflected on the issue, suggesting that the academic context itself may be the cause due to its specific setting due to the higher level of independency of the staff, when compared to private sectors. The participant suggested that the staff would be revolting against any kind of imposition.

*“I think in a kind of private sector organization you would roll something out as mandatory requirements. It doesn't happen in academia. People would be kind of revolting against it, I guess. They wouldn't be happy with it. I don't think they would conform.”(M9)*

Another participant agreed on the challenges of applying internal branding in HE, pointing out that some people will live the brand more than others, justifying her words by reflecting on the nature of the academic jobs.

*“Am I confident that every single one of those is living and breathing the applied identity? Someone much more than others. Some staff, as is the case in our professions, come in and out, you know. Somebody that just comes and teaches 30 hours a year. They're not going to be living and breathing the brand in the way is a full-time member of staff would.”(M2)*

The participants reflected on the nature of the academic context and the importance of respecting the uniqueness of the staff members, suggesting that the academic staff should be involved and invited to take part in the branding efforts.

*“Academics have to be invited and have to be encouraged and I suppose it has to be explained to them why it's a good idea and then some of them may choose to cooperate and some of them may not. So, that's what we understand, and I suppose those individuals have their unique strength and to some extent you would not want to interfere with that. You want to kind of leave them as they're specialists in their areas because they are experts.”(M9)*

The next section discusses the ways in which organisations convey the brand internally, focusing on training and development activities.

### **5.1.3. Section 3: Internal Branding Training and Development activities**



**Figure 5.3. Section 3 (Management): Internal Branding Training and Development Activities.**

As previously mentioned, one of the areas investigated in the study concerns the use of training and development activities to facilitate understanding and support of the brand in employees. When asked about the brand centred training and development activities in place in their organisations, the managers shared several opinions regarding the activities, the criteria for

their selection and the expected outcomes. It is extremely important to notice that the vast majority of the participants were not able to identify activities dedicated specifically to the brand, but rather suggested that generic training and development activities could also influence the brand. The words of the managers suggest that, in most of the cases, the potential of such activities to affect understanding and supports of the brand had more an indirect effect, rather than a direct impact.

The training and development activities identified are now introduced, with their implication discussed.

#### **5.1.3.1. Types of internal branding training and development activities and reasons behind their selection**

When asked about the existence of training and development activities, as previously mentioned the managers were not able to identify any specific ‘brand’ training, but rather activities that may indirectly inform the staff about the brand and influence them to act in line with it.

One of the participants explained the processes in place to convey the strategy and ensure alignment with the actions of the staff, based on a governance structure where the information is cascaded across through recurring formal events.

*“We have a governance structure, so each of the subject groups within the business school have monthly meeting. So, you have the subject group leader who is part of a department leadership team. There is a hierarchy and the communications filter through that, or at least that's what is intended to happen. So, there's an ongoing dialogue around this. So, not so much training, but kind of a governance structure where there is alignment to the brand strategy.”(M2)*

When asked about activities arranged in a way that could benefit the branding strategy, the participants identified initiatives useful in achieving the outcomes. A significant one referred to the organisation of professional development days, in order to prepare managers for their professional development reviews, a process ultimately aimed at evaluating whether the staff accomplished the organisational goals by acting in line with the strategy.

*“We have regular professional development days and away days. Professional development days happen in a whole range of different areas. For example, a really, really important one involves sessions around professional development review (PDR) for the line managers that do the PDRs. And actually, all of the documentation in the PDR now means that our appraisal, PDR conversations are aligned to the strategy, and ultimately to the brand strategy. So, the staff is encouraged to frame what they do in a way that aligns to the strategy.”(M2)*

When discussing the activities aimed at members of staff, participants explained that the offered trainings are mostly oriented towards professional services. The activities linked to the brand appear to be mostly related to the adoption of visual branded contents.

*“The training we have tend to be focused more on how to do things, so more about professional services. We have some that are more related to the brand, but it is more about the visual side of it, like how to create and use templates and email signatures.”(M10)*

Managers explained that although there are no specific brand discussions, all the organisational discussions are linked to the brand. The participant explained that, since the discussions are based on the organisation, if the brand reflects the organisation the discussions will indirectly affect the brand as well.

*“We don't really approach the staff and talk about the brand. We would talk about a specific topic and the brand would be there. If the brand is real, it will necessarily come through because the discussion take place considering the type of organisation that we represent.”(M10)*

Participants noted that some brand related discussions may take place on away days. Although those may not specifically discuss the brand, they may focus on mission and vision conveying indirectly information about the brand.

*“I guess the away days would be the most relevant to branding. We don't really have any specific brand away day, but in the away days we have those discussions and messages about where 'we are' and 'we want to be'. So, discussing mission and vision that are linked to the brand.”(M6)*

Away days were identified by several participants as events playing a key role in the transmission of knowledge around the school brand and identity and, sometimes, aiding their acceptance and support. Conversations about the challenge of fitting the department identity within school and university and aligning the internal and external communications were

mentioned, suggesting that the previously mentioned concept of brand architecture can effectively pose challenges for academic members. One of the participants interestingly noted that the management deliberately avoids mentioning branding and explicitly asking the staff to behave in a way that aligns to strategy and brand. This is due to the participant belief that the academics would not like this approach, suggesting management's efforts in acknowledging and respecting academic staff perspectives.

*“Then we have what we call away days, but sometimes on a way that just in a different building to the one you normally see. Often, part of the day is about familiarizing with our identity. And, you know, what do people think of when they think of this department. It was one of the departments in the business school. How do we want to align to the business school in the university strategy and what does that mean in terms of the messages that are sent internally and externally. So, it's a formal training. We don't get people in a room and say this is the brand, this is strategy and this how you have to behave. Maybe we should, but academics don't really like it.”(M2)*

Further than away days, introductory documents, initial meetings and orientation programmes were identified as key resources and activities that could allow and facilitate understanding of the brand.

*“It's through all those kinds of ways that they learn, in their introductory documents and the way they go to their initial meetings. They have training initially. All those will give them an understanding of the brand.”(M3)*

In some cases, the participants explained that training activities are delivered through the Human Resources department. Initial one-to-one meetings are carried out to provide background on what happens at the university and then online courses about university practices are provided. The participant believes that this should help the employees learn about the brand.



*“Well, it's more HR based. You'll have initial one to one meetings and you'll have training with all the information. There are lots of different things that happen when you're an employee here, and they give you the background. So, all of that should be permeating through. So, there are lots of different little things. You have to go online and do lots of online little courses about university related things and of course, that will start to build the brand.”(M3)*

In another example, when a re-branding exercise took place, workshops were organised and staff members were invited to share their opinions through focus groups, actively contributing to define the brand.

*“Last year there were a lot of workshops and a lot of events where people were asked to share their opinions about the values through focus groups.”(M8)*

Participants discussed ways of defining the brand and practices to deliver it internally. An interesting view about internal branding concerns the belief that the brand is acquired naturally, without the need of a formal process. It is suggested that managers can deliver the brand internally through daily conversations as a genuine natural process.

*“A lot is about understanding how the university works and how people speak and how they carry the values. And that's not necessarily because I was given a 'this is the brand' document. It's just the way that people are here every day and the conversations you're here and all of that comes through, really.”(M3)*

At the same time, structured events carried out informally may be helpful in conveying the brand values, with some kind of storytelling taking place and projecting positivity towards the university.

*“We have regular events that are open to all staff and are few hours where you get together and network with other colleagues. And there's normally a speaker who will share something about a specific area or a new project. It's about talking about the university in a really positive way.”(M4)*

Specific members of staff may feel more involved than others with these kind of events, regularly attending them, suggesting that may be members of staff more committed to the organisation.

*“They are open to everybody and you don’t have to attend. We have looked at the data though and there tend to be recurring names, so the same people tend to attend.”(M4)*

The manager explained that, whilst monitoring the attendance of such events, the organisation may attempt to increase the number of participants interested in the organisation and the brand.

*“It’s about try to expand that out, to get new audiences interested in the organisation and the brand.”(M4)*

Recruitment is also an important step of the process as it appears as the first step of identifying potential staff with values aligned to the brand values, which would facilitate acceptance and support.

*“In the recruitment process we look at what we are about and see how the applicants reflect that. That is definitely connected to the brand. The questions we ask.. We try to know those people to see how they reflect the values, respect them and link them to their work.”(M6)*

Managers suggested that organising activities and training efforts aligned to the brand can help understanding the brand and foster its acceptance in academic staff. Interviews suggest that universities can facilitate brand acceptance and support through workshops where the staff can ask questions and receive clear answers, making the brand easy to understand and use (in a visual way). Participants explained that universities generally try to work with people, rather than against them, asking questions to understand staff views and avoid making the brand a negative thing.

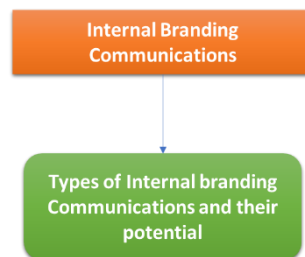
*“I think the key it's supporting them with some good workshops where they can kind of ask any questions and answer any questions. So, being there for answers. I do get a lot of questions day in, day out about ‘why is this so?’ and ‘where do I do it?’, ‘what happens with this?’ ‘and can I use this?’, and just being able to answer those questions really helps. And also make it really clear and easy for people to use. (...) Generally, we’ll try and work with people rather than work against them. And um, we will ask any questions that we can and not make it that the brand becomes a thing that they need to fight against.”(M3)*

Furthermore, support can be provided to test whether resources created are in line with the school and university brand guidelines, in an interactive dialogue where both sides can share their views and contribute to the process.

*“When we organise events that are related to the strategy and potentially to the brand, we try to listen to academics’ opinions and clarify doubts as much as possible. This help us understanding how our messages come across to the staff and clarify any doubts they may have.”(M8)*

The next section addresses further ways of conveying the brand internally, focusing on the brand related internal communications.

#### **5.1.4. Section 4: Internal Branding Communications**



**Figure 5.4. Section 4 (Management): Internal Branding Communications.**

In order to identify potential internal branding communications channels, the participants were asked about the ways in which they felt the brand values were communicated to the staff. The results showed that different channels were adopted and highlighted the importance of specific steps, beyond the channels, that also seem to play a role for successful communications.

##### **5.1.4.1. Types of Internal Branding Communications and their potential**

As expected, emails were identified as a first point of contact for overall communications, including brand-related ones.

A widespread practice concerns the delivery of emails including stories around what is happening in the university, in order to involve the staff and promote involvement. The internal communications department was identified as the one in charge of the process.

The intranet was also identified as a suitable channel to communicate internally.

*“We have an internal communications department.(...)So we have a department here to communicate internally, and they do that by finding out what's going on in the university, finding out any specific news, stories, and achievements. And that's emailed to the staff. We have different types of messages that go out. You may get them several times a day, so there is a constant messaging system with those. And then, we've got an intranet as well, so we can go on there and find things out there. They're the main ways the staff learns about things internally within the university.”(M3)*

An important point that was identified in one of the institutions concerns the nature of the communications. Managers suggested that further than the message delivered, it is important to define the tone of voice intended for such messages, and to have a coherent way of communicating, in line with the brand and the brand guidelines. Specific templates are designed for the different types of emails, but all of them are aligned to the brand. The ones in charge of communications seems to be aware of the importance of aligning the shared contents to the brand guidelines, suggesting high levels of control over the communications.

*“The messages and the tone of messaging are in line with our brand guidelines. We have a set of templates for different messages. So if it's a serious message, if it's a fun, nice new story, everything's got its own template. And they all fit within the brand guidelines as well, and then the tone of them. So, the people are in charge of communicating internally knowledge of the brand guidelines so they will write in the right tone of voice to make sure that it sits within our brand. So that everything kind of aligns there, really.”(M5)*

Further brand communications identified by the participants were brand straplines, brand manual containing several brand related important factors, such as messaging, tone of voice, photography style, design, logos, pop ups banners, how the organisation talk about the itself internally and externally. The complexity and comprehensiveness of the document suggests that, although there may not be a formal attempt to deliver the brand internally, there still exist efforts to influence the external delivery of the brand.

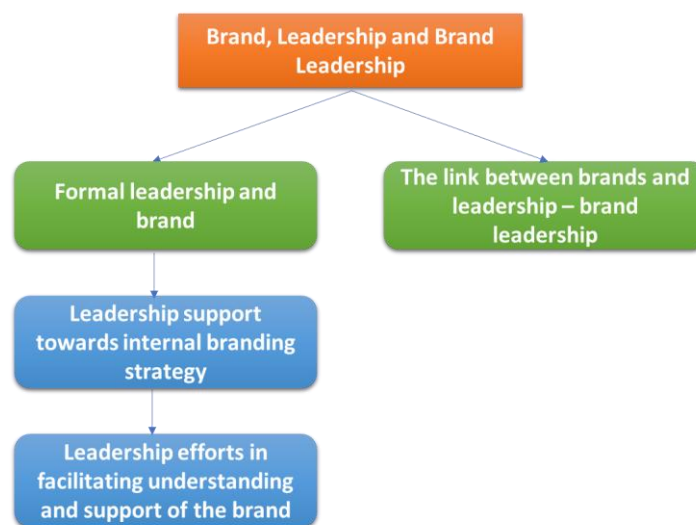
Further to communication channels, events involving personal interaction were identified as potential ways to convey the brand, although carried out through a formal top-down process.

*“We have a governance structure, so each of the subject groups within the business school have monthly meeting. So, you have the subject group leader who is part of a department leadership team. There is a hierarchy and the communications filter through in that, or at least that's what is intended to happen. So, there's an ongoing dialogue around this.”(M2)*

In other cases, genuine and informal meetings were regarded as capable of developing a community feeling and, consequently, a sense of attachment to the organisation.

*“I believe the staff may not necessarily like formal approaches. Informal meetings work better. They blend in daily activities and the staff can learn more about the positive things of the organisation informally without feeling like ‘this is an event I must attend but I don't want to’.”(M5)*

### 5.1.5. Section 5: Brand, Leadership and Brand Leadership



**Figure 5.5. Section 5 (Management): Brand, Leadership and Brand Leadership.**

When discussing the concept of internal branding as a process capable of generating change and influence behaviour, the researcher identified a potential link with leadership, in form of brand leadership. As previously discussed in the literature review, brand leadership can be seen as the capacity of leaders to inspire and affect staff behaviour in a way that generates understanding, acceptance and support of the brand.

During the interviews, the several questions explored the managers’ perspectives towards the concept of brand leadership and whether they experienced demonstrations and occurrences of such phenomenon.

However, during the interviews, the researcher noted that the term leadership was used to identify two different concepts: 1) Leadership, intended as the people that sits at the top of the university and school hierarchy (eg. Chancellors, vice-chancellors, deans) from now on defined ‘formal leadership’ for the sake of clarity; 2) Leadership as the process capable of inspiring change and influence behaviour, referred as brand leadership when concerning the brand.

Therefore, when discussing the themes identified, a distinction between the two concepts is required. The researcher encompasses the views about formal leadership and brand into the theme “formal leadership and brand”. Then, the data concerning leadership as an influential and change-inspiring process, capable of affecting brands, is presented in the theme “The link between brands and leadership – Brand Leadership”.

The first theme “formal leadership and brand” is presented in the next section.

#### **5.1.5.1. Formal leadership and brand**

Most of the participants identified the link between leadership and brand in the fact that formal leadership tends to define and create the brand.

Managers suggested that formal leadership often tends to define the brand through a top-down approach, explaining that potentially this might not be the best approach. Managers suggested that, ideally, the brand should not be decided at the top but rather represent the organisation and be embraced by the staff. This would allow an authentic brand.

*“I think that the leadership likes to tell you what the brand should be, but I don't necessarily feel it should work that way (...) I feel the brand should come from an authentic place as strategy that then everybody has to take on board. But sometimes, I feel that the leadership has decided what the brand should be and then basically want to make it happen. So it's, whether it's coming from that authentic place where we have a strategy in about who we actually are.”(M3)*

*“If leaders create a brand based on their views, but without any input from within, then the brands will reflect those leaders and their views, but will be unlikely to represent all the different members of the organisation.”(M7)*

An extremely interesting opinion concerns the views of the formal leadership, which may pose an issue to the creation and delivery of a successful branding.

*“I think leadership sometimes thinks the brand as a reflection of what they require rather than what we actually are. So, they try to influence it rather than being realistic about what the organisation really is. You may brand yourself as the best university in the world, but then if even your staff won’t believe you, how can you expect external people to believe it?”(M3)*

From this section, it can be argued that formal leadership often plays a key role in the beginning of branding exercises and the shaping of the organisational brand. The next section discusses the participants’ views about formal leadership support of the internal branding strategy.

### ***Leadership supports towards internal branding strategy***

According to the interviews, it can be noted that formal leadership views about the brand affect the actual support of the internal strategy. In fact, participants argued that the brand should reflect what the organisation is in order to be genuine. However, there is a possibility that formal leadership may not accept the genuine brand and force a different one.

*“I think this may be linked to the position of the university in the market. Perhaps we may not be the number 1 university in the UK or in the world, but that’s fine, that’s who we are. If leaders try to escape reality through inflated promises is not really going to help or changing where we are.”(M1)*

Formal leadership appears to have huge influence in defining the brand. In fact, the participants’ words suggest that once formal leadership is content with the brand this will facilitate the process, since they will be involved with it and the other members will just accept the decision of the formal leadership, whether they like the brand or not.

*“The leadership was on board with it because we created it and they approved it, so they were very much involved in the creation of our brand. It was their idea. They wanted a new brand. So, I feel that they are very on board with this brand. I’ve not really had any issues with them and the way they’ve supported it. It helps if I’m honest with it that they are on board with it, because if anybody else in the wider university doesn’t like it. Well, the leadership has decided that, then it’s fine. So, it is a little bit forced like that, but somebody somewhere has to have the final say, really.”(M3)*

Nonetheless, based on the data results discussed until now, acceptance of the formal leadership's decisions will not necessarily translate into acceptance of the brand. Interviews suggest that formal leaders seem to agree with the researcher's views, with attempts to involve other members of the organisation and drive acceptance of the brand. The next section will look at this aspect in detail.

### ***Leadership efforts in facilitating understanding and support of the brand***

Interviews suggest that if leaders believe in the brand and the branding efforts, they will be involved in it, talk about the brand and disseminate it. On the other hand, the managers suggested that if formal leadership is not involved this may hinder a successful branding strategy.

*“Well, you may say they represent the organisation. So, even if most of it is empty talk or propaganda, it may still affect their audience, assuming those are willing to listen. If it comes across as ‘they know what they are talking about’, they may ultimately attract interest and even gain support.”(M8)*

*“I think they have embraced it. I think it was their idea about having the whole straplines and all that kind of things and they put it on all their materials, and they talk about it when they are speaking. So, I feel that they kind of take it and run with it and they speak about it, which helps it kind of disseminate down throughout a little bit more. You really need to have them on board with it. Otherwise, it just won't work.”(M3)*

The interviews suggest that formal leadership can facilitate the understanding of the brand and support it by delivering it through speeches in important events. Examples listed are graduation days, and open days. The participants seem to regard such events as having a huge impact upon the success of the branding strategy.



*“Well, I suppose the leadership, you see them at certain points in the year. For example, when they do the graduation or when we're going through clearing or when any of the big open days. And they are the points when we really need to have them on board and speaking up for us and talking in terms of where we are in the industry, partnerships with businesses, all of those things that we talk about and happening to the brand. That's what we need them to do, really, to speak up for us and to speak at these particular points during the year.”(M5)*

In order to clarify the concept of brand leadership intended for the current research, the definition of ‘brand leadership’ was provided and the participants were asked to share their opinions about such definition. This allowed the researcher to gain insight of their perspectives, which the participants provided after expanding on the original answer.

#### **5.1.5.2. The link between brands and leadership – brand leadership**

The second theme identified concerns the concepts of brand and leadership and explores the participants’ opinions towards a concept of brand leadership. Participants were asked whether they felt a link across the two concepts could exist and if they could think of any example related to that, based on their experience. Participants overall agreed that a concept of brand leadership could exist, and some were able to support their opinions by providing clear examples.

First of all, the participants identified what factors could affect the brand perception for the academic staff. Positivity and pride were identified as important factors and social interactions as the channels to promote the brand and endorse it.

*“Yeah, I think it's the positivity.(...) It's being proud of that brand and looking at developing it and not kind of sitting in your little room thinking that ‘oh, I'm in my office, but that's the university’ as if it doesn't concern you. It's really kind of taking it on board how we speak. It's a real positive way of thinking and chatting to people and that affects the brand every day. I think it's when people are proud to work for the university. Recently, more senior positions are being really proud and forward thinking as well. It really does have an effect. If you see leadership and positivity and belief in the brand from somebody else, it makes you want to carry through as well.”(M3)*

A further quote emphasizes the views of the participant, specifically interesting as it refers to an example of positivity as a driver for inspiration in the educational context. This may be extended to the HE context and seen as a potential example of brand leadership, with leaders identified in those people having an influential role whilst showing satisfaction with their job and organisation.

*“When you're at school and, you know, you have a teacher that really kind of makes you happy to be there and it's positive and life affirming. And by being all those things within an institution, you know that they are happy being in that institution and by proxy you know that they believe in the brand. Otherwise, they wouldn't be there.”(M3)*

Other opinions suggested that some members of staff may carry and convey the values of the brand naturally, just by being themselves, without requiring a dedicated effort.

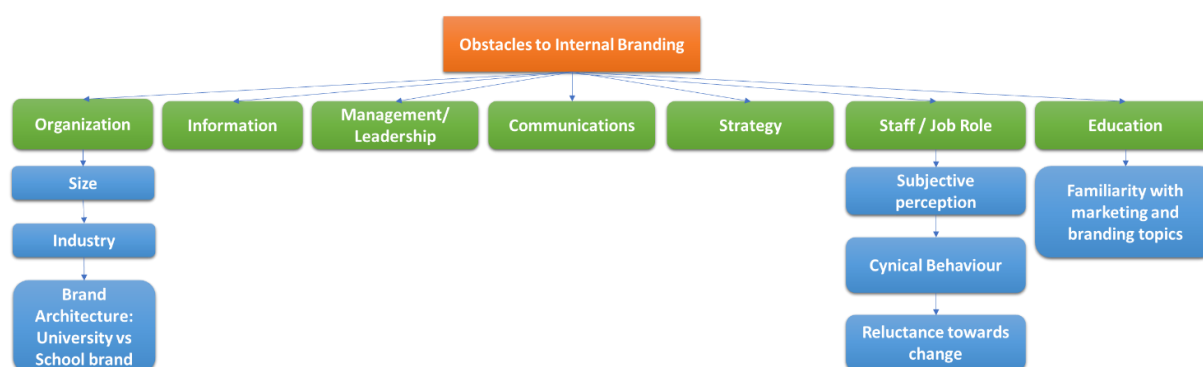
*“I don't think they make an actual effort because I think they're just naturally like that. It's just the way they are.”(M8)*

Upon being asked whether they could think of any ‘brand leader’, participants were able to identify some people which they felt responded to the definition provided. Once again, positivity seems to be the key factor in identifying support. Interesting to note, the ones identified as potential brand leaders were not those in the most senior positions in the organisation.

*“I think there are people that aren't necessarily the most senior position who are leaders. And they are generally people who are well known across the university. They are the people that live the brand and the people that are generally positive, and they attract more positivity around the brand. So, I would say that anybody's who's well full tough and it's always they're kind of a vocalist for the university.”(M3)*

*“I am not sure, since the name brand leader sounds like a full-time role to me! I can think of some colleagues and some senior members of staff that you meet around the school and they are always happy to have a chat. These ones may discuss good and bad things happening in the university in a natural way. Perhaps these are the ones who tend to influence more the opinions, especially if that member of staff has been working in the institution for a long time.”(M12)*

### 5.1.6. Section 6: Obstacles to internal branding



**Figure 5.6. Section 6 (Management): Obstacles to Internal Branding.**

The information obtained through the interviews was extremely good to get an in-depth perspective on the daily practices in HE related to branding and, more specifically, internal branding. However, it is important to note, the participants point of views not only helped identifying the means through which internal branding can be implemented, but also exposed potential issues that could represent obstacles to a successful internal branding strategy. In some cases, the participants explained implicitly some form of obstacles occurred during the activities, whilst, in other instances, when the participants were asked directly what they believed could hinder the internal branding strategies, explicit perspectives regarding the issues were provided. Altogether, the opinions were clustered in seven themes, in line with the model from Mahnert & Torres (2007, p.56) presented in the literature review (section 3.6). The themes identified concern: *Organisation; Information; Management; Communication; Strategy, Staff, Education.*

### **5.1.6.1. Organisation**

#### ***Challenges due to the size***

The managers explained that the size of the organisation may create challenges to internal branding, due to the difficulties in disseminating the information about the brand among the academics.

*“Dissemination of information is always a problem.(...)Especially considering the size of the organization.”(M3)*

#### ***Internal vs External focus***

The interviews show that, in some cases, universities tend to focus more on branding on an external level, rather than an internal. External efforts were recognised in some cases as a priority over the internal, being necessary to make the brand attractive and have the external audience (ie. Students) engaging with the organisation and, eventually, provide funding through tuition fees. External recruitment was highlighted as a priority for business schools.

*“Well, the staff is indeed important. However, what keeps us going is primarily the students. So you may say that they are necessarily a priority for us.”(M7)*

#### ***Brand architecture: University vs School Brand***

One of the topic discussed concerns the existence of multiple brands within universities. For example universities and business schools may have different brands, which could results in members of staff feeling close to one of the brand, but not necessarily to both. When this happens, it could create obstacles to the internal branding strategy, since the staff member will not buy into the brand.

*“Some people, you wouldn't know that it was a university that they worked for. You know, it's just the business school. So, there is this kind of a real feeling that they don't feel that the university speaks to them. So when somebody doesn't feel that way, isn't proud of the university and doesn't include the brand, there is a definite feel that ‘It doesn't speak for me, so I'm not going to consider it in my activities’.”(M3)*

Some participants clearly identified a gap, stating that there is a difference between university and school brands, suggesting a strength in the possibility of having two different brands. Its views are expressed as follows.

*“I would say that the school brand is different from the overarching university brand, although there are areas that are shared.(...)I think having both helps creating a competitive advantage for both university and school.”(M9)*

Other opinions seemed to favour a more cohesive approach, although acknowledging the challenging situation, suggesting that schools cannot have their own independent brand as they are ultimately part of the university brand. The managers noted that academics may feel part of their school but not of the university.

*“Well, they can't have their own brand, basically. That's the issue. They're not a separate part of the university. My strong feeling is that they are part of the university. And to build a really strong brand internally, everybody needs to be involved and not like ‘well, this is the school and we're not part of the university’ because the fact is that you are.”(M3)*

### ***Competition between schools***

As previously discussed, the managers noted that competition between schools may exist, explaining that this should not happen because all schools are part of the same organisation. This could represent an issue since it will result in schools pushing their own agenda and potentially contrasting with each other, ultimately resulting in a disjointed and unclear university brand.

#### **5.1.6.2. Information**

The words of managers suggest that there may be limited information about the brand available for the staff. This may be linked to the fact that, as previously noted the branding efforts are mostly oriented towards external stakeholders. The internal initiatives seem to be mainly focused on preparing the new staff for the working duties benefits and overall expectation, with limited efforts on the values behind the job and their link to the brand.

*“I think we have more about the job than the values. (...) We are probably more focused on ‘this is the job’, ‘this is what your hours are’, ‘this is what you're earning’ rather than the values of everything that's going on here, really.”(M3)*

Further to that, the activities linked to the brand appear to be mostly related to the adoption of visual branded contents, without real explanations regarding the reasons for such adoption or depth about the meaning behind the brand.

*We have some that are more related to the brand, but it is more about the visual side of it, like how to create and use templates and email signatures.”(M10)*

### **5.1.6.3. Management/Leadership**

Managers suggested that formal leadership often tends to define the brand through a top-down approach, explaining that potentially this might not be the best approach, since the brand should not be decided at the top but rather represent the organisation and be embraced by the staff. This would allow an authentic brand.

*“I think that the leadership likes to tell you what the brand should be, but I don't necessarily feel it should work that way.(...)I feel the brand should come from an authentic place as strategy that then everybody has to take on board.”(M3)*

In fact, managers noted that a branding process built upon desired position, rather than reality, is deemed to fail. The belief is that the brand promise may exceed the possibilities of the organisation, resulting in the messages that will not reflect the actual organisation and consequent incapacity of the staff of identifying with that brand.

*“I think this may be linked to the position of the university in the market. Perhaps we may not be the number 1 university in the UK or in the world, but that's fine, that's who we are. If leaders try to escape reality through inflated promises is not really going to help or changing where we are.”(M1)*

The managers suggested that if formal leadership is not involved this may hinder a successful branding strategy.

*“You really need to have (formal leaders) on board with it. Otherwise, it just won't work.”(M3)*

#### **5.1.6.4. Communications**

One of the issues identified concerns the fact that there may be only top-down communications because there is no possibility of involving the staff, get feedback and incorporate it. These one-way communications would lead to staff not feeling part of the effort.

*I think the main issue is that if somebody is going to create a brand and get everyone involved, then they would need quite a long amount of time. If you're going to want to do it quite quickly, which is what we did, you just don't have the possibility to do that. Um, if you want to put surveys out and get all the information back, which we did, but not to every person in the university, then you have to allow yourself a significant amount of time to do that, really. But then, it's what you do with that information, really, and convincing everybody is difficult. It's a difficult job.”(M3)*

#### **5.1.6.5. Strategy**

One of the main challenges identified when trying to adopt an inclusive strategy and satisfying the disparate individual opinions concerns the large number of staff members and consequent difficulty in taking on board every member’s views. Time was identified as a further constraint, with limited timeframes allocated to branding exercises potentially inadequate for the task.

*“If we took everybody's personal opinion, we would have never been able to create a brand, but it'll still be here 20 years late. (...) We just literally can't go to every lecturer and say, what do you think about our brands, and then get all that information back. We just can't do that because we were tasked with doing a brand update within six months. So if you think of the logistics and the timeframes, it's just not possible.”(M3)*

#### **5.1.6.6. Staff**

One of the points identified links the job role of staff members to the context of HE, since the academic staff in HE institutions tend to have different types of contracts. The managers explained that members on visiting or part-time contract will be less likely to live the brand, due to the limited time they get to experience the organisation.

*“Am I confident that every single one of those is living and breathing the applied identity? Someone much more than others. Some staff, as is the case in our professions, come in and out, you know. Somebody that just comes and teaches 30 hours a year. They're not going to be living and breathing the brand in the way is a full-time member of staff would.”(M2)*

The participants explained that some people may not be interested at all in the brand while others may be interested and take it on-board, aligning their actions to it. The individuality of the staff seems important, with the manager explaining that some members may act as if they were self-employed and not interested in being part of a larger identity.

*“I think it depends on the individual. Some people, for example, have looked at the new brand rollout that we have. Some people haven't. And it's very subjective. And I think it depends to the individuals. Some people take it on board and make sure that everything that goes out speeds by the brand.(...) And it's almost as if they are self-employed, there's a little bit feeling of that, but it depends on the person really, and whether the type of person that is welcome to be given brand identity or whether they feel it's more of a hindrance than a help.”(M12)*

The brand was regarded as a subjective concept, and therefore the way in which the individual members of staff subjectively perceive the brand will affect their decision of embracing it.

*“Some people embrace it, others don't. And that's the way it will always be. The brand is really, really subjective and really difficult subject for some people.”(M3)*

Further to that, the brand was regarded as a collective way of thinking. Consequently, those members of staff that are not collective thinkers and more self-oriented will be less likely to engage with and buy into the brand.

*“A brand is a real collective way of thinking and if you're not a collective thinker, if you don't feel like that, then you're likely to sit outside and do your own thing a little bit.”(M3)*

### ***Cynical behaviour***

Further to issues that may affect the individual perception of academics and the fact that some academics may be simply not interested in the brand due to not being collective thinkers, managers explained that some members of staff may just be naturally inclined to criticise the brand since it may not reflect their personal views. Since the brand values will hardly reflect



fully every academic's values, some academics may reject the brand as a whole feeling that it does not reflect their own experience.

*“There's a lot of people that don't want to be part of the brand and instantly kind of pick holes in anything that you do because you don't speak for them. And it's not personal, but it's so subjective. The brand is, it's a really difficult thing because it's very subjective. Everybody has different values and different ways of thinking about their personal values. So everybody's experience in the university is different in day to day life, so they will see a brief brand document, and think ‘well, and that's not my experience’.”(M3)*

### ***Reluctance towards change***

Managers explained that some members of staff may dislike change. Such academics may perceive anything new or different as negative and reject changes as a whole.

*“I think one of the problems is that people don't like or don't want to change. They like their comfort zone and are reluctant to leave it. Anything new is automatically perceived as a problem.”(M6)*

### ***Perception of branding***

Further issues could be caused by the fact that some members of staff may not see the brand as something useful or necessary, perhaps not seeing benefits in it but just limitations.

*“I think certain people will always feel that way. They just don't see the point in the brand or why we're changing it or what was the point in it, really. And others think ‘it won't affect me or that it will affect me and it will all be wrong’. And it's that negative thinking that you kind of try to find a way around, but it's difficult.”(M3)*

### **5.1.6.7. Education**

Managers explained that lack of understanding of branding and what it involves may be an issue. For example, the staff may regard re-branding exercises as visual efforts involving visual aspects, such as the logo. However, since the re-branding exercises may require more than just the visual changes, the staff may not fully comprehend the initiatives and perceive negatively changes beyond the visual aspects.

*“Not understanding branding. I think it's understanding of what is involved and what it is. I think some people just go, just change the logo and it's done. But that's not enough. I think the brands need to constantly be evolving. Otherwise, you'll just be left behind. And I think when you are in the middle of a change, it can be a little bit unnerving as to 'why are they changing things?' I think that can be a little bit of an issue.”(M3)*

The managers reflected on the nature of the HE context, with employees that tend to work for the same institution for many years experiencing different management efforts and, eventually, losing trust in the initiatives due to previous experiences.

*“There's another aspect to it as well. I think is, if you worked in an organization for a number of years, the case of most universities on the region that have some quite long serving members of staff and they've probably seen management iterations. They've probably been through a process like this over a number of times and it's pretty much harder for them to buy into it, because they kind of say, "Well, this has happened before. Nothing happened." Or "Something did happen. And it wasn't follow through and it was a bit superficial.”(M11)*

The participants noted that further to the actual previous experience, obstacles may actually be linked to how those experiences changed the staff members. Participants argue that, following unsuccessful branding efforts, staff members may develop a negative way of thinking towards further branding exercises.

*“You think that you had seen other brand changes and think it's gone badly, who've seen the brand developed before and like, oh, we're doing it again. Those kinds of thinking is, that's kind of doesn't help, really.”(M3)*

## **5.2. Part Two: Data analysis and results of Academics' interviews**

The previous part of this chapter addressed the management's perspectives towards the concepts of internal branding, outlining several interesting points of view and identifying points essential for discussion and theory-building. However, before proceeding to the point of discussion, the perspective of the academic staff needs to be presented as well, since such perspective allows a deeper understanding of the internal branding process. In fact, if the previously discussed management plays a key role in defining and implementing the internal branding process, the academic staff can be indeed regarded as the ones on the receiving end

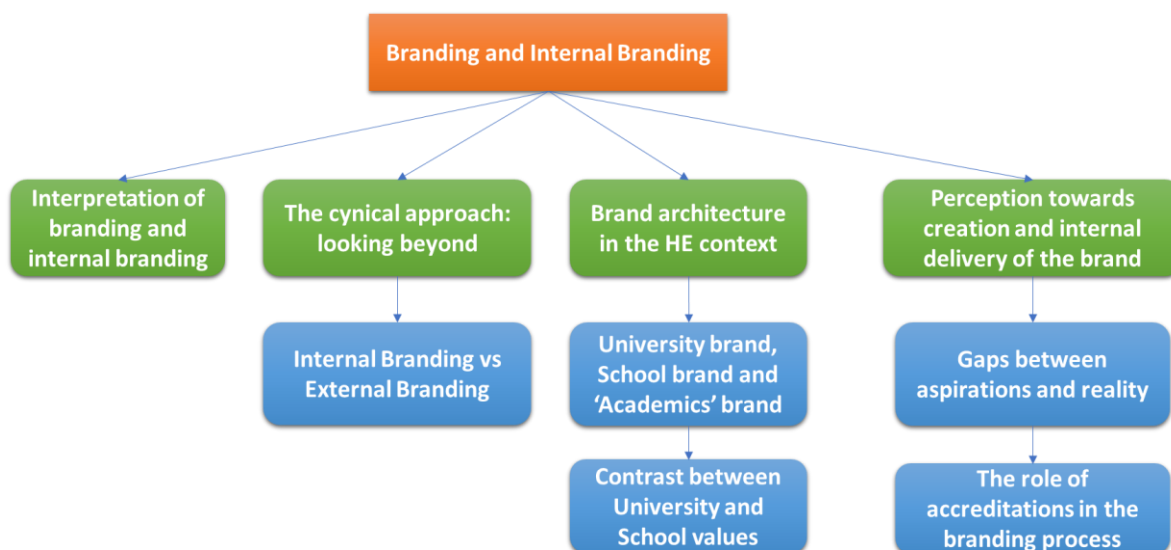
of that process. Therefore, academic staff's views should help getting further insight towards the topics discussed with management members.

Within the maps, the sections are presented in orange circles, the main overarching themes in green circles and the correspondent subthemes are presented in blue circles

Following the previous part, this second half of the chapter presents the results in sections. Within the sections, the results are presented through thematic maps. In the maps, the main overarching themes are presented in orange circles, whilst correspondent subthemes are presented in green circles. Within the maps, the sections are presented in orange circles, the main overarching themes in green circles and the correspondent subthemes are presented in blue circles.

The six sections are now presented in detail, with excerpts from the interview provided to support the analysis.

### 5.2.1. Section 1 – Branding and Internal Branding



**Figure 5.7. Section 1 (Academics): Branding and Internal Branding**

All the interviews started with questions designed to understand the participants' perception towards the concept of internal branding. Similarly, to the management case, the general trend saw the academic staff starting from a conceptualisation of the topic of branding and a

successive application of that to the internal perspective. It is interesting to note that, whilst managers' opinions helped identifying some trends in employees' attitudes towards branding and internal branding, reasons behind such behaviour were not fully understood and explained by the managers, and sometimes just taken for granted, without a real reason identified. This section helps digging deeper by providing staff views towards branding as well as reasons behind such views. The themes are now presented in detail, with excerpts from the interviews provided to support the analysis.

### **5.2.1.1. Interpretation of branding and internal branding**

The first concept discussed with the participants concerned the topic of branding and internal branding. The participants were asked to present their views towards these concepts, in an attempt to discern their understanding and opinions of the topics.

The data collected shows that academics tend to have a more or less a clear idea of the meaning of branding and are able to appreciate the internal orientation of the internal branding efforts. When discussing the discipline of branding applied in HE, participants provided opinions sometimes very discordant.

The first point discussed was about the meaning of a HE brand, with one of the participant providing an outcome-oriented definition, explaining that the worth of a brand is directly linked to its generated value.

*“In a university, the essence of my own understanding of a brand is how much values it generates.(...)Irrespective of what kind of organisation you are or what your brand is, if it does not generate a consistent output, it's worthless.”(A2)*

Interesting to note, the participant regarded the concept of branding in HE as extremely commercial, referring to the delivery of courses as ‘purchasing and supply processes’. The value in the brand was associated to what the course offers to the students and how it facilitates their career once completed the studies. Therefore, employability was regarded as a key added value to the university brand, with the participant explaining that degrees linked to accreditations, certificates and memberships can make the brand more attractive to students.

*“The more students have opportunity to get the certifications or memberships of those things that are an added value to them, the better it is. Some other universities let them go into a university where they will have a degree and then need to go and start again with the professional courses from the beginning. So, it's added value and it's attractive to the students. It's part of the branding.”(A2)*

Significant were the extremes where, on the one hand, following on the above quote some of the participants recognised the concept of brand as something standing on its own, created and developed whilst, on the other hand, other participants disagreed with this idea explaining their belief that brand and staff are one and inseparable.

*“You referred to the brand as it's something apart, as a third party. I don't feel that way. I feel that we are one, so I am the brand, so the others are the brand and we're all in this thing together. If I see it as one thing, so I don't see it as something coming to me rather than being something that happens continuously. So, it's not like I'm the recipient of the brand, the brand being the university. I don't feel like that way.”(A3)*

Regardless of how the brand of the specific institution is created and developed, an important aspect of branding in HE concerns also the perception regarding the ‘category’ of university, the quality of which is often associated to whether they are categorised as ‘red bricks’ or ‘post-92 universities’. Consequently, branding in HE arguably becomes more challenging, with organisations having to face prejudices related to the category.

One of the participants provided an extremely interesting view, explaining that, when discussing the brand of her organisation, she felt that the perception towards it was highly influenced by its category as a post-92 university. The participant explained that such universities are regarded as offering lower opportunities for research and development as well as overloading lecturers with teaching duties, when compared to the long-standing red-brick counterparts, with consequently a negative perception associated to the category. However, the same participant observed that the perception towards the category does not reflect necessarily the reality, explaining that her university actually promotes research and encourages conferences’ attendance and publishing, providing funding and support along the path. Such views’ suggest that, in some cases, not only the brand may be perceived internally and externally in different way, but also that the internal perception of the brand may be more positive than the external.

*“I think my university, for instance, it's a small university and one of the post-92 university, which a lot of people regard as not really red brick university. And the other general perceptions about such universities are that the investments for research and development is low, teachers are not trained, lecturers are only exploited to teach and teach and teach. But I think my university has more support for research and development than any other established red brick university. And I think there are different training programs. There is no hesitation to encourage you to go for conferences. On the funding side, you're encouraged to publish. So the reality is actually different from the perception.”(A2)*

Internal branding was seen, in the words of one of the participant, as *“a promotion and enactment of organisational identity directed towards its members and participants”*(A4), focusing on the concept of identity. Then, the academic who clarified the distinction between post-92 universities and traditional ones, observed that internal branding should have a deeper meaning. The academic explained that internal branding is about organisations understanding the essence of their existences and how that can be translated into the message delivered externally. The participant suggested that, rather than fostering organisational identity, internal branding real potential lies in allowing understanding of own organisation and brand, arguably a pre-requirement for any identity fostering exercise.

*“How an organization understands the essence of its existence and how we want to communicate the value proposition to the customers.(...)I think the focus of internal branding is really to understand oneself. You understand what happens internally and then to reflect on how that understanding explains what you're trying to communicate to the external.”(A2)*

A different academic suggested the need of a consistent message to clarify the organisational identity. The words of the academic focused on the process, explaining that internal branding can be used by organisations to ensure that all elements of branding, such as marketing communications, brand identity, logos and design, flow internally among employees as well as the physical institutions and buildings.

*“I think it's the insurance of the organization to ensure that the branding elements, so the marketing communications, the brand identity, the logos, the design and everything that that represents flows through its internal systems between employees. And also, I think, within the actual organization itself, so within the buildings, within the offices, within the locations. (...) There needs to be a consistent message internally about what the organization stands for and what its identity is. And I feel that a lot that could be done through it's branding. I see that more as a process. The process of ensuring that all the different things are consistent, that the branding message, the branding communications are consistent.”(A7)*

Another participant, instead, looked at internal branding focusing on the outcome, rather than the process, highlighting the role of the academic staff and recognising to staff the need of understanding the brand, as well as the main role in conveying and portraying the brand.

*“To me, it means how well the employees represent the brand, how well we understand the brand, knowledge we have around the brand, and how well we can communicate it, how well we can disseminate information around the brand as employees, as a part of the brand, because I believe we play the main role in the brand.”(A3)*

The same participant explained that, in her perspective, the way in which the brand is ‘received’ by the staff and then portrayed externally is down to a connection, which should exist between the brand values and the activities that the school carries out. Research, collaborations and funding, in line with the brand values, appear to be useful in allowing the staff to take part in the brand effort through daily activities.

*“The employees communicate the brand and everything when there's a connection. I think the connection is research and how we engage with the local community. So, our research is around innovation, creativity, sustainability, and I think that's how we kind of incorporate and communicate our brand values through our research, through our collaborations, through our funding.”(A3)*

Then, participants reflected on the reasons that would drive organisations to implement internal branding and opinions were disparate and, sometimes, very far from each other. For example, one of the participants suggested that staff members’ identification and sense of belonging with their organisation tend to perform better, in terms of output, wellbeing and cohesiveness and that staff’s goodwill is the main driver to exceptional performances. The participant argued that feeling part of the organisation would certainly help in generating such important goodwill.

Internal branding was seen as the process capable of facilitating such sense of identification and belonging.

*“I think most of us would agree that an organization where its members identify with and where they feel that sense of both engagement but also belonging,, tends to perform better, regardless of what metric you use, whether it is in terms of outputs, wellbeing and cohesiveness. Well, all organizations rely on goodwill but then we certainly have greater goodwill towards our in-group rather than outgroup. And the way in which we can feel part of an organization will help it.”(A4)*

In a different case, another participant was surprised by the need of distinguishing between an internal and external branding, explaining his concern in the event that, in case of lack of consistency between internal and external branding, the organisation and the internal stakeholders may end up walking towards different directions.

*“They're trying to convince those people internally about ‘what the university is’, rather than trying to convince the people, the consumers and the supplier externally. I'm surprised at these two things are separate.(...)I thought that it should have been one thing. Otherwise you can have the internal people moving in a different direction to what potentially the external branding is.”(A6)*

After further discussion, the same academic concluded that, in his opinion, internal branding can be seen as *“the operationalization of the external branding”*(A6), looking at it as a series of control mechanism which may help driving behaviour. In line with this idea the participant showed a strong disagreement with the concept of internal branding as capable of creating a change at deep level in people, expressing scepticism towards this concept.

*“Internal branding is trying to change people's values and morals and ethical position. Well, you can't do that. People are predisposed to behave in a certain way. You can't certainly expect that.”(A6)*

Further to that, the participant explained that in his view the only way to influence behaviour to align it to the brand would be by monitoring performances of the staff and aligning the key performance indicators, used to review staff performances, to the brand.

*“The best that they can do is monitor. Control the latest key performance indicators.”(A6)*



A more drastic opinion was provided by another interviewee, who clearly expressed its view of internal branding as something not necessarily useful and valuable.

*“I suppose the issue is whether any of the internal stakeholders see this as necessary, valuable.”(A12)*

The same participant explained that the problem may be at the roots, with the concept of brand itself potentially not adequate for HE institutions and not accepted by the academic staff. The participant identified that in HE there would be an organizational culture but not necessarily a brand, and also suggested that there are different types of efforts at university and school level, resulting in conflicted internal branding efforts and consequent confusion. Finally, he explained that the academic staff tend to discuss branding efforts, suggesting that they tend to be not supportive of the brand.

*“Many people in academia and in other occupations may even doubt that there is a thing as a brand value that everyone will take seriously. All that there is, is a culture, that management can shape and control - or should shape and control. So, to me, not definitely what goes on in the university goes on in the school. Like there are people, employees, there are lots who put their time and spent on what you might call internal branding, what effects it has or what role it plays is, very confused and I think very conflicted in the university. And there's a lot of that about, but I think it's in general not regarded in very high regard by the academics. Probably they talk about that, but I certainly know what a lot of academics think about it and they tend to be not supportive.”(A12)*

#### **5.2.1.2. The cynical approach: looking beyond**

In the first half of this chapter and in this current second half, academic staff members have been addressed as cynical individuals who tend not to buy into branding initiatives and prefer to ‘do their own thing’. However, this assumption has been built mostly on external opinions and not necessarily based on the subjects of discussion, the academic staff’s views.

Therefore, the researcher will now provide an analysis of the staff opinions, in order to understand more about the issue of cynicism and the reasons behind it.

The first important point to note is that reasons behind staff’s cynicism may be related primarily to the size of the organisation, the type of organisation, the nature of the academic roles and, the type of leadership and the past experiences of staff. Nonetheless, it is also important to

acknowledge the individuality of each member of staff and the fact that some members may simply not be interested in taking part in any activity outside their job role.

Regarding the nature of academic roles, linking to the type of organisation, participants suggested that the type of employment relationships makes it difficult to support the brand. The fact that academic staff are technically employed by universities but work in schools puts the staff under different types of pressures and each level involved will have expectations and beliefs that the staff will contribute and work in line with that level's vision and values, which may not be necessarily the case. Reasons for that may be that the type of job academics do is very complicated since the staff members will work for themselves whilst having to deal with many different stakeholders and may not align their effort to these of the university or school. Consequently, internal branding was also identified as potentially not ideal for academia.

*“I guess it stems from the idea that academics have a very strange employment relationship with the university and even so a slightly different one with the school as well. So technically, you're employed by the university. But then you work in whichever school and department you are in. So, both the university and the school kind of make claims over you in a sense. So, they make claims of what they think you should be doing or what they think you are doing. You are contributing to the vision and values providing excellence, originality, innovation? So, they think that you are doing these things. I know you might be. You know, it's not to say that they've got it completely wrong, but what we do is so specialized and so complicated and the work we do is for ourselves, for various stakeholders, the students, for other people, for all kinds of different people. I think that the traditional employee branding, internal branding idea is kind of a marketing function and doesn't work very well in academic environment. It doesn't make much sense.”(A12)*

### ***Internal Branding vs External Branding***

Whilst internal branding presented some perplexities for staff members, who questioned the effective use, on the other hand external branding potential was acknowledged more easily and its usefulness identified in recruiting students and academics.

One of the participants explained that external branding can make sense as long as the portrayed brand is authentic and based on staff and student views, nonetheless acknowledging the challenges in doing so, due to the large number of academics and students, with the risk of being broad and potentially perceived as superficial and lacking substance.

*“External branding makes maybe more sense if they design it well and if it's authentic and if they listen to the staff and the students. So, if they actually know what's going on. And it's always going to be very broad. Because the university might have 4,000 academics and have 30,000 students doing a whole range of things. And the danger is it lacks substance. The people will say this is just simplistic marketing slogans and ideas and concepts and don't take it too seriously.(...)Externally, I think it maybe makes more sense to do it.”(A12)*

On the other hand, internal branding was not acknowledged as useful by the participant, who explained that, by working in the institutions, academics would have their own idea about it, without requiring identity claims by the marketing function.

*“Internally, I've got doubts about the reasons for doing it. I mean, what is the marketing function trying to do by claiming 'this is what we're all doing'? I don't understand. I don't see the point of it. I think we all know what we're doing, and we're not doing very well. We're qualified professional people who are not going to be impressed by some statement about what the marketing function thinks we are and where are we going. I think that we're very cynical about it. I just don't see why it's there. It's a waste of energy and waste of resources.”(A12)*

The idea of being forced to support views appears to be one of the biggest reasons for staff to not trust internal branding processes, with freedom appearing as a key topic to be considered when implementing any kind of action in HE, including internal branding. On the other hand, participants' words suggest that successful internal branding comes from not pressuring staff and rather naturally involving them in the activities of the school.

*“Like in marketing, for instance, and then in previous organizations that I was working it was very much calculated. Here they give us the freedom to be part of the brand, the university and communicate that. And, you know, there's no pressure to start and scream, you know, start screaming that we are University of X.”(A3)*

The participant then explained that the stress was to be put on the fact that things should happen naturally, whether they are structured or not. In her words, that would allow the staff to live the brand, a deeper process compared to just support it.

*“I mean, I'm sure it's structured. I'm sure. But when you are part of it, you just live it. I think there's also a book about it in terms of branding, living the brand rather than just support it. (...) for me it would mean to naturally 'be' the brand on daily basis, without necessarily thinking that and how your actions are affecting the brand. Just doing it, really. Naturally.”(A3)*

### **5.2.1.3. Brand architecture in the HE context**

As previously mentioned, one of the most interesting points identified in this research concerns the concept of brand architecture, a concept that can prove extremely challenging and complicated in large and complex organisations such as universities.

The participants were asked about how they felt about their school brand, and some highlighted the issue of a multi-layered brand, with departments, schools and universities portraying different, and sometimes contrasting, identities.

Several opinions were collected, showing different perspectives and highlighting challenges in the multi-layered HE context.

#### ***University brand, School brand and 'Academics' brand***

As explained above, HE presents challenges for internal branding when it comes to corporate identity and branding, due to the multi-layered nature of HE institutions. Participants discussed this issue, explaining their perception and position towards the situation. In several interviews, the participants explained that the type of organisation posed a problem for a consistent internal branding process. The trend saw participants confused by university and school's brands due to their position as formal employees of the university but their actual daily working environment of the business school. Loyalty was suggested as an indicator of willingness to accept and support the brand.

*“It gets complicated when you consider that most of the people you deal with for your daily activities will be most likely in your school. So you may feel proud of your university and its brand, but perhaps feel more attached to the school where you spend most of your time.”(A9)*

*“I think I am loyal to both. I think it depends on the context. It depends on the situation. I think to the university because like, it’s the organization I work for, it’s my employer. But then every day I work in the business school, so I am loyal to that too. I think it’s complicated because of the way that the university is set up.”(A7)*

Challenges in encompassing a consistent brand in HE were identified in the existence of multiple layers expecting and claiming different things about the brand, which eventually would cause ambiguity and lack of clarity. Lack of consistency across the messages of the university central department, schools and different departments would inevitably hinder the capacity of conveying a coherent message. The same participant explained the difficulty of supporting something that is not clear.

*“You’ve got so many different schools, so many different departments, functions, all creating their own messages, all creating their own directions, all trying to use the brand in different ways. There’s just such ambiguity about what it is we’re actually trying to do, what we want the brand to reflect. If someone might say, what the branding means, and they might come up with three different values that the brand means. You might get another person that comes up with different values and you’re getting all of these different inconsistent and incoherent messages. If it was clear like: “This is the brand. This is what it stands for. This is what its direction is. These are its values”. Then I can support and kind of advocate the brand. But it is a very difficult thing to do when you don’t know overly what it does.”(A7)*

The participant identified the existence of a sense of identity within the business school, although explaining that this would get eventually affected by the multiple brand perspectives within the business school.

*“We are quite divided in our schools. You would get a sense of identity built in the business school, but even the branding within the business school is very disjointed. And probably, when I am thinking about internal branding, I’m probably thinking about issues that arise in the business school. We probably get less internal efforts within the business school, which are also very inconsistent. There’s a multiple perspective, I think, on the brand within the business school.”(A7)*

Similarly, another participant explained that he identifies with both school and university, although specifying that, if asked which of the two brands were more important for him, he would have certainly chosen the university. The participant explained that this is due to his desire of being part of a larger whole.

*“It ties back to the idea that I think I’ve talked about before, of a connection to the university that is at least as important as the connection to the business school. I want to be part of this larger whole. And I’m sure that if I were to get upfront of my brands, then the university brand would certainly be much important than the business school brand.”(A4)*

In one other case, whilst discussing the complicated nature of the academic job roles, the participants reinforced the idea that part of the internal branding challenges could be attributed to the brand layers and relative positions of schools and universities.

*“It can be complicated because the staff would sign the contract with the university but work mostly within the department and the school. So the question is ‘how do we deal with that?’”(A10)*

Another participant explained that schools and universities may be expecting something different from staff members. The participant expressed his disappointment towards the mission and vision statements that, at different levels, sometimes moved in different directions, making it difficult for the staff members to identify themselves with a coherent brand.

*“Well, the straight answer is I have a bad opinion towards school values. The problem with any kind of academic organization is that you have multiple layers of identification. So, on the one hand we have the business school, then we have various groups within from university. But the business school is one which has a recognizable form and they promote the brand. Um, then we have the university, which has some sort of relation to it.”(A4)*

The conversation with the participant became even more interesting when he stated something that, across all the interviews, was either implied or clearly discussed: academics’ identification with the profession, also seen as a vocation, which transcends any universities and schools’ boundaries. The participants explained that the idea of managing staff through key performance indicators may not be compatible with vocational beliefs.

*“But then, we also have very strong identification of academics with the profession, with, one would say vocation, that transcends any kind of organizational boundaries. And both in terms of the way we think, but also in how we are, how we act and how we collaborate, how we meet, who and what we associate with and so on.”(A4)*

*“People have come into HE because they have a particular belief about education. It's not something that you come into to make money. Speaking from my discipline, most people could make more money outside the university than inside. They come in because they have a passion for this job, because it's a vocation. That's an old-fashioned word. And the notion of trying to manage it with key performance indicators is something that goes negatively with a vocational belief. So, if we look at this from a transactional perspective, if I was here to make money, I wouldn't be in education.”(A6)*

The participants further explained the difference between committing to the profession and to a specific organisation, clarifying the gap between an almost lifelong commitments to a temporary engagement.

*“On the one hand, you have a lifelong or, well, almost lifelong commitment to an area of expertise, area of work. On the other hand, you have temporary engagement with particular organizations.”(A4)*

### ***Contrast between University and School Values***

Further to the obstacles linked to the different layers of identification, the divergent position, mission and values between universities and schools may result in contrasting opinions within academics, who, according to own views, may feel closer to either school or university brand due to their different positioning.

*“The university(...)has a mission statement, which has a slogan about discovering new things and reasons for such things, which is printed and all sorts of places. That's been with the university from its founding, at the turn of the century. And it's a nice slogan and kind of short idea of what a university is about. And with that, with a notion of pursuit of knowledge, that certainly seems very attractive to me.(...)Now, if we look at that same statement for the business school, it (is about) using research to create knowledge, to create employable students, promote social responsibility in working contexts and benefit organizations and societies in the world. Now, this is a certainly much less attractive idea for me than to discover things and the reasons of things. And so, it's much less ambitious.”(A4)*

In some other cases, the participants did not express a strong opinion towards the multiple brand layers, showing a more flexible approach where they would identify with either the brand of the school or the university according to the context.

*“Well, thinking of myself in events and conferences, it's the university. Sometimes, when we have meetings within the school, it's more about the school. And because we meet with other faculties, we have to introduce ourselves as part of the business school, which is a sub brand. But I think mostly I see myself as being the university brand.”(A3)*

Some participants explained that they may use the school logo mostly internally, whilst adopting the university logo outside.

*“I think mostly, we use the logos and stuff when we go to conferences and forums and things like that.(...)Usually, in conferences, I use the university logo, rather than the school one, so there's really no indication that I'm part of the business school.”(A3)*

#### **5.2.1.4. Perception towards creation and internal delivery of the brand**

When discussing the concept of brand, since most of the organisation are going through rebranding processes, the creation of the brand appears to be one of the key steps for a successful branding exercise.

Across the several interviews, it was extremely interesting to learn about the branding processes and the involvement of the academic staff in such processes, since the degree of involvement seems to affect staff perceptions towards the brand.

*“I think the communications department sometimes does something related to the brand. Last month, they were trying to rebrand the logo of the business school and they sent across the prototype. So, they sent different samples across for us to look at it and tell them which one we preferred.”(A2)*

When asking the participant about her opinions towards this process, she explained that she was not sure whether her role had necessarily an impact on the branding directions.

*“Perhaps, I think they would, from the back end, review these comments and make a choice, which could reflect the joint team view. Or maybe, that just tried to test the waters.”(A2)*

Then, the next question aimed to evaluate the participants' perception towards her involvement with the brand. The answer was extremely interesting as it unveiled the fact that decisions about



the brand can affect the perceived degree of involvement of the staff, with positive outcomes when the academic staff opinions are reflected in the brand decisions, as they feel considered.

*“I think, to an extent I'm involved in discussing the branding process. Again, it might be difficult for me to know what my contribution is, whether it is important or not. It depends on what comes out at the end of the day because my contribution might be in the minority. You know, and if I don't see that coming up as part of the final brand, I would perhaps, say I was just asked to talk about something that maybe was not captured. If the final brand reflects my perception or my views, then I would perhaps say that yes, they took in account my opinion.”(A2)*

Further questions to the participants regarding their involvement led to answers that suggest that staff appreciates the opportunity of providing own opinions, despite of the fact that they may not be reflected in the final brand.

*“But regardless of the outcome, they gave us the opportunity to listen, to say something, which is nice.”(A2)*

*“I know that it's not easy to listen to everyone, but it would be nice if they would listen to our opinions.”(A10)*

Such idea of staff members appreciating the opportunity of providing their opinions was confirmed in most of the interviews. Nonetheless, the participants' words suggest that although the academic staff members are keen to share their opinions, staff recognised the difficulties of an all-inclusive approach.

*“Well they say too many cooks spoil the dish. So one way of seeing it is that everybody really shouldn't be involved in making decisions.(...)But on the other side it would feel like they value us, you know, as junior members of staff if we were consulted or if we were asked on some aspects.”(A5)*

On the other hand, further interviews revealed that not being involved in the process of creation and development of the brand would result in staff not feeling part of the process, with consequent feelings that their views are not important and there is not much expectations due to their junior position.

*“I think it's more an instructive exercise rather than an attempt to involve people. So, we tend to get, ‘this is what you need to be doing’. ‘This is why you need to be doing it’, but there isn't necessarily step where you feel you are involved. And I don't even think that, if I had an idea, they would listen to me. I mean I'm just a lecturer, so probably my views are not important, there's always somebody somewhere who has the final say. I've never really thought that they would take my view on point, so I take it as instructive rather than engaging us to have an input into the processes. To be honest, I don't think I've even been consulted once on anything.”(A5)*

The disappointment appears to increase in circumstances where students have opportunities to share their opinion whilst the academic staff are not able to, suggesting that students may have a stronger influence on the brand than academic staff. From the academic staff point of view, the process appears to be perceived as unequal, and potentially unfair. On the one hand students are able to contribute to the definition of the brand, whilst, on the other hand, the academic staff may only be told what to deliver, without really getting involved in any of the decisions made.

*“We see a lot of this opportunities to share opinions and provide feedback given to the students. And I'm not saying it negatively, but what I'm saying is, it feels like students are more engaged in what the university should be doing, what processes should be in place, what procedures should be followed, what should be taking in, what should be taking out. But then as staff members, you're simply brought in to say, this is what has been decided. This is what you should be doing.”(A5)*

The relationship between brand, students and staff appeared to be challenging in some instances. One of the participants suggested that the involvement with the brand may be reflected in the creation and delivery of the courses, explaining that part of that process should be based on the feedback received by the students. However, the participant explained that, for this to happen, academics' efforts should be acknowledged, and a conversation should take place, where the positive outcomes of the course are recognised and the areas for improvement discussed to agree on a future strategy. The participants explained that, when this does not happen, the staff members will feel like numbers, simply limited to deliver the lectures without any role in shaping the contents.

*“Let's take for example, feedback, right? So now students can write feedback on, after the unit module, they can evaluate the module. And this is a good thing because feedback is meant to learn, to improve.(...)But most of the time, you just feel like this feedback, that is anonymous from the students exposing flaws in the course or complaining, or maybe congratulating and saying positive things, is a way to learn what to do next. But then we, as members of staff, never get praises or are given the chance to act, in case of problems. So, it's like year in, year out, you read the feedback you get. And then September comes, you're thrown into another unit. And so it feels like we really don't have a voice.”(A5)*

*“I think we are part of the brand. I don't want to say ambassador, champion or any of these words. I think in HE things should be, you know, different. I don't see students as our clients. I just think we are offering something, motivation, knowledge. And I don't see things happening artificially. It's very natural.”(A3)*

Further discussions seem to suggest that staff when staff opinions are not taken into account, they may feel not appreciated and, in some cases, insignificant. Furthermore, the words of the interviewees also suggested that staff has an interest in improving the brand and supporting the university strategy.

*“I feel... not devalued, but maybe not necessarily appreciated. I could bring something to the table that could contribute to the university. So I feel, I wouldn't say hurt, but I do feel like... ‘insignificant’ is a good word.”(A5)*

*“I feel the brand should be clearer and I want to make it clear(...)I care about what the brand actually stands for and what it reflects.”(A7)*

Participants' words suggested that, further, to affecting negatively the staff attitudes by suggesting that their opinions are not valued, not involving the academic members may have further impact on the internal perception of the brand. The academic members explained their difficulties in believing in a brand the values of which have been defined without involving the staff, as this appears to them as something not real and not necessarily reflecting the reality.

*“You can put the poster up on the wall saying, here are our values. If they are not real, people just won't take it seriously. And we are not consulted on it, right? They'll just say ‘here are our values’. Where did you get them from? Have you asked anyone what? And how are they real? It's just not real. It's not authentic, right? That's not just me thinking this way. I have this view, but I think many others would share it.”(A12)*

### ***Gap between aspirations and reality***

So far, the data presented showed that the participants tend to have strong opinions towards the concept of branding. However, although the complexity of the brand has been previously discussed, this section will unveil what can be the challenges when the brand efforts are aimed at reflecting aspiration rather than reality.

The first point to discuss is that the discipline itself of internal branding can be challenging. For example, what theoretically works well could be practically hindered by inconsistency of internal efforts and messages.

*“What we've talked about there is what we would define as internal branding. The expectation of what internal brand should be. However, not just for this organization, but with all organizations, it doesn't necessarily always work that way. I think internal branding in some organizations that can work very well and it can be done very clearly. But I also think that in others organizations, some of these values behind the brand and the identity of what your organization stands for, I think sometimes, when it comes into internal communications and internal branding, it can be become a bit lost, a little bit inconsistent I would say. I think there's a difference between what you would expect and what actually happens.”(A7)*

### ***The role of accreditations in the branding process***

Across the several interviews, an extremely interesting topic mentioned concerned the fact that universities, and in some cases even more individual schools, tend to shape the brand in a way that is desirable to achieve set objectives. More specifically, participants' words suggest that accreditations are key influencers in driving organisations towards specific directions, due to the necessity of university to comply with the required criteria. Consequently, the activities of academic staff appear to be heavily regulated in order to have them reflect the desired criteria, with staff being discouraged to undertake significant changes that may stray from the path.

*“This university it's certainly highly regulated in terms of what is being taught in how the processes, how the programs are accredited. So, the business school has accreditations, which means, that any change in what we teach in how our programs are constructed has to be examined with those accreditations in mind. And therefore, we might have an idea of things that we would want to do, but if they don't meet that vision by those accredited organizations, simply forcing it through radical changes can be quite difficult.(...)There were few times I've been told that some proposed changes should not be pushed through because this year we're having re-accreditation and therefore, it's better to put it off not create disorder and so on.”(A4)*

The participant showed his acknowledgment of the situation, explaining that the process that the business school was going through is pretty much non-negotiable and imposed from the outside.

*“One might take various looks at how it sees the business school as part of it. But it certainly has a commitment to, well, creating or running either a profitable or sustainable or self-sustaining organization in light of available funding, of available income. And in this regard, the business school, as most business schools are significant net contributors. So, in other words, we have and duty to be profitable that is imposed from the outside. That's pretty much non-negotiable.”(A4)*

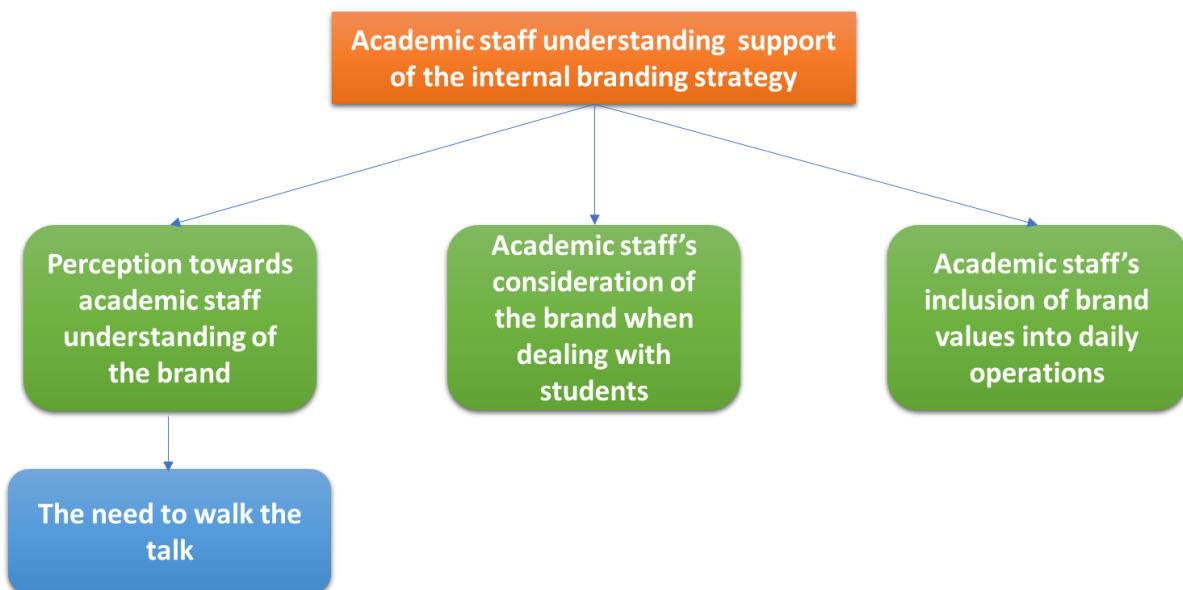
Then, the participant listed different bodies that are affecting the way in which universities and school are managed and accredited, explaining that the different types of external pressure ultimately impacts the nature of HE institutions, limiting what university and schools can be.

*“So, in this sense, there are universities; UK wide frameworks; the research excellence framework and now the teaching excellence framework coming in, which again, further constrain about what the university, and in this case the school, can be.”(A4)*

The participants reflected on the difficulties of being unique while having to comply with the same requirements of other organisations.

*“They are trying to tell us what is unique about our organisation. But then, most of these unique features are not that unique. Are similar and in some cases the same of other institutions, because all are aiming at the same accreditation and want to show they meet the requirements.”(A10)*

## 5.2.2. Section 2 – Academic staff understanding and support of the internal branding strategy



**Figure 5.8. Section 2 (Academics): Academic staff understanding and support of the internal branding strategy.**

This second section will focus on the relationship between academic staff and internal branding, looking at how the staff understand the brand, supports it, and incorporates its values into daily operations, such as working with students.

### 5.2.2.1. Academic staff understanding and support of the brand

The first area that is worth discussing concerns the understanding of the staff's understanding of the brand. Arguably, lack of understanding would inevitably affect the capacity of the staff to consciously support the brand, which makes understanding the first step to cover for successful branding.

When asked about the brand and its values, different opinions of participants highlighted the fact that not all the members of the staff were aware of what their school 'stood for', with answers ranging from a total lack of awareness to a complete recognition of brand values.

*"To be honest, I don't know the values offhand. I would have to find them on the Internet."*(A2)

Although in very few cases the participants were able to clearly identify the brand values, the main trend saw them capable of recognising some factors that, in their opinions, defined their organisation and made it different.

*“I would be able to tell you what makes my brand at university different or special. And that's my own view, which might not actually coincide with the brand.”(A2)*

A very interesting point was made by one of the participants about the relationship between brand and organization. The participant explained that, despite of an unclear branding effort and uncertainty about the nature of the brand and values, his attachment to the organization translates in a conscious effort to support the brand.

*“I think on the surface the brand seems okay. I think I have always been supporting them because I'm loyal to the organization. It's just that, from a branding perspective, it's not clear what the direction is and what it's trying to reflect.”(A7)*

Similarly, the participant explained that the disappointment that staff members may show towards the brand and the branding efforts may be due to their desire of improving the process and have a clearer direction to head towards.

*“I think there's some things that I get a little bit annoyed with within the business school that I think could be done better in terms of branding. (...) Although I said I'm loyal to the organization, maybe my loyalty is because I feel the brand should be clearer and I want to make it clear. So if I didn't have the loyalty, I probably wouldn't have cared. I care about what the brand actually stands for and what it reflects.”(A7)*

### ***The need to walk the talk***

Academics explained that when brand values are created but are not authentic, this will lead to difficulties for the staff in believing them. In a specific case, a participant explained that he had a vague idea of the values claims of his school's brand but found difficult to remember and identify clearly such values, due to his difficulties in actually believing in them.

*“I have an idea, but I might not be able to tell you what they are officially, because I've struggled to believe in them?”(A12)*

The participant explained that his reluctance in believing in the brand and its values were principally caused by the fact that the university's claims about the brand were not honest and

not reflecting the reality. The example provided by the participant concerns the gap between his university's brand, built around the values of ethical involvement and social responsibility, and the actual organisation, unethical and not caring about the well-being of the employees.

*"I often don't see management or the organization or the students or the various stakeholders actually following what that's supposed to be. It's very vague. It's very general. There's lots of talk about things like, social responsibility and ethical involvement. These things aren't bad ideas. In fact they're good ideas, but they're not real. The university isn't really an ethical organization on lots of levels. There's been restructuring redundancies. People are stressed and people are too busy. The employer is a terrible employer when it comes to PhD students, junior staff, you know, short term contracts, vulnerable contracts. That is not an ethical organization where he claims it is, but it's not. So, I can tell you what some of the espoused values are, but I couldn't say that I believe in them because they don't really reflect reality. So that's my problem with it all."*(A12)

The participant explained that HE organisations' attempts to portray a brand that does not reflect reality will certainly result in failure. Further to that, the participant explained that such conduct may lead the staff to question the organisation's actions, due to its questionable efforts in portray an image different from reality.

*"If you try to make claims but then you don't really reflect what you're saying in your practices, people would find it hard to believe in it. Which also raises questions as to 'why are they so keen to project that image?' Again, they're not trying to impress us, you know. The staff knows that this isn't real. So why are they trying to do it? It's not going to work."*(A12)

#### **5.2.2.2. Academic staff's consideration of the brand when dealing with students**

When asked about the influence of the brand on their daily activities, the participants highlighted different processes where the transmission of the brand values may happen either on a conscious or subconscious level.

For example, one of the participants explained that she felt that teaching could be certainly related to brand values. An interesting aspect concerns the idea that the participant recognised the importance of including the values of the organisation within the module and its delivery, although without necessarily seeing it as a conscious branding effort.



*“The values may be reflected when teaching. (...) For example, I stress all the time that they have a responsibility. So, when they do research for my module, I’m very keen on ethics, in ethical conduct, so that’s part of our vision and mission. Um, so I find it very important to disseminate these values through guidelines in my module.”(A3)*

In other cases, the brand appeared more explicitly taken in consideration, with a participant explaining that his role inevitably included activities where the brand had a weight, and consequently his actions were influenced by the brand and taken with the brand in mind. The participants highlighted the importance of presenting positive aspects about the organization.

*“There are a few kinds of meet and greet in visit days where I’m expected to show up and make a good impression. Other than that, if I were to define my kind of main branding activities, it would be on the one hand that meeting and work with students who often come here with very little idea of few things, such as what’s this University like or what the business school is like, or information about the master, for example. So, in this sense, I do believe that I serve as a guide and present some vision of the business school, which is certainly coloured by both my understanding of what we are, but also my aspirations where I think what should be in my picture presented to students. It’s not about the negative things that annoy me, but rather about the positive aspects.”(A4)*

Further to that, the participant explained that students go through a process of identification to find their own meaning of being students and therefore, particularly at postgraduate level with short courses, academic staff plays a key role in building and developing a sense of identity with the institution.

*“For students it’s extremely important, particularly at UK postgraduate level where you have just one-year courses. There is a kind of strong and quick enculturation process. So, there is the need to consider institutional, cultural aspect of being a student. So, it is the idea of whether being a student is about having wild parties or whether it’s about studying, whether studying is about learning for exams or whether it is about reading lots of different things. And so, all these ideas are not just individual. They are encapsulated with or enacted in what, consecutive groups of students do, how they interact with staff. And in this sense, building an identity is probably most important.”(A4)*

The participant raised the issue to whether students should be considered as an external or internal audience of the university. Then explained that, regardless of the how they are

regarded, dealing with students represents certainly the most important activity, with the need of ensuring that the values of the organisation are effectively conveyed. The brand was identified as a focal point to understand about the organisation, and the need of align the ways of engaging to the brand was suggested.

*“So, that's why the issue of what causes internal and what causes external branding is for me important because if students count as internal branding, then probably this is for me that by far the most important activity, because due to rather short time of contact, brands can serve as a kind of focal point for understanding what's going on, what's important, what the values are, all those ideas. When you think of academics or even a bunch of those students tend to be here for quite a long time and will find all the different ways of engaging, which might be perhaps, not so focused on the brand itself.”(A4).*

Another participant explained that the way in which the staff understands and supports the brand will certainly affect the way of working with the students, and is therefore extremely important to engage the internal staff with the brand. In particular, the participant associated to the members of staff a role that could be regarded as brand ambassador, explaining that the brand can be reflected in views, opinions and contributions of the staff, in activities such as teaching, creation and delivery of the modules. Also, the participant explained that creating contents in line with the brand guidelines would allow the staff to be more relaxed and confident with the delivery of the module, and consequently more capable to motivate the students.

*“I think it will absolutely change the way in which they interact with the students. And I think this is why it's important to actually engage the internal staff in branding because wearing the brand reflect your views, your opinion, your contribution. You're being motivated and you will be more confident to deliver the lecture or perhaps to the design of modules. So, one thing is for you to design the module, another thing is for you to design the module in a way that reflects and delivers what we're doing. So, if you are involved in the design of the module and if you link the contents to the brand, and the brand is reflected in your own expectations, you'll be more relaxed and more confident and you'll be able to motivate students to actually learn from that module.”(A2)*

### **5.2.2.3. Academic staff's inclusion of brand values into daily operations**

Across the several questions posed, the participants were asked whether they felt the brand and its values may affect their daily working duties.

One of the participants explained that, due to its marketing-related background, he felt that understanding the brand and its values would perhaps not affect his activities in a conscious way, but still have an impact subconsciously.

*“I think that the trick with this question is that, consciously, probably not. Subconsciously, probably yes. But the only reason I would probably say that is because having studied marketing previously, I understand how marketing works. I understand the importance of brands and I can understand, even on a subconscious level, it's importance and how it can encourage and affect behaviour and influence behaviour. So, yeah. So, I do think it affects the daily operations. I clearly do.”(A7)*

The words of the participant suggest that having a background related to branding may help understanding the importance and the usefulness and, consequently, accept the concept of branding itself.

*“I believe I'm looking it from the position where I know a bit about branding and marketing. It gives me the insight. If I was from another department within the business school, that could have been a big issue.”(A7)*

Other participants reinforced the idea, explaining that previous experience outside academia may enhance the familiarity with branding concepts, as well as the awareness that the actions taken should take in consideration the image of the organisation and, consequently, try to project pride and positivity towards it.

*“Possibly because of my background, because I have spent too much time outside academia, I am probably more in tune with that philosophy of representing an organisation in everything you do. So, when you go to classroom, when you give out handouts, when you see students, go to conferences. You are very much aware of promoting the organisation as something you are proud to belong to.”(A1)*

Another participant explained that further to dealing with internal situations, such as dealing with students and colleagues, he felt that other activities carried out externally were done taking in account the brand. The participant suggested the existence of a concept of brand responsibility, with the academic member aware that his actions would have affected the brand

in either positive or negative way. Interesting to note, when discussing external aspects, the participant referred to the university brand, rather than the school brand.

*“Then there's of course representing the university in other academic settings, so conferences, guest lectures and the like where anyone is associated with their own institutions. If I do something really boring or really stupid, it probably would be a good call of the reflection of my institution and similarly, absolutely brilliant thing. And so, that's certainly how I get to think of different universities. So, that's the person who had this brilliant presentation. That's where they're from. It must be interesting plans. So, I try to do my best because I know that it will reflect in a certain way the image of the university, in a good or bad way.”(A4)*

Further to representing the school, participants explained that in some occasions the academic staff plays a key role on shaping the brand proposition, by actively being involved in processes that define the courses offer, as well as the direction towards students are headed in their learning path.

*“In that Business Management, you have different pathways. And those pathways would perhaps be linked to the kind of specialty with HR or procurement, etc. And so, we were asked to identify professional bodies that could link the lending objective to the performer. So, we are developing new performers for different models. We contribute to the brand proposition by identifying the relevant professional certification out there that competitive study students would want to have after they've studied. And see how we can map the learning objective of those professional bodies to our course, so that when students graduate, they would have a lot of exemptions from the professional examination, which is also a valuable proposition for the students because it gives them the confidence that when they have their degree, they don't need to go and start professional course from scratch.”(A2)*

### 5.2.3. Section 3 – Internal Branding Training and Development Activities



Figure 5.9. Section 3 (Academics): Internal Branding Training and Development Activities.

This part concerns the staff views towards what activities they believe may be directed at fostering the brand understanding and support and, perhaps more important, what training and activities they felt may be actually useful in achieving such objectives

### **5.2.3.1. Academic staff identification and perception of IB training and development activities**

When asking the participants about what training and activities allowed them to learn more about the brand, all the participants indicated away days as a type of event intended for the purpose.

*“I think twice yearly we have these away days where all members of staff are brought together. And again, I've been able to compare these at a few institutions. Now, the important function of them is certainly to foster some idea of identity, of being together, of standing for something. And so, that's certainly an important event in regard to creating or maintaining a brand.”(A4)*

Although the participant recognized the usefulness of away days in the internal branding exercise, he also identified limitations, suggesting that these events are not necessarily enjoyable meaningful. The participant emphasized the fact that academics wish to provide opinions and have a say in important matters, as this would allow a sense of participation, suggesting the importance of involving academic staff into brand discussions.

*“(Away days) tend to be very boring and, in this organization, they're not particularly meaningful. So, in a previous organization, when I was there, various motions were voted through. So, there was a sense of participation, of democracy, of some sorts. Whether those were the important decisions or the unimportant decisions, another matter. But, there was a strong idea that, well, okay, this may be boring, but it's the only way in which we can, you know, we can have a say in important matters.”(A4)*

The participant felt disappointed by the lack of involvement in decisions around the brand, commenting with irony the existence of a non-democratic approach for a brand that supposedly includes democracy across its values, arguably creating a contrast or even a paradox.

*“Here there's none of that. So, there is the school steering group, which is a much smaller group. They make all the significant decisions and those are being fed through to us. Perhaps consulted. But, as I said, as the general volunteer staff, we don't have any say, a direct say. At the same time, the idea is that during those meetings we, well, exchange opinions, we build consensus on various ideas. So, there is some sort a building of identity. That is certainly not a democratic one, which it's supposed to be a feature of a brand or certainly reflect an understanding of what kind of organization we are, how we manage, what are the hierarchy of relationships.”(A4)*

Further activities happening in universities, possibly linked to the brand, were identified in orientation days. The participants explained that orientation days are useful in meeting interesting people but did not guarantee any further interactions with such people. Further to that, the orientation days may happen at university level, rather than school level. At the business school level, the participant may be informally introduced to the new colleagues, without any formal event.

*“In another (orientation day) where I took part, I met few people who seemed interesting and I might have never met again. But this was at the university rather than the school. At the school level, I don't remember anything like that happening. I was taken around, introduced to various people by the person who was then the head of group.”(A4)*

Further to that, new members of staff may receive an induction upon starting a new job at the university. In some instances, the HR department was identified as the one carrying out induction events, with such events aimed at explaining how the values would fit in the academic practices.

*“I remember doing my induction. I got one of my first meetings with management for people from HR. We got a very clear training session on how to incorporate the values of our school in our future practices.”(A11)*

Following the discussion regarding the fact that external pressures influence the objectives of universities and business schools, such as accreditations and academic frameworks, one of the participants explained that the external expectations are filtered internally through performance appraisals, with performance indicators aimed at defining activities relevant to satisfy the external requirements.

*“There is that external pressure on the university, on the business school. And certainly, some of it gets filtered through into, well, our performance appraisals, into general feelings of what should you do in order to succeed or what kind of activities are worthwhile, and which are not particularly rewarding.”(A4)*

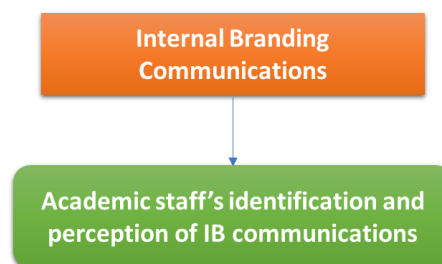
Events and training may be more likely to happen with new members of staff, compared to senior academics, within the school. Nonetheless, the intended outcome of the training may not be necessarily to inform and align the behaviour of the academic to the brand values, but rather to specific accreditations criteria. Whilst such type of activities may on the one hand help the organisation to demonstrate how they meet, and work towards meeting, the accreditations’ criteria, on the other hand they may not be perceived as meaningful and/or useful by the staff and could create instead a negative effect on them.

*“Communication is pretty minimal, actually. I mean, at my level it’s minimal. Maybe if you come in as a junior staff member, it’s more intense. So, let’s say you have the PhD and you have papers, you need to join as a new lecturer. You’re put through a big training program, which is one of the faculty and it’s very unpopular. Everyone who’s on it says it’s too long. It’s too much to do. You’re busy enough with all the stuff but they do it anyway. They are trying to teach them how to write more papers, writing essays and portfolios for some internal training program that you don’t need. Staff says they don’t need it. And that’s interesting. I mean, does teaching excellence require localized training? The faculty will say yes, but mostly probably because they’re facing some kind of audit or some kind of TEF rating, ranking system and they need to improve it. So, they feel they have to do something to try and encourage them.”(A12)*

The participants explained that, when this type of events occur, a paradox may be in place. Although these events may be created with the purpose of development for the staff, on the other hand it could actually hinder such development by taking too much time that could have been otherwise invested in experiencing the institution and the nature of the new role.

*“Whether the training program helps or not, I would say, it probably hinders the development of staff. I don't think you'll learn anything of value from it. This is based on what I heard, as I haven't done it. I was part of the generation that didn't have to do it. But all the junior staffs complain about it quite bitterly. It's too long. And they'll say what I said earlier that it's not real, you know, they're trying to tell you what to teach and how to teach, but you already know. You're already an expert in it. If you have already been hired, you are supposed to have already those requirements. You don't need it, right? Let people get on with it. Let people shape it themselves. So, there's a lot of that for junior staff.”(A12)*

#### **5.2.4. Section 4 – Internal Branding Communications**



**Figure 5.10. Section 4 (Academics): Internal Branding Communications.**

This section concerns the staff’s views towards what communications and communication channels they believe may be directed at fostering the brand understanding and support. Then, the section addresses what communications and communications channel the staff believe may be useful in achieving such understanding and support.

##### **5.2.4.1. Academic staff identification and perception of IB communications**

Emails were identified as traditional tools to communicate within the organisation information about the brand. However, it was also noted that regardless of how meaningful such emails may be, if the staff does not read them the effort will be pointless.

*“For all the staff, there's a weekly email from faculty and from the school. Sometimes you read it, sometimes you don't.”(A12)*

Among the communications channels, posters listing the values were recognised as tools capable of communicating the values, although their effectiveness was regarded once again as strictly linked to honesty and reality of the messages conveyed, suggesting authenticity as a determinant of success.



*“You can put the poster up on the wall saying, here are our values. If they are not real, people just won't take it seriously.”(A12)*

Such limited effectiveness is not only limited to authenticity but also continuity. For example, booklets were identified as capable of fostering brand identity, with a process of storytelling to tell the history of the organisation and how it evolved along the years. However, although individual activities may be useful, the views of the participants suggest that regardless of how effective a specific communication effort may be, it will be meaningless if it's not part of a continuous and coherent long-term process.

*“There's as a little booklet and that went around., There'll be lots more going on when there are new things, like the new buildings. Or if there is a relaunch that will be sort of spoken about because often is associated to funding. So, for example, the university got a new sponsor, a big donor. When that happened, they did a lot of marketing related to that. And they tried to talk about a history of the school, and it wasn't bad. It was reasonably well-researched and they have images, texts from the 1960s on lists, the history of the school. It's wasn't bad. But... what was it for? If it's a little booklet, you flip through it and then you put it down to get on your work, right? I mean it had no effect. Or at least, I don't know what effects it was supposed to have. It's so much like, it's a ritual. Let's make a booklet. Let's update the webpage. But no information on why they are doing it, or how it's linked to us.”(A12)*

The idea of the need for a continuous effort was identified across the interviews. One of the participants, for example, explained that the business school provides branded PowerPoint templates for the staff to use. Also, he noted that the university has specific fonts linked to the local heritage, explaining his disappointment in the fact that the fonts are not included in the template, missing an opportunity to create continuity.

*“We have a set of PowerPoint templates and the university, has two special fonts, font styles, which I think is really nice. The name of the founders is linked to the local heritage. The problem for me is that a PowerPoint template we have for this school does not use any of these fonts, just generic fonts for its presentation. And, for me, it feels like a lost opportunity of kind of creating a continuity.”(A4)*

Further tools identified as capable of communicating the brand were guidelines, staff handbook, documentation and literature on what the school stands for. The VLE was the channel identified where the staff could access the documents.

The participants suggested that, although there are different documents to access information, there are no specific brand-training courses.

*“We have guidelines. We have a staff book online. We have a lot of the documentation and literature on what we stand for, what we do. Many of these things in our VLE. So, we don’t have like a specific one-week course where you’re going to learn about this faculty, this department, this job. We have the basics and they’re available on the staff handbook. And other than that, you know, it’s just the rest of the activities.”(A3)*

The interviews suggest that, although VLE can be useful to access brand-related documents, the lack of brand-related courses can be extended to the online aspects as well. The participants explained that, although they have different online courses for general training, no specific brand courses or e-learning seem to be in place, neither about the brand, nor about mission and vision linked to the brand.

*“I can’t remember of any kind of e-learning where they say, you know, this is the brand or this is mission and the vision.”(A3)*

The participants also reiterated the idea that the most effective communication comes from experiencing the institution, rather than accessing formal events or seminars.

*“But I think, the communication and all of the values come from our activities rather than accessing one specific document or being part of one seminar.”(A3)*

Experiencing the organisation may happen in different ways. Whilst daily activities may be useful, the actual environment of the organisation may help building the sense of identity. A participant’s words are useful in explaining the idea, with the member of staff discussing a branded environment and the fact that, without that, the rooms and the offices may appear as any other university, with no physical evidence defining the place.

*“In terms of communications, the branding you'd get in and around the offices and branding you would get from the program office to deal with your job. And various different aspects I suppose.(...)You would expect a lot of the internal branding to be very clear in everything. You kind of come across in your daily work. You would expect to see it in all different offices, various different messages and communications. That should be happening. I don't know compared to other universities, but I think probably in this university we don't have enough of that. This could be an office in any university. This is not ours, so there is not a branded environment and stuff, I can walk into a lot of rooms throughout the university, and I probably won't see any of that.”(A7)*

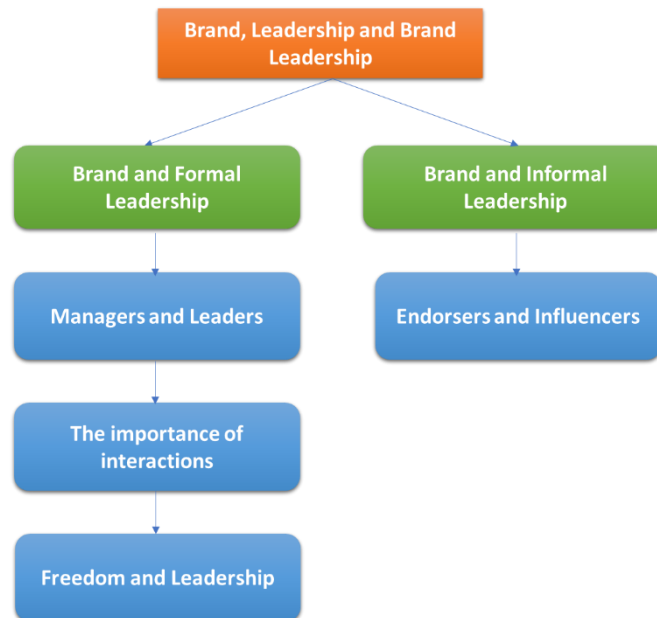
However, whilst the visual aspect could be useful in contributing to the internal awareness and acceptance of the brand, the words of the participants suggest that it will only represent the tip of the iceberg. The most important aspect for any kind of communications appears to be a clear idea or conceptualisation of what is going to be communicated. In fact, the participants explained that visual efforts, as well as any kind of communications, would be pointless if a lack of conceptualisation of the brand subsists. Without clarity, the efforts will result in ambiguity ending up confusing the staff about what is expected from them.

*“It's not a visual problem. I think it's deeper than that. I really don't think you should be pushing and promoting a brand internally if you're still not sure what it stands for. So, I think it's more of a lack of conceptualization about what the brand is, what the brand stands for, and what we need and we want to stand for to be influenced and direct behaviour. It does have an impact because if I think about all the people who work in this organization, there's a lot of people where they get a lot of ambiguity and there's a lot of lack of clarity about who does what and who is doing what, what people should be doing, how should they be doing it. I think there's no clear brand there to rally behind, to get behind us. So, 'what's the point of trying to overemphasize that, when the actual brand itself is not clear in the first place?'. ”(A7)*

Further conversations revealed that forcing activities and communications on staff will have negative effect, reinforcing once again the idea of freedom of choice as prerogative for internal branding success in HE. An example involved the use of branded screensavers that the staff could not replace or deactivate.

*“There was a time when they changed your screensaver. They gave us a screensaver that we couldn't turn off, couldn't change, right? And people didn't like that very much and that went away after a few months. I don't know if people complained. I am sure that they didn't like it. Others just ignored it. I think they complained, or the IT service changed and just fell away. I don't know.”(A12)*

### 5.2.5. Section 5 – Brand, leadership and brand leadership



**Figure 5.11. Section 5 (Academics): Brand, Leadership and Brand Leadership.**

Similarly to the management views, when the academic staff members were asked about the concept of leadership and brand leadership, except for few cases where the participant were actively involved with the topic of leadership, the vast majority of participant referred to leadership as the people at the top in the organization hierarchy, previously named ‘formal leadership’ and provided some views regarding the previously defined process of ‘brand leadership’ only after further clarifications from the researcher. Consequently, for the sake of clarity and narrative, the results are now provided and discussed critically in the next sections.

When presented with the definition of brand leadership provided in the literature review (section 2.9.1) the participants showed different reactions, each one of them valuable on its own right. Therefore, to get to the discussion around brand leadership, it is necessary to start from the general view of branding that, once again, appears extremely challenging in HE and the role of leaders in such branding process.

### 5.2.5.1. Brand and Formal Leadership

In one of the examples, the participant recognised that leaders may be capable of influencing behaviour. However, reading the definition, the participant felt puzzled by the idea of academics going beyond their self-interests to benefit the brand.

*“I agree to a point. (...)So, I see some strange assumptions in here, because the general idea that a leader can make us do things or want to do things that we would otherwise not do, that’s very strange but still acceptable. But, it says academics, as individual members of the organizations transcend their own self-interest, which means that acting for the organization, for the brand is something bigger because to transcend is to go beyond. It's not to move to somewhere else.”(A4)*

Further to that, the participant explained that he believed academics would be able to go beyond their normal responsibilities for the sake of their profession and their role, rather than for the sake of the brand. The participant explained that there is a difference between institutional role and academic role, with the latter appearing as a stronger determinant of the staff’s behaviour.

*“‘For the sake of the brand’ maybe because I'm coming from organizations theory rather than marketing, I would see people do all sorts of things for their understanding of their professional role. I do various things because I'm an academic. And as an academic, I need to do that. I need to be, for example, available for a student. If a student has a question, in my kind of institutional role, it doesn't matter. It's my academic role to try and deal with, trying to answer, to try to help. So, I have those kinds of obligations, which are professional.”(A4)*

Then, the participant explained that academic staff may feel like having obligations towards the organisation that are not necessarily stated in the contract, and that academics may willingly work overtime and make extra efforts if these are important for the organisation that they care about, suggesting the importance of emotional attachment as driver of goodwill.

*“I have some obligations towards the organisation. Or, I feel I have various obligations towards the organization, which are not necessarily enshrined in the contract. And I am willing to do things. If something's needed, I can sit up in the night and do it because it's urgent. I can do all sorts of things which I cannot be formally forced to do it. Because again, I think that's important for the organization that I care about.”(A4)*

The relationship between an organisation and its brand was discussed as well, with participants recognising the challenge behind separating the two concepts. One of the interviewees

explained that an organisation and its brand do not necessarily overlap, with staff possibly feeling loyal to the organisation but not necessarily to the brand. The participant explained that, although being attached to the organisation, the fact that the brand is not clear resulted in difficulties in understanding what the brand stands for and what is the direction, with consequent difficulties in buying into such brand.

*“I think I need to separate the two things here. These are two difficult things to separate, the organization from the brand. I know the brand can often represent the organization, but in terms of the organization, I feel very strongly about it and I feel loyal to the organization. I'm motivated to work towards working strong for the organization. However, with that said, I suppose this is where it relates more to the brand. It's I'm not really sure what the brand represents, what it's meant to me and where we may be headed as an organization. So, with that, I feel positively towards the organization. Maybe not so much towards the brand because I'm not really sure what it is, what it's trying to represent.”(A7)*

Similarly, another participant explained that being attached to an organisation does not necessarily mean being attached to its brand. The participant explained that the feeling of continuity can be useful in creating some kind of attachment to the brand, although the brand itself, and its brand language, tend to identify more with a commercial entity out on the market.

*“I'd be surprised if people's loyalty and goodwill were directed towards the brand rather than the organization. (...) There is a certain feeling or there can be a certain feeling of that of a continuity, which I don't think is very well encapsulated by the language of branding, regardless of the name brand. It tends to refer to, well, a set of identifiers that can be offered up for sale and can be incorporated and the likes of it. And that's absolutely not the kind of thing that most of us care about. I mean, after all, most of the places where I've been at some point underwent some process of rebranding.”(A4)*

The participant provided some examples to support his views, explaining that whilst, for instance, in a sport context supporters may have strong feelings about the team brand and its story, rather than the actual players in the team, in an academic context staff may be more likely to accept changes to the school brand. The participant provided an example of his experiences to justify his views, explaining that, compared to other contexts, academics tend have a weaker connection to the brand. From a different perspective, the words of the participant may be interpreted as the fact that discussing new directions with the academic staff and explaining reasons behind the actions may facilitate acceptance of the changes.

*“When the school changed its name, I don’t think any of these changes were particularly shocking or important for the people in there. They might have been discussed as kind of sign of the times or, you know, things are becoming more commercialized and now we are a Business school. But it was in the sense that, since we changed the name, we’re no longer the same institution, the same group. But again, nobody was really shocked by the change. We have a weaker connection with it.”(A4)*

Having discussed the relationship with brands that appears fickle and potentially erratic, the conversation moved back to the concept of brand leadership. The participants discussed the topic of leadership, explaining its characterization as symbolic sense or symbolic focus for the organisation. Then, provided examples of organisations explaining that some successful companies have influential individuals, defined as leader, that embody the brand as well as others that does not have specific individuals that stand out, nonetheless still successful.

*“I’d say that there are so many different conceptualizations of what leadership is. But, at least one way of looking at it, would be as a kind of symbolic, having a symbolic sense, a symbolic focus for the organization, and with the leader as a representative. Very much of the branding that we see in a lot of coverage of various tech corporation. There is the notion of people who embody the brand. And so certainly that can happen and there are many organizations where it happens. There are many brands, which are very strongly bound up with founder or a significant person or a leader of some sort, which of course creates all sorts of difficulties in terms of succession. (...) Now, I don’t think that’s always the case. There are lots of other strong brand (...) where most people would struggle to find any person associated with that, even if they know that brand and they feel strongly about it.”(A4)*

### ***Managers and Leaders***

When the discussion moved onto the concept of brand leadership in HE, the participants explained that a concept of university brand leader is possible, although challenging due to the fact that often these who have the formal power to influence decisions are not necessarily the ones advocating and supporting the brand. The participants’ views suggest that staff assumes that leader should be the ones expressing, advocating and talking about the brand to the other members of staff, especially junior ones.

*“I would think that there should be a connection. There should be because the leaders will be the one wanting to express, talk about, advocate the brand to the employees, the junior. So, yeah, definitely. Yeah, there is a connection between, and I think then it takes me back to the previous question, is the reason why we feel that they deal with it and we are not included because only management is taking brand decisions.”(A5)*

Sometimes, confusion arose when the interviewee tried to identify potential leaders in academia, perhaps due to the nature of the academic context that poses difficulties in defining duties, which often overlap.

*“I think because in academia really, we don't even call head of units as leaders. We call them like the academic head of units, you know. So, for some reason, I've never thought about that, but for some reason in learning institutions, they're not managers. They're not leaders. They're academic heads. You have to be good to put a definition to that really. But it could be said that they are managers, because they manage us. So, in that sense, they are managers.”(A5)*

Further discussion highlighted freedom as a key difference between manager and leaders, suggesting that managers are required to adhere to the same regulations imposed on staff, whilst (formal) leaders are the ones creating the regulations and are free to choose to what degree follow such rules. In the participant views, even manager can be classified as colleagues when following regulations from the top.

*“I would think that a leader probably is more decisive. So, they make the rules and the regulations. They implement and probably monitor them. I wouldn't necessarily call a manager a leader in that, in the same breath, they have to adhere to the same rules as me. (...) The manager does exactly what I do, except they manage me, but they couldn't have their own rules, if you know what I mean. While leaders, I think can pick and choose. So, even if he's my head of academic unit, he still has to listen to what this university leadership is telling him. So, in the same breath, he's my colleague rather than my leader.”(A5)*

In some cases, the staff members explained that academic unit heads are the only point of contacts that they have, and therefore see them as the eventual key figure in getting information about the brand.



*“My organisation is quite hierarchical. I would normally get most of the information from my head of department. Then I guess the head of department would have somebody above communicating what to tell me and so on.”(A6)*

### ***The importance of interactions***

The participants’ words defined a key difference between managers and leaders. Leaders were seen as people of power who would show efforts in interacting socially with the staff on daily basis, with attempts to motivate the staff and convey informally to them news, opportunities and events. Interactions were identified as major requirements to classify somebody as leader, with personal, face to face exchanges seen as important and leaders that should visit the offices, chat with the staff and inspire, rather than just instruct. Similarly, the idea of communicating through standardised email was seen mostly as a functional exercise, missing the need of tailoring communications to the audience.

*“I wouldn’t say they’re inspiring. They actually micromanage through standardised emails. So, they’ll send us an email to me, just write my name and then to somebody else just writing their name, but just the same email. To me, that’s not managing. When you say they inspire, I’m expecting maybe, they’d come to my office, ask me how the day’s going, you know, what are you finding interesting. Maybe tell me interesting stuff that might motivate me. Tell me about training that is going on. Do you want to go on this conference? Do you want to publish with this and that? So, no, I wouldn’t call our academic heads inspiring. I only see them as people who give us instructions and we need to follow those instructions. So that’s why I think they are managers and not leaders.”(A5)*

Interviews revealed that participants recognise the existence of different school of thoughts about leadership, with interviewees explaining that perhaps there is not a single type of successful leadership, but rather different styles that can be adequate and successful according to the specific context they are implemented within. The participants suggested that leadership is context specific and it’s also process specific and it should be tailored to the specific case.

*“I think I understand the different school of thoughts, perspectives about leadership, you know, and I also agree that each of these different school of thoughts are right in their own. They are valid in their own right or they don't, they are not absolutely right for different contexts. So, my definition of leadership is that leadership is context specific and it's also process specific and it shouldn't be fixed. So, for instance, what makes you a good leader in this environment might make you a bad leader in other environment.”(A2)*

The words of the participants then suggested the idea that successful leadership should not be fixed, explaining that it should not predefined and imposed on people but rather flexible and capable of adjusting to the context. Once again, the idea of a social context came across, with the idea that potential leaders should interact with their subordinates and learning from them, in order to adjust to them and identify the most suitable leadership style.

*“Leadership shouldn't be fixed. You are not supposed to impose style on the people. Rather, you have to develop a leadership style that reflect the kind of followers in the situation and circumstances that you find yourself in. So that's why it's a process. So, you lead the environment. You interact with the people that you're managing, and you learn from them. And then, from such knowledge, you develop a leadership style, helping and effectively managing the followers within that social context. And in doing that you might lead from democratic style or autocratic style or blends of different school of thoughts.”(A2)*

Potential issues may occur when an autocratic style is adopted, for example, with a leader that prioritise its own views over the reality of facts and the potential followers put in a position where they either conform to it or are perceived as resisting the leadership efforts.

*“So, there are people who are just very strict. They are not really realistic. They have one idea that they strongly believe is right, and if you don't conform to that, you know, they consider you as unmanageable.”(A2)*

On the other hand, whilst participants agreed that changes in leadership would eventually affect the brand, further discussion revealed that a supportive and involving leadership style may help clarifying and reinforcing the brand message internally.

*“The brand of university has changed in the past 20 years. I've seen the change and it has to do a lot with leadership. So, we changed deans in the business school. Some of them encapsulate and push the brand further, like the one we have now as opposed to the previous one, because the current dean is more supportive and he helps and involves people more in decisions and things like that.”(A3)*

Nonetheless, being in power and reflecting the brand may not necessarily be enough, in a process of successful brand leadership. In the previous section the idea of having an authentic and realistic brand was seen as a prerequisite of internal branding success. Perceived successful leadership seem to share the same idea, especially when considering the need to ‘walk the talk’ previously discussed in section 5.2.2. In fact, academics suggest that a successful leader would practise what they preach, being the first example of what they expect from the staff.

*“A good brand leader is somebody who actually walks the walk, doesn’t only talk to talk. They actually practise what they preach. So, they are actually doing what they want you to do, in their own way.”(A1)*

Further to that, the interviewees’ words suggest that staff will find it difficult to put their confidence in leadership whose objectives are built upon aspiration, rather than a solid background, suggesting once again the need for authenticity. Also, having some kinds of formal recognitions and titles at senior level were indicated as a requirement to build credibility, especially when the titles will represent expertise in processes that the staff is undertaking or when the same titles are expected by the job applicants during recruitment processes.

*“I don’t feel confident about the leadership.(...)I’m working towards a PhD. Some of the leadership team do not have PhDs. I think, if you work in education as a senior level, you should have a PhD.(...)Because most of the staff is going through that process or because you’re in education, therefore it’s something you should have achieved. (...) I think it’s important in order to understand and support the process, as well as gaining credibility. (...) If you are somebody at senior level and you are saying, ‘we will only recruit staff who have a PhD’, but the person speaking there does not have a PhD. I think that’s not cool.”(A9)*

The idea was reinforced by suggesting that leadership’s decisions should be crafted looking at the reality of facts rather than the aspirations, linking back to the findings discussed in section 5.2.1.4. The words of the participants suggest that, in some occasions, staff may disagree with leaders’ decisions believing that they may not necessarily benefit the university/school, showing commitment towards the organisation and willingness to improve it.

*“You know, if they said, ‘we will consider if somebody doesn’t have a PhD but they’re working towards it or willing to work towards it’, then okay. But if they say, ‘they haven’t got a PhD, we won’t recruit them’. And I’m sitting there thinking, ‘you’re senior, you don’t have a PhD? What do you mean?’ So, it’s not about trust. It’s about confidence. (...) There is an old English expression. “People in glass houses shouldn’t throw stones.” And I think somebody sitting there with no PhD and no intention of getting a PhD, saying every new staff member should, I think that’s where we’ve missed the recruiting of those people. They could have been encouraged to take the PhD, but we couldn’t even interview them because they didn’t indicate it on the CV.”(A9)*

Then, the conversation was extended to the idea that the effectiveness of leadership styles may also be affected by the potential followers’ ideas, culture and beliefs, and whether those match the leader’s ones. Same ideas may be perceived in different ways due to the potential gaps in any of the mentioned elements and the context itself may give different meaning to specific actions.

*“For instance, people build confidence if they have a leader that reflect their ideas. If the leader could do certain things, and in which way also differs. This may be affected by beliefs, cultures and religions, for example.”(A2)*

Leadership was consequently seen as the capacity of responding to all the challenges despite of context, in a way that unifies the different views under a common idea. A leader that can identify challenges and problems and provide solutions be accepted despite the fact that views of the participants may be different.

*“You need to understand the key points, understand context and then it’s all about your response, really. So my definition of leadership is your response to the challenges that you are managing, the strategic response to the challenges that you’re managing.(...)People have different situations and different circumstances and the society and cultural environments are different. So you need to actually scan the vulnerabilities, the variations and the constituent of that setting and see how you can reflect those variations or look for your model that will speak to those relations, irrespective of who they are.”(A2)*

Along the different interviews, another idea that seemed to be shared across the participants is the idea that whilst management may be focused on processes, leaders should be focused on people. The ability to empower staff, inspire and support them was seen as an important indicator of good leadership, which would affect staff perception about the organisation and,

potentially of the brand associated to it. Successful leaders were identified as those who lead by example, by showing to employees how interesting and productive things could be, rather than just asking them to do such things. Another interesting idea concerned the idea of co-inspiration among staff members, where the leaders' role would consist in initiating and facilitating such process.

*“There is a skill in managing and the organization that is about allowing a particularly professional creative organization. That relies on allowing people to do things which they do well. And, from my general observation of the business schools, the ones which tend to seem very attractive to me are usually not just about individual people doing good and interesting things. You can find that in pretty much elsewhere. But it also has to be, well, with some form of leadership. (...) So, some form of, I would say inspiration, where there need to be people who inspire others to do interesting things, to do things well. So, even though I am rather a solitary person in lots of things that I do, my admiration is for those situations, for those groups where there is a kind of level of co-inspiration where people push each other to. But I've never seen that come down from a dean or a section leader or group leader saying that we should be doing things. It's always about leading by example. It's always about kind of showing how good, how interesting, how productive things can be. And I think that we can fall back onto the old idea of charisma in all its meanings.”(A4)*

### ***Freedom and Leadership***

Freedom seems to be the key factor in defining a brand leader. For academics, the freedom to act in a way that conforms own views appears extremely important. This idea appears even more relevant for academics when applied to formal leaders, since the ones in power are perceived as the ones inevitably capable of defining the actions to take. A key discussion point revolves around the idea of whether those in power believe in the brand and are actually willing to embrace it and, ideally, embody it.

*“Walking the talk, you know.(...)You should be demonstrating it from the most senior leadership all the way through.”(A9)*

*“A good brand leader is somebody who actually walks the walk, doesn't only talk to talk. They actually practise what they preach. So, they are actually doing what they want you to do, in their own way.”(A1)*

### **5.2.5.2. Brand and Informal Leadership**

Other participants interestingly noted that leadership characteristics are often not associated with senior managerial roles, but rather outstanding individuals such as successful researchers or head of groups who end up symbolising the organisation.

*“In a university, in my experience, again, as an academic, there's certainly a leader role that can be found and seen but it's often not associated with senior managerial roles. So, it's quite often not that head of, or the dean or, or anything like it, but particularly well-known or successful researchers, perhaps head group, who comes to symbolize the organization. So there are forms of academic leadership certainly, which alter how people perceive an institution, well, actually the brand.”(A4)*

Some member explained that during their normal duties they may be indirectly influencing the brands by advocating it with their colleagues. This seems to be more likely to happen when strong feelings are associated to the organisation, in a positive or negative way. For example, academic staff members that are happy to be working in a specific context may be likely to share their views naturally with their colleagues.

*“I mean, most of my colleagues, when we're talking, I tell them my views. I think this is a good place to work. I think there are opportunities here. I mentioned this and that and that. But I just do it because it's just my own way of expressing my feeling.”(A2)*

In some organisations, an interesting phenomenon seems to be taking place with the organisation recognising the importance of internal perception towards the brand and involving the staff in brand-related activities. Members of staff have the opportunity of volunteering as brand champions and including such activities within their performance review.

Examples of the brand champions' activities may involve providing feedback and suggesting directions about organisational decisions in order to help the organisation understand how such decisions will impact on the internal perception of the brand. Although the participants recognised the existence of such appointed brand champions and some activity they had been involved with, further discussion suggested that these efforts may be meaningless if the members of staff do not know about what the role involves or what is the point of such position.

*“I have a colleague who is a brand champion. So, she's a brand champion, but I don't know what she's doing as a brand champion. We had a crazy email that came out from the communications office about parking. And parking always upsets people, but it was a really badly written email. And I think this brand champion contacted the communications office the other day to say you really shouldn't send these emails and we really need to improve the communication to staff because this upset a few people.(...)We didn't get an email to say these people are brand champions, which means they will be doing this, this and that. I think it was something that was just agreed in a performance review. ‘What does it involve?’ I don't know. Go to some meetings, maybe.(...)It's a disjointed process, lack of coherence, lack of clarity.”(A9)*

Other participants interestingly noted that this is often not associated with senior managerial roles, but rather outstanding individuals such as successful researchers or head of groups who end up symbolising the organisation.

*“In a university, in my experience, again, as an academic, there's certainly a leader role that can be found and seen but it's often not associated with senior managerial roles. So, it's quite often not that head of, or the dean or, or anything like it, but particularly well-known or successful researchers, perhaps head group, who comes to symbolize the organization. So there are forms of academic leadership certainly, which alter how people perceive an institution, well, actually the brand.”(A4)*

The participant then explained that, although there may be people who embody the brand externally, the same does not necessarily happen internally, with consequent difficulty in identifying any brand leader from an internal perspective.

*“I'd say externally, probably yes. Probably there are a few people who come to people's mind when they think of who are associated with. Internally, I'm less sure. I don't know. I might be wrong, but I don't think there are people that are kind of universally looked up to, in this sense.”(A4)*

More specifically, the conversation took a very interesting turn, unveiling the fact that in a school where the efforts and the initiatives are not cohesive and linked among each other, it becomes even more challenging to unify the school under common concepts that unify it. Consequently, challenges in defining what the values that identify the school are would naturally make it difficult to recognise somebody embodying that unclear values.

*“I see quite a few people doing interesting stuff, but then I do not think that this is a very cohesive school. So, I think there's this whole lot of different strands, and probably, most of us would struggle to single out things that really unify us. And therefore, it would be difficult to define the person who don't embody that because we don't even know what they could be.”(A4)*

*“I think it's difficult to talk about embodying the brand when the brand isn't clear. (...) So, somebody might do, and I may have missed it because I don't know what the brand is, or I lacked clarity about what the brand is.”(A9)*

### ***Endorsers and Influencers***

In other cases, there may be individual members of staff that may be influential and affect the operations of staff and their views towards the organisation. Such people are usually adopted as endorsers by schools and universities, who may use their influence by giving them visibility in press releases, conferences and media.

*“I notice the same thing happening in the media. It tends to show three or four people that keep coming back to all the time. So, in our school, we have a famous psychologist. Now, some of his work is quite critical. He does work on stress and burnout and these sorts of things. And he's on the media all the time. He's very famous. He was already famous and when he got here, he got immersed with the media activities. And then, it was almost established. Let's continue that. And so, it's almost like the marketing department doesn't know much more than everyone else knows. So, he's already famous because he's on media all the time. And they just continue to reproduce him internally and externally because they know he's famous.”(A12)*

The interviews show that, although the academic staff members may recognise influence and merits to these illustrious individuals, on the other hand they may not be necessarily happy to see always the same individuals appearing on the media, believing that there are other members contributing with their work and that their efforts should be acknowledged. This would allow more diverse internal and external branding efforts, with more staff taking part in the process and contributing to their success.



*“His work is outstanding. He's good. He is a kind of a brand leader in that sense because the others will associate the school to his image. He's extremely famous. So, they rely on him and they use them a lot. What annoys certain people is that it's the same three or four people every time. It's him and a couple other people to get on the media. They do a great job, sure. But they never go beyond the same three or four talking heads. And there's a lot of interesting people in the school. They could also be doing more in that branding efforts if they would allow more people to take part.”(A12)*

Further interviews revealed the idea that more than the role of a specific individual, what would really affect someone's capacity of influencing others is linked to whether they are naturally disposed, their behaviour, ethics and morals. These factors appear to be more effective in influencing behaviour, when compared to simply label individual as 'leaders'.

*“There are people who you respect within your organization and there are people who will respect me. So, I don't it's about labels about being leaders or whatever. I think it's a natural disposition. I don't think it's not about brand or anything else. It has more to do with people's ethical and moral status and how they behave. That creates the working relationships within an organization rather than a label.”(A6)*

The interviews revealed that the roles of academic individuals can affect their credibility and degree of impact they can have on other people. Titles, capacity of attracting funding, charisma and networking skills were identified as feature useful and important in influencing both students and staff members.

*“I think title is one important element in terms of influence. Funding is important. So, how well they're working and how well their networking and they're gaining funding. And people do listen to that. I have a lot of students that I don't teach but they still come to me and say we've watched, for instance, one very high-profile academic who was a professor in our school. In TV they talked about this and that. And we admire them, and we think they're wonderful about their career. So, there is an element of leadership in a few academics that already have a really good position. And I do think they can influence others. Not just students but also staff members.”(A3)*

Further interviews suggest that brand leaders are influential individuals who associate to the brand and embody the brand. The interviews suggested that the use of 'We' rather than 'I' indicates the fact that the individual is associating the achievement and results to the school, rather than claiming them as its own, fostering the image of the institution and, potentially,

earning support and respect of the other members of staff. Also, acknowledging the merits of the academic staff in achieving the organisational goal was seen as a key step in the process, as well as involving them in the achievement of future goals and offering support in the process.

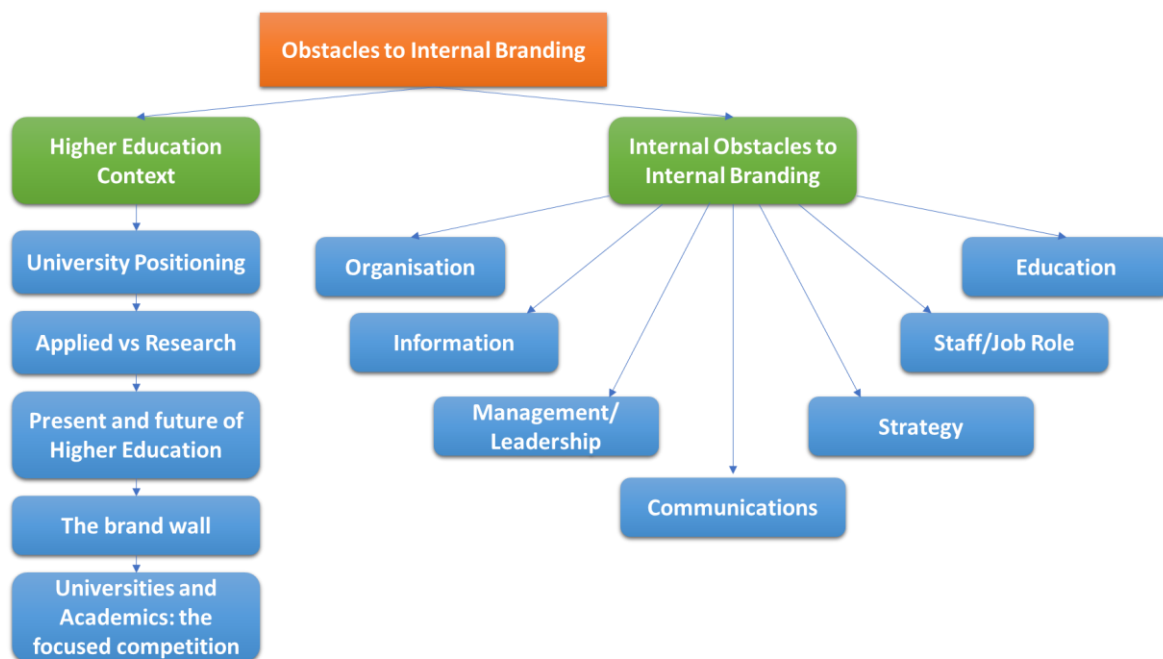
*“Yes, definitely. It's all about we are doing this. And when it's "We", it's the school. So, I've seen them in seminars and webinars, they very much promote the brand with themselves as one. So, we, as in our school, are doing this and we did this research, and this is what we got. So yeah, I do believe leadership place a very important role in terms of followers and in terms of, you know, impact.”(A3).*

*“He acknowledged the contributions of every individual in the room, the achievement of the corporate goal of the organization. He tried as much as possible not to dissociate the contribution of everyone for the achievement of this goal. He tried as much as possible also to articulate how we could achieve the future goals and how individual can contribute to it. And he presented himself, made himself read to help and available if you have challenges in meeting those goals. And he used more of "We" than "I". (...) I think that's a good example of leadership, which could be applied to branding. For me, that's the brand leadership concept.”(A2)*

The participants' words suggest that leaders may help the staff understanding the brand by 'being' the brand. More specifically, the participants explained that leaders could support the internal branding process by embodying the brand and its values naturally, rather than as a separate process.

*“So, I think they have been supporting us through workshops, through seminars. And it's not supporting us to understand the brand. It's just as members of the brand, representing the brand. That's the other thing, you know, I can't see it as being separate.”(A3)*

## 5.2.6. Section 6 – Perceived obstacles to internal branding



**Figure 5.12. Section 5 (Academics): Obstacles to Internal Branding.**

The information obtained through the interviews was extremely good to get an in-depth perspective on the daily practices in HE related to branding and, more specifically, internal branding. However, it is important to note, the participants point of views not only helped identifying the means through which internal branding can be implemented, but also exposed issues that could be seen as obstacles to a successful internal branding strategy. In some cases, the participants explained implicitly some form of obstacles occurred during the activities, whilst, in other instances, when the participants were asked directly what they believed could hinder the internal branding strategies, explicit perspectives regarding the issues were provided.

Altogether, the opinions collected were clustered in the theme '*Internal Obstacles to Internal Branding*' and divided across 7 dedicated sub-themes, in line with the model (Mahnert & Torres, 2007, p.56) presented in the literature review. The sub-themes identified concern: *Organisation; Information; Management; Communication; Strategy, Staff, Education*. However, although the model is useful to understand the internal obstacles that may affect the implementation of internal branding within an organisations, it fails in address the relationship between such organisations and its context. Therefore, a second theme has been added, namely

*The HE Context*, which addresses the external issues occurring in the HE Context and how they may hinder the internal branding process.

#### **5.2.6.1. Higher Education Context**

The first theme discussed looks at the importance of the HE Context and its role in the successful implementation of internal branding.

##### ***University positioning***

The first issue discussed concerns the difficulty for organisation in differentiating their brand proposition, arguably pre-requirement for a successful positioning in the marketplace. Universities find themselves in a time of high competition where differentiating is challenging and the possibilities are limited.

*“I think most HE institutions probably are not clear about what they stand for and what they're trying to do. And I think they are in a difficult marketplace now and having to constantly try and differentiate is hard. It's very little you can differentiate as a university. So, now as it's getting more and more competitive, it gets harder I think.”(A7)*

##### ***Applied vs Research***

One of the issues identified concerns distinction between applied and research universities. Applied universities are seen as the ones more oriented towards practical implementation, both in terms of preparation of students and research conducted, whilst research universities tend to be associated mostly to those that focus their resources on research excellence for the sake of research. The participants discussed the idea that some organisations may stand in between the two sides without taking a clear position, which would eventually affect their positioning in the market.

*“I think that in my university they're trying to represent an organization that has a high reputation for teaching and research as well as for applied preparation. It's going in a direction that isn't sustainable with all the decisions that they make. So, it's hard to say. You can only really go towards a reputation for so long until things physically change the positioning of the university. I find it a bit odd. I think there's nothing wrong with probably a bit more honest about it. (...) I don't know about the research, but there's definitely a shift towards the more applied stuff, which is fine. But you've got to know that comes with issues. You know, you are going to be looked at less in terms of the academic side, which, you know, you can't pretend to be overly academic when you're doing a lot of applied stuff.”(A7)*

In line with the doubts regarding the balance of universities between research and practice, participants explained that, in their opinion, branding is important yet useless in HE. It is important because the competitive nature of the market requires it, but, at the same time, the system itself is not ideal for such practice. Therefore, the participants suggested that potentially the lack of clarity could be attributed to the concept of university itself, rather than individual organisations.

*“It means nothing, but it means everything. I think the concept of brand of particularly universities is a waste of time. The HE sector itself, that's what needs to change. It's not about individual universities, because individual universities are chasing government initiatives and accreditation standards, which is making every university an average university. I think, if you look at HE in UK you might be wanting to say, well, 'what are we trying to do? Is this a business for commodifying education to be able to sell to the world? Or is this the centre of learning? Are we trying to deliver vocational students ready for employment? Are we trying to deliver people who can think for themselves?'.”(A6)*

The participants suggested that the idea itself of competition within HE seems to be negative, due to the fact that the increasing competition over students is resulting in universities moving away to their identity in order to increase the numbers of students applications, resulting in organisations that end up lowering their standards offering the same basic propositions rather than committing to differentiate and ensure unique value proposition, resulting in the delivery of devalued degrees.

*“And we, sort of, turned polytechnics into universities. You are trying to understand what you're there to do and you're competing against other universities and different standards. And in all that, we're all slowly being driven down to the lowest common denominator in order to be able to make as much money as we can. Until such times, so the consumer realizes that actually, the value of a degree has been so watered down. It's barely worth the paper trail.”(A6)*

Also, issues with the internal branding implementation may arise due to the fact that the context of HE itself and the nature of academic job may not facilitate branding processes. In fact, academics may have decided to work in HEs due to strong beliefs and passion towards the profession, which they may see as a vocation, resulting in a mind-set potentially harder to influence when compared to traditional businesses.

*“HE is different from other contexts, because it's a vocation rather than just a job.(...)People have come into HE because they have a particular belief about education. It's not something that you come into to make money. Speaking from my discipline, most people could make more money outside the university than inside. They come in because they have a passion for this job, because it's a vocation. That's an old-fashioned word. And the notion of trying to manage it with key performance indicators is something that goes negatively with a vocational belief. So, if we look at this from a transactional perspective, if I was here to make money, I wouldn't be in education.”(A6)*

### ***Present and future of HE***

Further reflections about HE highlighted that the difficulties in implementing internal branding in universities may not necessarily be limited to the acceptance of a commercial concept in an educational context, but perhaps having deeper roots within the overall changes affecting HE. An interesting discussion highlighted the idea that universities are nowadays lowering their standards in terms of students' grades, in order to increase passes and reduce fails, since higher numbers of passes will positively affect the rankings and, consequently, the brand. Rankings and massification of education may have led to numbering, with HEIs more focused on increasing their ladder rank than focusing on their value proposition.

*“I think maybe I'm coming from old school perspective because these days, it's about rankings, and so this is about ‘the university that is ranked number 15’. So, this massification of education has led to numbering. And I think we are too consumed with continued publishing, continued getting students through that door and making sure that no matter how bad they are, they should pass, right? So, they couldn't spell their name, but they should be given a 40%. But all that is branding. What you're trying to do is to brand yourself to say, our university is number 5. In our university all students pass. In a normal, natural environment, that doesn't happen. Not everybody can get 70 plus and that's why there is a word "fail and pass", but we don't have fails because the brand will be affected.”(A5)*

The participants argued that the concept of university is in jeopardy itself, with the focus switching from enhancing the educational aspects to improving the brand name. The interviewees believe that a more genuine approach focused on delivering good education, whilst looking after students, stakeholders and staff, would be desirable as it would organically contribute to the development of the brand without any forcing and pressuring it.

*“I think that universities now, in general, are too focused on branding. What is our branding? If we offered good education and took care of our students, of the community where universities are and our members of staff, the brand will work for itself. Would we really need all these commercial attempts? And trust me, when I went to university in my years, we just went to a university. It wasn't looking through its number. Maybe the couple of historical ones in the Russell Group would be preferred. But it was just the university because it wasn't publicized from the branding aspect. It was publicized from an educational aspect. People went to university to get a degree and a learning experience. But now, It's really about that name attached to the degree, rather than the learning process and the personal development.”(A5)*

### ***The brand wall***

The idea of university brands catching all the attention may not be limited to internal organisational effort but also to the external perception. Participants felt that the brand of the institution where they got their degree may impact upon the employers' perception of applicants, putting a label and leading to prejudices and bias. In such process, the applicants themselves may feel uncomfortable in applying to job positions in universities with higher ranks than the one where they have studied.

*“Well, I am coming from a university that is almost at a similar rank or maybe slightly lower than the university I'm at now. I think that, when I was applying for jobs, I was aware of how high I could aim before shooting myself in the foot. So, applying to more ‘middle-level’ universities, not that I'm incapable of teaching, but I was already thinking ‘they'll look at the university I am coming from and get an idea’. So, you find that you have to almost, weigh yourself before you can go to that university that you want to check whether you fit. So, I think employers do actually care. I think that when you apply for a job, they look at your CV and they think ‘oh, she's coming from that university’ and the brand speaks for itself before they could even decide whether to consider your application or not.”(A5)*

### ***University vs University, Academics vs Academics: The focused competition***

Further discussions revealed that the brand labelling process may apply mostly to universities, which may give more importance to the university where the applicant studied, whilst in private companies employers may be more interested in the practical skills of the applicants and whether their study path is aligned to the job requirements and specifications.

*“I believe brands have certainly a weight for academics. When you get a top ranked university, I think that rank is also reflected in the application process. A university may not be better than another, but because their brand is stronger they may feel legitimate to raise their standards, and demand more requirements for the same position. You may say that it doesn't help the applicant, I guess?”(A1)*

*“But I don't think the employers from private companies necessarily look at the university where you come from. I think the competition is university to university, so it's academics against academics. Private employers will probably look at what was your qualification. If what you did during your degree fits. I think employers look more at the summative qualification rather than the brand name.”(A5)*

### **5.2.6.2. Internal Obstacles to Internal Branding**

As mentioned at the beginning of the section, the second theme presented addresses the internal issues perceived as capable of hindering internal branding processes. In line with the model (Mahnert & Torres, 2007, p.56) presented in the literature review, the results will now be presented through 7 sub-themes: *Organisation; Information; Management; Communication; Strategy, Staff, Education.*

#### ***Organisation***



One of the issues identified concerns the lack of customisations of buildings and offices. The participants explained that the environment plays a role in affecting positively the internal perception of the environment and the brand, allowing the staff to subconsciously buy into it.

*“This could be anyone's office and any university. So, it's kind of a different environment. If there were, various things on the wall about our brand, what do we stand for and stuff. Then, it would probably create a very different environment and probably a more positive environment, because then you would probably, subconsciously, buying into whatever the brand is and what it is about.”(A7)*

The size of the organisation and the locations of the building may represent a challenge for cohesion. Having schools and universities spread in different locations will reduce the cohesion in terms of space.

*“When I joined the business school, it was spread over to different buildings in town. So, it was, you know, less cohesive in space as well.”(A4)*

The size of the organisation could represent even a bigger issue when attempting to convey a coherent message, especially when the brand identity is imposed by management. Leadership support was recognised as a way to reduce such issue.

*“If internal branding is something that is being imposed by management without support of leaders, it's more difficult to communicate it coherently in a large organization.”(A6)*

Such coherency and consistency of the message may be lost also due to the multiple departments and teams involved in the branding efforts, which may convey different messages misaligned with each other.

*“I think the biggest obstacle is actually where you've got a marketing team, digital marketing team, communications team, a brand change management team, and they're not joined up. So, you don't get this people singing from the same hymn sheets. You get different messages from different places and you need one consistent message.”(A9)*

Another issue that may arise concerns the fact that the university brand may be built around students but not necessarily staff. For example, a brand that promotes diversity may be reflected within the diverse student population. However, if this does not apply to staff as well, the staff may feel not taken in consideration and, in some cases, if the values are linked to the integration of members of staff within the internal culture and community, this will negatively impact on

their sense of belonging, previously identified as an important prerequisite for buying into the brand.

*“I think that we live in a very diverse environment. Things have changed in the last years. Years ago, when I went into academia, I probably was one of the only ethnic minority. So, I think, linking to branding as well, from a university perspective, we are teaching students that are so diverse. They come from all different ethnicities. But I think that that's not reflected in the staff that we have. And I think that as well impacts on branding. In the sense that if you're the only black, if you're the only Asian, if you're the only Hispanic, yet you go in the classroom that is full of people of different ethnicities, the students will wonder why is that not reflected in the staff that is teaching you. Then, for the staff, when you go into meetings as well, that becomes an issue if you're surrounded by people who are all from a different ethnicity. Nothing wrong with that, of course, but in that I won't see a community for me. It will affect my sense of belonging. I won't necessarily feel I belong there.”(A5)*

If the brand only represents students but fails in representing staff, the staff members will hardly identify with such brand and not feel confident about advocating it since they will not feel reflected in it. The ethnical representation was seen as important to facilitate a sense of belonging.

*“I think that maybe the university should start looking into employing staff that will be reflective of the diverse student population that they teach. (...) for two years that I've walked around these corridors, I've not seen a diverse population, you know, representation.(...)So I think that to me, the brand shouldn't just be representative of one segment and if we are talking about internal branding, then it should start with representing the staff. (...) Then that way, I can go and advocate it to other people.(...)This is one of the factor that I think that impacts on how I feel about the brand, is that it does not represent me.”(A5)*

### **Information**

Arguably, awareness towards a brand and its values could be considered the main requirement for any branding effort to succeed, since not knowing about them would result in the staff acting according to their own beliefs and opinions.

Some of the participants were not aware of the brand values, identifying an issue in either awareness or understanding of those.

*“To be honest, I don't know the values offhand as I would have to find them on the Internet.”(A2)*

The participants explained the importance of being aware of the brand and its values clearly, identifying the lack of awareness as a potential obstacle.

*“Another thing would be that staff just simply may not know about the brand, because that could be a problem with people that are doing their own thing innocently without realizing that maybe they should be doing something different, instead.”(A8)*

Lack of clarity of information may hinder the delivery of messages. The information provided should be clear and try to clarify the benefits for the staff.

*“Some people always wants to understand ‘what does it mean for me, how does it affect my job’.”(A2)*

In some cases, the lack of clarity may be at the roots of the internal branding efforts, which will inevitably result in a poor implementation, since the core message to deliver is not clear itself.

*“If you try and implement internal branding and you don't know what the brand stands for and what the values are, then it's going to be a very poor implementation, isn't it? It's not going to make any sense and it will not profit the university at all, which may be where we have little evidence of internal branding because no one knows what it is that should be communicated. I think it's the key problem.”(A7)*

The participants explained that visual efforts, as well as any kind of communications, would be pointless if a lack of conceptualisation of the brand subsists. Without clarity, the efforts will result in ambiguity ending up confusing the staff about what is expected from them.

*“I really don't think you should be pushing and promoting a brand internally if you're still not sure what it stands for. So, I think it's not a visual problem. I think it's more of a lack of conceptualization about what the brand is, what the brand stands for, and what we need and we want to stand for to be influenced and direct behaviour.”(A7)*

Further to that, lack of clarity may result from staff not being able to access the information. If no measures are taken to ensure an efficient way of conveying information, the brand message may not reach the staff.

*“I think the next obstacle, it's just that lack of clarity. You've mentioned these little brand booklets. I haven't seen them, but we are going through a lot of change with our offices at the moment and our pigeonholes, I don't even know where they are at the moment. They have been moved, I think, four times in the last four months. And it may be that I have something in there, but I need to find out where the pigeonholes are to go and find that information. So, I think there are obstacles in accessing that information.”(A9)*

When discussing the link between brand and organisation, the participants explained that staff may have strong feelings towards an organisation, but that does not mean that the same will happen to the brand. The reason for that is that there may be a disconnect between organisation and brand or perhaps the brand may not be clear or distinctive enough for staff to buy into it or seeing its directions and priorities.

*“I don't think it's necessarily that there isn't a match, because I think that the brand and the organization are both reflected in that. It's not clear what it is that they want to do and how to distinguish and differentiate themselves from the brands of other universities, for instance. So, I think, there is not that fit. There's a disconnect there. I don't know if that's inherent to most universities and most HE providers, or whether it's clear what their brand stands for, especially in terms of a differentiation perspective. In a way, other universities are the same. I think that most universities probably want that brand in the same way or that brand does reflect very similar things. And it's never overly clear what its priorities are or direction is.”(A7)*

Information appears as a key facilitator for staff involvement with the brand. Similarly, lack of information, and events where such information can be conveyed, will result in staff not feeling confident about sharing opinions and actively contributing to the brand.

*“I'm also worried that I might get involved into something that I'm not fully conversant with because I haven't been briefed or haven't been consulted, haven't been spoken to about. And so even if I want to get involved, I'm also cautious about what I could be jumping in, you know. (...) I need to be careful.”(A5)*

### **Management/Leadership**

Across this chapter, the importance of management and leadership for a successful internal branding effort has been discussed. Consequently, issues with management and leadership will eventually affect negatively the implementation of internal branding.

One of the points discussed in the interviews concerns the fact that in some cases members of staff may not even be aware of the people at the top of the hierarchy who potentially hold higher levels of influence over the brand, with their interactions limited to their immediate manager/leader.

*“To be honest, beyond my head of academic unit, I don't know, or deal with, anybody else above me.(...)I could meet them in a restaurant or maybe even in the cafeteria and not recognising them.”(A5)*

According to academics, defining the brand at the top, and then communicating it, may not be the most preferable approach since it will be perceived as an artificial implementation and create distance.

*“The fact that is a top-down approach has a key role indeed. I feel there is a distance there, is not something coming from the roots but rather artificially implemented.”(A11)*

Participants explained that having formal brand activities (eg. formal training and communications) may not be necessarily useful. Instead academics suggested that what could actually affect positively the perception of the brand would be feeling supported in teaching and research. Formal brand activities may help provide information but not necessarily driving behaviour.

*“The only thing I can think about that's really important for me is support and even funding support, supporting of your research, supporting of your teaching. Everything we need to do for our job, I see that as being part of internal branding. So it's that support that I see as gaining my attention.”(A3)*

In line with this, the type of leadership and the brand management process may represent an issue when those are not supporting the academic staff and involving them in the brand processes, resulting in staff feeling disappointed and in a sense of exclusion. Academics believe that, since they are the first point of contact of students and the one delivering the brand directly, not involving them in the branding process will result in a missed opportunity for improvement. At the same time, not acknowledging the role of the academic staff and giving them the possibility of sharing their views, will arguably reduce motivation and sense of belonging, previously discussed as key elements of successful internal branding implementation.

*“Junior staff or lower level staff such as myself, my colleagues, even cleaners are stakeholders of a university. We are not involved. So this is a very much top-down leadership style rather than grass root. Just almost a triangle. There's the leader at the top and that leader chooses what information reaches us, and we do as we're told rather than do you have something to bring to the table that we could implement. So, the first obstacle is that I, as a lecturer, am the one who is in day to day contact with the students. As a lecturer, I am the one who is on the grass root level dealing with day to day life. But I'm also the one right below the ladder who is not looked at, who is not recognized, who is not seen, who is not heard.”(A5)*

Lack of identification of people interested in hearing about constructive feedback, or lack of interest itself in hearing such feedback will result in discouraged staff members who will lose interest in contributing. This will result in a disconnect between top management and bottom level staff, where information is only passed in a top-down approach, with no contribution from the bottom. This will result in frustration for the staff, especially when the original message sent from the top loses coherency, getting influenced by the views of the middle-management involved in the top-down delivery.

*“Even if I had feedback, I don't even know who to send it to because it's not a clear-cut channel. You've got this feedback but if you don't know who to send it to, or if this person doesn't listen there is no point and things will not improve. So, I think the first obstacle is that there is a disconnect between top management and lower level staff and therefore what we say doesn't go to them. But what they say comes down to us and in the middle somebody add its own spin and sometimes it's very frustrating because you get mixed messages.”(A5)*

Further to that, since the leadership style may not seek staff opinions, this may not only result in staff losing interest but even in them getting afraid of sharing an opinion that is not requested.

*“There is no personalization where you feel that if you said something, somebody will respect it and take it on board. That leads to mistrust. So, I'll be very worried or cautious to give my opinion without being considered being rebellious or being the odd one out.”(A5)*

Potential issues may occur when an autocratic style is adopted, for example, with a leader that prioritise its own views over the reality of facts and the potential followers put in a position where they either conform to it or are perceived as resisting the leadership efforts.

*“So, there are people who are just very strict. They are not really realistic. They have one idea that they strongly believe is right, and if you don’t conform to that, you know, they consider you as unmanageable.”(A2)*

Regardless of leadership style, across the interviews it emerged that leaders should be the ones ‘walking the talk’, meaning that they should be the ones behaving in line with the brand and, ideally, embodying and reflecting the brand values. Failure in doing so would constitute an obstacle for the process of staff buying into the brand.

*“I think other obstacles are walking the talk, you know, this is what we were saying. You should be demonstrating it from the most senior leadership. It should be demonstrating that all the way through.”(A9)*

In fact, if the brand values are not reflected in the actions and practices of the school, the actions will result in an imposed identity then rather than a natural process.

*“There is the idea that the school is committed to creating sustainable solutions to organizational business problems facing our society. But at the same time, there’s also a certain distance since I do not believe in imposed identity in that way. And I do believe that there are pressures on the school as well as within school that are neither reflected in the language of the brand, not necessarily in the practice.”(A4)*

Problems in internal branding implementation may arise when there are changes of formal leadership within the organisation. Participants explained that often the arrive of a new dean results in a re-branding exercise due to the fact that the dean may want to make an impression and show how things will change. However, once they decide to change job and leave their role, a new cycle starts with the brand continuously being reshaped by the new ones in charge.

*“The only time the business school changes is when they get a new dean. And the dean wants to make their mark. So, they change something. They change the structure. They change this or change that. Um, and then they stay there until they leave and get another job. And then the process starts again with the new dean.”(A6)*

### **Communications**

One of the issues identified, when looking at communicating internally the brand message, concerns the quantity and quality of communications.

Participants felt that there may be too many emails that lacks relevance to the receivers who may feel not reflected in the messages, which will result in the staff looking at the emails and ignoring or deleting them.

*“For me, primarily, communication is a problem. Information comes, there's too much information but information that most of the times I find not necessarily irrelevant, but there's no connect with me, because where is me in this information? I don't exist in it. So there's too much information, but information that, to some extent, I click and delete, click and delete. And also it does not seek my opinions. It just tells me what to do. So I am not part of it at all.”(A5)*

Even in case of relevant information, if there are too many communications efforts, in terms of emails, slogans, blogs and newsletters, the huge quantity of communications will result in staff not actually engaging with any of it.

*“There's probably too much effort. You are so bombarded, with emails with the latest slogan and the latest developments and blogs etc. There is so much that we actually don't take any of it.”(A1)*

Academics explained that the focus may be too much on quantity of communications, rather than actual quality and relevance.

*“It would be better if it was much more focused and reduced in quantity and increased in quality.”(A1)*

Similarly, training and communication events may be created with the purpose of development for the staff. However, these activities may could actually hinder such development by taking too much time that could have been otherwise invested in experiencing the institution and the nature of the new role.

*“Whether the training program helps or not, I would say, it probably hinders the development of staff. I don't think you'll learn anything of value from it. This is based on what I heard, as I haven't done it. I was part of the generation that didn't have to do it. But all the junior staffs complain about it quite bitterly. It's too long. And they'll say what I said earlier that it's not real, you know, they're trying to tell you what to teach and how to teach, but you already know. You're already an expert in it. If you have already been hired, you are supposed to have already those requirements. You don't need it, right? Let people get on with it. Let people shape it themselves. So, there's a lot of that for junior staff.”(A12)*



People will have different preferences in terms of communications, and therefore, in order to successfully convey the intended message, organisations should adjust to the personal preferences of the staff.

*“How the implementation is being communicated as well, because people have the propensity to use different models of communication. Some people are very efficient with the use of their emails. Some prefer a call on the phone. Some, if you bring them into a meeting to discuss things, will take them more seriously. So, we should review the preferences of our staff in terms of communicating such.”(A2)*

Furthermore, internal communications about the brand and its values can become inconsistent, representing a gap between what is expected by the staff and what is actually communicated.

*“But I also think that in others organizations, some of these values behind the brand and the identity of what your organization stands for, I think sometimes, when it comes into internal communications and internal branding, it can be become a bit lost, a little bit inconsistent I would say. I think there's a difference between what you would expect and what actually happens.”(A7)*

The message delivered may not be consistent due to the multiple teams involved in brand-related communications which may deliver their own interpretation of the brand.

*“I think the biggest obstacle is actually where you've got a marketing team, digital marketing team, communications team, a brand change management team, and they're not joined up. So, you don't get this people singing from the same hymn sheets. You get different messages from different places and you need one consistent message.”(A9)*

Participants explained that, if there are different brand messages delivered internally, the result will be the sum of different perspectives and views, which will lack consistency and coherence. Misaligned internal communications will eventually cause the brand perceived internally to become confusing and unclear.

*“Normally within organizations, obviously, when you're doing a lot branding, especially internally, a lot of things are created and designed and developed by people who are probably not in marketing departments. Therefore, the communications and the branding that comes, that circulates internally is often inconsistent because of this. So, you would get a lot of branding issues that kind of created from different perspectives, different ideas, so that you will not get coherent message. So, there'll be different things you deal with where you come in contact with certain brand internally, and you would feel that there's different messages and different values and the different identity, different touch points I suppose.”(A7)*

In fact, the ones defining the brand at the top of the hierarchy may have a clear aim, but if those involved in the delivery are not on the same line, it will lead to different interpretations and inconsistent messages.

*“If you come into contact with the brand at different touch points throughout the inside the organization, and that's just one person thinking in a direction whilst the others do their own branding, then you're gonna have mixed messages. How would different people interpret it? Well, I think it's very important. But I don't think it's necessarily a problem with just this organization. I think a lot of organizations have similar situations.”(A7)*

Since communications can have a role in shaping the behaviour of employees, academics suggested that inconsistencies in communications will eventually lead to inconsistencies in behaviour, failing the purpose of internal branding.

*“I think, realistically, when everybody has its own views of the brands at different levels, it creates inconsistent messages, which makes it harder for an employee to understand or buy into what the main direction and the main purpose of an organization is. When you've got inconsistency across internal branding actions and communications, you get inconsistencies in behaviour. So, employees work in different ways rather than being more coherent.”(A7)*

Further to the communications from the top, participants suggested that HE institutions should attempt to promote also horizontal communications across members, in order to ensure that staff is aware of what is happening in the organisation and can engage with it. Such process would foster the sense of community in staff members.

*“I think communication is very important. And a lot of institutions I've been at, including this one, have been struggling with building layers of communication between people so that we know what all of us are. Because of various time pressures, participations in research seminars, tends to be fairly low on the list. So, it's very likely to have lots of marking and therefore not go to a research seminar, and therefore not learn what interesting things my colleagues are doing. And therefore, I am losing on something, on finding what I have in common with them and so on. So, fostering ways of exchanging interest, ideas and, and kind of reports of what we're doing is probably very important.”(A4)*

Finally, although some tools were recognised as useful in communicating the values, their effectiveness was regarded once again as strictly linked to honesty and reality of the messages conveyed, suggesting authenticity as a determinant of success.

*“You can put the poster up on the wall saying, here are our values. If they are not real, people just won't take it seriously.”(A12)*

Such limited effectiveness is not only limited to authenticity but also continuity. Although individual activities may be useful, the views of the participants suggest that regardless of how effective a specific communication effort may be, it will be meaningless if it's not part of a continuous and coherent long-term process.

*“There's as a little booklet and that went around. Again, there'll be lots more going on when there are new things, like the new buildings. Or if there is a relaunch that will be sort of spoken about because often is associated to funding. So, for example, the university got a new sponsor, a big donor. When that happened, they did a lot of marketing related to that. And they tried to talk about a history of the school, and it wasn't bad. It was reasonably well-researched, and they have images, texts from the 1960s on lists, the history of the school. It's wasn't bad. But... what was it for? I mean it had no effect. Or at least, I don't know what effects it was supposed to have. It's so much like, it's a ritual. Let's make a booklet. Let's update the webpage. But no information on why they are doing it, or how it's linked to us.”(A12)*

### **Strategy**

One of the issues identified, concerned how realistic the set strategy should be. The participants explained that creating an unrealistic and overambitious strategy will create an issue to the staff, due to the impossibility of achieving it.

*“One problem I can think of is if the strategy is over ambitious. So, if they've set a strategy that is just simply unrealistic, then it's going to be a problem for everybody to achieve it.”(A8)*

The organisation should acknowledge the interest of the staff member and recognise their efforts in contributing to the decisions. Ideally, communications should seek honest involvement and listen constructively to opinions of those involved. The organisation should build an environment capable of allowing and facilitating constructive contributions. Failure in doing so will result in staff being not considered and questioning the worth of their contributions, potentially ending up seeing their own efforts as having a negative impact rather than a positive contribution.

*“And I found out that when someone asks a question, and that question triggers a comment, if the comment does not align with the view of other people you may see some of them feeling offended by that comment. (...)What's the point of that? I mean it's just, that's his own view, you know? It happened to me.(...)And when I shared my view, the person that was proposing the model was like offended. Do you understand? When I left the meeting, I just decided that I'm not going to contribute anymore.(...)So I made up my mind because I don't want to make more enemies.(...)And, so, in the subsequent meetings I will not talk about things. I will just agree to avoid negative reactions and leave as soon as possible.(...)The environment is not conducive for you to share your view.”(A2)*

In line with that, a top down approach from the leadership may not be the most suitable strategic approach, due to the existence of strong independent sentiments within members of staff. Involvement and inclusion were regarded as strategic decisions to tackle the issue.

*“It's not sufficient for the formal leadership to come with a top-down approach in order to attain certain goals, because the organisation itself, and the members of the organisation, they work in a way where there are strong independent sentiments and therefore, in order to catalyse these sentiments together, inclusion may be a good strategy.”(A11)*

An interesting concept that emerged across the interviews revolved around the fact that the brand strategy should be capable of reflecting the changes happening internally. Ideally, the brand strategy should be short-term oriented and flexible, rather than long-term oriented and static due to the complexity of the organisation. Considering the high staff turnover, with staff members continually changing, the brand strategy should be constantly updated to reflect the

new members' opinions and inputs. Failure in doing so would result on the creation of a brand outdated that will not be relevant for the new staff members.

*“I think that the staff turnover in the industry, which these days is higher than most industry, should also reflect in the branding strategy of any institution. So rather than having a brand that has a very long life cycle, you should also ensure that your brand is subject to review, periodically, maybe every couple of years, five years or every ten years to reflect the turnover rate in your staff, so that when the old staff and the way they engage in the challenge in developing that brand have left, you'll have opportunity for new staff to review the brand. And so, with that to reflect their own realities, perhaps you could have a consistent brand that reflect the reality. Would reflect the aspiration of your staff, irrespective of how diverse or how frequent they go and come.”(A2)*

Another problem identified concerns the budget allocated to branding. Organisations may not see the value of investing resources in internal branding efforts. Branding as a whole may be seen as not necessary in some organisations, with the internal implementation valued even less than the external one.

*“Other problems that organization may face are probably resources, the lack of resources. People don't want to spend an awful lot of money on it. I think a lot of organizations probably see internal branding as a waste of resources. I know a lot of organizations, especially the big ones, would see the importance of it. Some organizations need to see the importance of branding. Generally, not to mind internally. So, yeah, I think finances are certainly one of the problem that could arise that prevents it from happening.”(A7)*

The interviews suggest that even though the availability of financial resources may be a crucial factor in promoting or hindering internal branding implementations, what seems to hold even a major importance is the motivation to carry out such efforts, which links back to the just mentioned need of seeing value within internal branding. Motivation will lead to commitment to the branding strategy, which will result in more efforts, in terms of both time and finances invested.

*“The motivation is a key thing. I think if you're motivated, because you understand the importance of internal branding, then you're probably going to be more committed to ensure that these things happen. You're going to spend more time and resources in making sure it happens and implementing it.”(A7)*

Motivation is not important only for the one implementing internal branding, but also to the academic staff subject to such implementation. Participants explained that if management carries out activities of formal control, these may result in the staff behaving in a certain way, in line with the review factors. Nonetheless, the participants explained that imposed behaviour will only result in academic staff feeling forced to carry out some actions, without a genuine motivation to do so, defying the purpose of internal branding as a natural approach.

*“People tend to behave in a certain way because they will be checked. They may do something because they will be monitored on that specific aspect rather than because they feel like doing it.”(A6)*

Findings suggest that perhaps the trend in HE is too oriented towards controlling and less about actually empowering and developing the staff. Expecting staff to complete task and duties without enabling them with necessary knowledge and guidelines will result in staff perceiving negatively the management processes, eventually affecting their motivation to be actively part of them.

*“I think that there's also just poor management of staff. We're not really equipped, you know. When you equip people, you manage people well. If you lack that basic equipment, in knowing who to report to, in terms of issues, where you need support or you need to contribute. I think that's poor management. So it was not just lack of communication, poor communication, people are just micromanaged, but without the constructive feedback element.”(A5)*

The interviews suggested that having staff whose values are aligned to the brand will certainly facilitate the process of staff members buying into the brand. Recruitment was identified as a useful approach, although it was explained that job applicants may show convenient behaviours for the interview, which not necessarily reflect their real values and opinions. Organisations should be capable of filtering the applicants with a genuine alignment to the brand values from those who are only pretending to improve their chances of getting the job.

*“If internal branding is actually about how people behave and what are their values, and moral and ethical choices, that's something which can be assisted through the recruitment process.(...)About the interview process, the organisations should be able to filter out those people who are just saying these things and those people who actually have those beliefs.”(A6)*

Trying to develop motivation and facilitate changes by offering rewards may not be easy, due to the fact that members of staff may be happy to retain their current position, and enjoy higher levels of freedom, without being necessarily interested in career progression, which would involve more limitations.

*“Trying to incentivize people is a bit more difficult in the university because there are different things. You know, we are not here to make money. It's not about making money. So, I don't want to do all the administration and monitoring and control everything, which is what in my institution you need to do if you want to progress in your career. (...) Many academics prefer to have less pay and be able to do what they enjoy.”(A6)*

Further to that, looking at the other perspectives, rewards useful for career progression may not necessarily influence behaviour. In fact, academic staff may behave in a way only to fulfil the promotions requirements without necessarily buying into the brand-related beliefs.

### ***Staff/Job Role***

One of the potential issues identified, when reflecting about people involved in the internal branding process, concern the fact that individual aspirations may not reflect the values and objectives of the school. This kind of issue could occur both at top level (eg. management) or bottom level (eg. academic staff).

*“The disconnect between individual aspirations and the objectives of the university could actually be a problem. This may be about the ones in charge having their individual views and not reflecting the school interests, or the staff that have their beliefs that are not aligned to the school values.”(A2)*

Also, staff may not be interested in processes where they cannot see some kind of added value, such as personal rewards or recognition for career advancement and promotions.

*“If what you're telling them to do does not have an element of value, added either to them personally or to their career in terms of promotion, then they may not be motivated to do their part.”(A2)*

*“If it requires extra efforts from the individuals involved that will not necessarily be rewarded, then there might be some kind of resistance on the paths of those implementing.”(A8)*

Furthermore, the demanding job role and limited time may force academic to be selective about what events they can actually attend.

*“We have so many of these things (...) but there's no time. So, I think that's very important. You talk about branding and you talk about all of these different elements and you will pin it down in some sort of figure, but one academic, unless they're Superman or Superwoman, cannot be involved in everything. You have to choose, you know, what you can do.”(A3)*

In some cases, the job commitments added to the personal life may completely prevent staff to take part in brand related activities.

*“I think our time as academics it's very demanding and we need to be good at every aspect of what we do and it's just finding that time and especially, for me being with a kid, doing all these extra activities in terms of branding sometimes it's too much and I choose not to.”(A3)*

Furthermore, individuals may not buy into the brand. Reasons for that may be some negative experience or the feeling of not being treated fairly by the organisation, which will result in them not being interested in supporting the brand.

*“There could also be the problem of the individuals themselves not really buying into it. So maybe they have some kind of grievance, for whatever reason. And so, they're just not really keen on doing anything to promote the brand.”(A8)*

In some cases, the participants felt that people are made in a certain way and it is very difficult to change their beliefs. The participants argued that the only way to affect behaviour is through control processes, such as the creation of key performance indicator aligned to the intended brand outcomes, explaining that even doing so will not necessarily change staff beliefs, values and morals.

*“Internal branding is trying to change people's values, morals and ethical position. Well, you can't do that. People are predisposed to behave in a certain way. You can't expect to change that. The best that they can do is monitor(...)and control different key performance indicators, but it won't necessarily change people's innate behaviours, values and morals.”(A6)*

Although KPIs and rewards were identified as factors capable of affecting behaviour, at the same time, the participants highlighted limitations for approaches involving such factors, explaining that the establishment of KPIs and the strict control of it would not be taken positively by the academic staff, who may see their job is a vocation and consequently dislike the idea of being constrained by standardised parameters.



*“People have come into HE because they have a particular belief about education. It's not something that you come into to make money. Speaking from my discipline, most people could make more money outside the university than inside. They come in because they have a passion for this job, because it's a vocation. That's an old-fashioned word. And the notion of trying to manage it with key performance indicators is something that goes negatively with a vocational belief. So, if we look at this from a transactional perspective, if I was here to make money, I wouldn't be in education.”(A6)*

In line with this idea, the common idea that emerged across the interviews is that academics identify themselves with the role of academics rather than members of staff of a specific organisation.

*“The biggest one, well, I think it's that relation to professional identity and professional career. In that, for various reasons, a lot of us identify as academic is much more strongly than as members of a particular university. And then we move around quite a lot. Uh, so people, particularly successful people, quite often change their places of employment. And, in that regard, we see a lot of commitment and engagement with the profession. And I feel much more strongly about it than about a particular university or a particular business school that I know I might leave in a year or two or three, depending on career prospect.”(A4)*

### **Education**

Participants suggest that having a background and previous experiences related to branding may help understanding the importance and the usefulness of the concept. The words of the participants suggest that if members of staff lack brand-related knowledge and experiences this could hinder the understanding and acceptance of the topic.

*“I believe I'm looking it from the position where I know a bit about branding and marketing. It gives me the insight. If I was from another department within the business school that could have been a big issue.”(A7)*

Also, having past experiences linked to past branding efforts may lead to staff not trusting new branding implementations. Consequently, those implementing new internal branding efforts should take in consideration what has been done in the past in order to reduce the negative effects of past activities and recognise the existence of prejudices among the staff.

*“It’s not the first time that there are branding activities. The thing is they start big but quickly lose interest. So, every time, you wonder whether something will change or will be the usual rhetorical exercise.” (A10)*

### **5.3. Summary**

This chapter presented the results from the semi-structured interviews, explaining the process adopted to identify the relevant themes for the current study. The chapter was structured trying to emphasize a flowing narrative, allowing the reader to move easily across the sections. The analysis of academic staff and management staff interviews were presented separately in the current chapter, in order to offer a coherent view of each group’s perspectives and identify the emerging dimensions from each stakeholders’ group. The next chapter will now provide joint review of the data presented for both groups, linking the results to the literature review and the original research questions of this study.

# CHAPTER 6

## DISCUSSION

### 6. Introduction

The current chapter discusses the findings of this research, linking back to the literature review and the proposed research questions, in order to outline how the results of the study address the different questions. The original aim set for this research consisted of exploring Internal Branding in the HE context from the perspective of UK Business Schools' academic staff and management. This chapter will clarify how the study fulfilled the intended aim, discussing the result in conjunction to the proposed research questions. In order to ensure a flowing narrative, the research questions (RQ) of this study are included below to remind the reader of the areas that will be addressed in this chapter:

- RQ1) What does internal branding mean to academic staff and management in a Business School context?
- RQ2) How does the academic staff of a Business School support the internal branding strategy?
- RQ3) How do Business School's academics and management perceive internal branding training and communications?
- RQ4) How do Business School's academics and management perceive the role of leadership in the internal branding strategy?
- RQ5) What are the factors that may hinder the internal branding strategy of a Business School?

Within this chapter, each section will be tailored to a specific research question, in order to clarify the contribution of this study for each of the areas investigated.

**The first section** addresses RQ1, exploring the *meaning of internal branding for management and academic staff*. The areas discussed are: the perception towards branding of the participants; the perceived gap between external and internal branding efforts within organisations; the concept of brand architecture within HE; the different approaches of creation and delivery of the brand; the way in which organisations define the values of their brand; the existing gap between aspirations and reality when defining the brand; the role of external

pressures and incentives, such as accreditations, on the creation of the brand and the brand values.

**The second section** relates to RQ2, focusing on the *academic staff support of the branding strategy*. The section discusses the staff understanding and support of the brand, reflecting on the topic of cynicism across staff members and reasons for it. Then the academics' inclusion of brand values into daily operations, and their consideration of the brand when dealing with the students are discussed.

**The third section** discusses RQ3, focusing on *brand training and development activities and internal communications*. Here the topic of internal branding training and development activities is discussed, identifying activities which may affect the understanding and acceptance of the brand for staff members. The same intended outcome is then explored through the topic of internal communications, with a focus on the factors that are perceived as useful in communicating the brand. Here authenticity and continuity are regarded as important factor for successful communications, and the existence of a branded environment recognised as a facilitator of the transmission of the values. Brand conceptualisation is discussed as a starting point for any kind of communications and the concept of 'freedom' is identified as a key dimension to take in account when implementing any form of communication.

**The fourth section** aligns to RQ4, discussing the relationship between *brands and leadership*, and the concept of *brand leadership*. Here an imaginary line is drawn to link the characteristics of leadership to the intended outcome of internal branding. The link is firstly discussed in general and then focused on the idea of 'formal' leadership, concerning those sitting at the top of the university hierarchy, and 'informal' leadership, referred as the capacity of individuals to show leader characteristics regardless of their role of status within the organisation. The discussion links back to the idea of freedom, which appears once again a key topic, although here discussed as the 'freedom of choice in supporting the brand', a differentiating factor between managers and leaders which potentially gives more credibility to the latter. The whole section is discussed in relation to the transformational leadership theory, here conceptualised as brand (transformational) leadership.

**The fifth section** focuses on RQ5, building upon the previous sections and discussing the *internal branding obstacles* that may arise throughout the implementation of internal branding.

Here, the first point of discussion concerns the challenges posed by the HE context itself, with a focus on the future evolution and consequences of the marketization of HE. Then, in line with literature, the identified obstacles concerning the actual institutions are narrowed down through the establishment of 7 dimensions: organisation, information, management/leadership, communications, strategy, staff/job role, experience

A map of the chapter (Figure 6.1) is provided below to guide the reader through the discussion journey presented in the following sections.

**Figure 6.1. Map of contents for discussion chapter.**



Source: developed by the author, based on the dimensions discussed in the chapter.

## **6.1. The meaning of internal branding for managers and academic staff**

The current research recognises the importance of understanding the concept of internal branding and the brand values of an organisation from both academic staff and management perspective. This study builds upon the idea that a lack of understanding of such concepts from the management perspective would affect the managers' capacity of conveying the brand to academic staff. Then, focusing on the perspective of academics, a lack of acceptance and/or understanding of internal branding may be linked to the academics' beliefs and attitudes towards the concept. Similarly, the views of academics may reveal issues with the ones managing the process, either in their understanding or capacity of conveying the brand internally, adding depth to the management perspective. The study focuses on the level of meaning of value, considering the internal branding purpose of transmitting brand values to the employees (Mosley, 2007; Whisman, 2009) and the purpose of aligning these values to the employees' ones (Punjaisri and Wilson, 2011).

Chapleo (2015) identified a lack of understanding of branding concepts among management/staff, which ended up influencing their delivery of the brand promise, suggesting that further research is required to investigate managers and academics' understanding of branding as well as potential internal branding implementations. Clark, Chapleo and Soumi (2019) maintain that "the role of internal branding as part of brand management strategy is poorly understood in the higher education context" (p.4), calling for further research IH. To address such calls, and following the idea that the literature of internal branding in universities is little and the concept requires further investigation (Mampaey, 2020), the current study aims to explore perceptions of academic staff and management towards the concept of internal branding and their institution's brand values, in order to contribute to the existing literature and to set the scene for the overall research.

The first question proposed to address such research objective is:

*1) What does internal branding mean to academic staff and management in a Business School context?*

When discussing the meaning of internal branding, both management and staff members approached the topic from a broader perspective, initially focusing the discussion the topic of brands and branding in general.

### **6.1.1. Perception towards branding**

The literature review highlighted the importance of understanding the terms internal branding and brand values for members of an organisation, as well as the fact the issues might arise from uncertainty about these concepts. Different studies (eg. Davis and Dunn, 2002; Urde, 2003; Karmark, 2005; Whisman, 2009) recognised the importance of understanding the meaning of internal branding and the values of the brand, specifying that if an organisation wants its employees to deliver effectively the brand promise, it needs to communicate to them ‘what the brand stands for’ and why the brand is different and unique (Davis and Dunn, 2002). Defining the brand clearly would help to describe what the essential brand values are, and ensuring that employees clearly understand such values would allow them to deliver efficiently what it is expected from the brand (Davis and Dunn, 2002; Urde, 2003).

Chapleo (2015) identified a lack of understanding of branding concepts among management/staff, which ended up influencing their delivery of the brand promise and consequently the positioning of the university, suggesting internal branding as a solution to reach the desired differentiation for HEIs. When looking at the results, management perspectives partially contrast with Chapleo’s (2015) findings, with the managers being in most cases familiar with the concept of branding, possibly due to the business school context. Nonetheless, this did not apply to the totality of participants. Managers were clear about the fact that branding is a process that goes beyond the visual element, regarding it as a collective concept, embracing working culture, ways of learning and communicating. Whilst management was able to easily discuss the brand and the branding processes as something inevitable and necessary, the same did not entirely apply to academic staff, supporting Chapleo’s (2015) views. In fact, the results from the staff interviews showed different degrees of academics’ understanding and opinions, with, in some cases, rejection of the topic of

branding in HE as a whole, suggesting resistances in the staff in line with previous studies (Whisman, 2009; Wearaas and Solbakk, 2009, Chapleo, 2010).

During the interviews, some academics defined brands' worth as the value they generate, focusing on a commercial outcome. These academics discussed the fact that the value of the brand of a university should reflect the degree of employability achieved by the students who decided to study there. Accreditations, certificates and memberships linked to the offered degree were seen as key points for adding value to the brand and making it attractive to the students. However, such idea of a brand manufactured for commercial purposes was rejected by other academics who saw the brand as "one with the staff and the organisation", and consequently inseparable from them. Such contrasting views highlight that opinions towards the concept of branding in HE are still disparate. A consensus on how to approach such a commercial topic applied to the education context appears challenging to achieve, possibly due to academics being either strongly oriented towards a *being* culture, where university is seen as a place to learn and far from commercial positions, or more willing to accept the *having* contemporary shift, with students turning into consumers and universities seen as places to 'buy' degrees in exchange of fees (also Molesworth *et al.*, 2009).

Indeed, personal attitudes and beliefs will necessarily impact on any individual's perspective, which may lead to different responses, including resistances to the implementation of branding (Naidoo and Jamieson, 2005; Naidoo *et al.*, 2014). The finding suggests that brand perceptions can vary across subjects, confirming Kunde (2000)'s results, who highlighted a potential issue in the fact that understanding of brand may vary according to individual perception of such brands. However, the issues may not necessarily be related to the recipients of the messages only. Further to the perception of individuals, Kunde (2000) noted that difficulties in understanding the brand can be associated to the complexity of the brand itself. The interviews with academics seem to confirm such a view, revealing that branding in HE may be challenging also due to the fact that there are two dimensions of the perceived brand, the first representing the reputation of the actual organisation, and the second reflecting the category of the university, based on the time of establishment and the long standing heritage. The literature about brand heritage in HE is limited, with very few studies focusing specifically on the topic (Bulotaite, 2003). The existing study from Bulotaite (2003) suggest that university brands can



capitalise on traditions, museum, ceremonies, old buildings and heritage, although focusing on a specific Polish HE institution. Findings of this study suggest that indeed heritage can play a role in HE branding, building upon the limited existing literature and providing insights from the United Kingdom. Academics suggested that a distinction between the so called ‘red-bricks’ and ‘post-1992’ UK universities may exist. Red-bricks and ‘traditional’ universities may be perceived as well-established and potentially ‘better’ than the other category. Post-1992 universities, seen as more recent and with uncertain reputation, and perceived as offering lower levels of teaching quality, research excellence and research funding. Indeed, Kok *et al.* (2010) observes that *traditional* universities, including ‘ancient’, ‘red-bricks’ and ‘plate glass’ HE institutions, may put more emphasis in preserving their historical heritage and reputation through higher degrees of research funding and investments whilst *new* universities, often defined as ‘post-1992’ or ‘ex-polytechnics’ may assume a more business-oriented approach, with increased levels of students recognition as consumers. The findings seem to suggest that the different orientations of *traditional* and *new* universities may affect not only the perception of external stakeholders, but the internal perception of staff members as well. Consequently, it could be argued that further to representing an asset for external branding (Bulotaite, 2003), heritage could also play a role in internal branding processes.

Nonetheless, the academics who suggested that such categories (eg. traditional, new) may create internal prejudices on HE brands, due to their different positioning strategies as seen in Kok *et al.* (2010), noted that they do not necessarily reflect reality. In fact, the findings suggest that the internal perspective of staff members, who experience an organisation from within, may be actually more positive than the external perspective affected by potential prejudices. Such results suggest that universities’ brand perception may be strongly influenced by the way in which academic staff experiences such brand, in line with Dean *et al.* (2016).

The idea that external image of a university may not reflect the internal perception of staff members, suggests that there may be a gap between the brand perceived internally and externally. Findings of this study suggest that the reason may be due to different brand approaches towards internal and external stakeholders. Indeed, this may cause an issue in aligning the brand promise to the actual delivery, an essential step for ‘successful’ branding, as widely observed in the literature (Tosti & Stotz, 2001; Davis and Dunn, 2002; Schultz & de

Chernatony, 2002; Punjaisri and Wilson, 2007, Whisman, 2009; Chapleo, 2015; etc.). The next section explores the gap between internal and external brand efforts, observing management and academic staff perception towards such efforts.

### **6.1.2. Internal branding vs external branding**

Across the interviews on the concept of internal branding as topic for the current study, the discussion eventually moved to a concept of ‘external’ branding.

In some cases, internal branding and external branding were identified by managers as separate concepts, whilst in others were considered the same concept targeted and tailored to different audiences. While the concept of ‘external’ branding appeared clear to managers, when asked about internal branding the same participants found it difficult to identify a coherent concept and suggested that different ideas could be associated to the topic.

The conversation with academics revealed a similar position towards the ‘internal’ and ‘external’ orientation of the branding activities. Internal branding presented some perplexities for staff members, who questioned the need for it, whilst external branding potential was acknowledged more easily, and its usefulness identified in recruiting students and academics. Some academics explained that external branding can make sense as long as the portrayed brand is authentic and based on staff and student views, nonetheless acknowledging the challenges in doing so, due to the large number of academics and students, with the risk of being broad and potentially perceived as superficial and lacking substance. On the other hand, in such cases internal branding was not acknowledged as useful by the participants, who explained that, by working in the institutions, academics would have their own idea about it, without requiring “identity claims by the marketing function”. The idea of being forced to support views appears to be one of the biggest reasons for staff to not trust internal branding processes, with freedom seeming to be a key topic to be considered when implementing any kind of action in HE, including internal branding. Such idea may be seen as consequence of the recent increased managerialism in HE, which limited academic freedom and autonomy (Kay *et al.*, 2010), with performance appraisal and administrative tasks given priority over traditional academic duties, such as teaching and research (Davies and Thomas, 2002). Following from previous studies (Davies and Thomas, 2002; Kay *et al.* 2010), the findings of

this study suggest that successful internal branding comes from not pressuring staff and rather promoting a certain degree of freedom by naturally involving them in the activities of the school. Such approach would allow the staff to *live the brand* (Ind, 2007) in a natural way, achieving a deeper impact when compared to a more superficial support of the brand. The approach would represent an example of what Karmark's (2005) defines norms and values communication based perspective, resulting in management trying to act on a deeper level, influencing employees' attitudes and behaviour through the control of the underlying experience, feelings and thoughts (Kunda, 1992). Indeed, Mitchell (2004) noticed limited effort in such approach, observing that organisations tend to focus too much on changing the way in which the employees act, without putting enough effort in translating the brand values into real-life experiences. Potential reasons for the limited efforts towards the internal audience may be linked to the primary focus of HEIs towards external audiences. The findings show that often universities may consciously decide to focus more on external branding, rather than internal, due to financial reasons. External efforts may be recognised in some cases as a priority over the internal ones, perceived as necessary to make the brand attractive and have the external audience (ie. Students) engaging with the organisation and, eventually, provide funding through tuition fees. In fact, within the findings, external recruitment was highlighted as a priority for business schools.

The efforts appear strongly directed towards the students, who otherwise may not select the university, whilst limited towards the staff, with some managers' belief that a basic information pack at the beginning of the new role and the everyday working life will eventually convey the brand. In fact, the initiatives seem to be mainly focused on preparing the new staff for the working duties, benefits and overall expectation, with limited efforts on the values behind the job. Nonetheless, some managers recognised that increasing branding efforts internally would be useful and impacting positively the university strategy, suggesting the acknowledgement of the benefits associated to internal branding implementations. In line with the different perspectives of managers towards branding, different approaches to internal branding within universities have been identified. The approaches are discussed later in section 6.1.6.

### **6.1.3. Defining the brand: aspirations vs reality**

When looking at the process of creating and defining the brand, the views of managers suggested that such task can prove quite challenging due to the gap between actual position and desired position in the market. Managers explained that often the formal leaders initiating the branding process attempt to portray and create a brand that does not reflect what the organisations stands for, but rather what the person in charge wishes it to be, identifying in this an issue for successful internal branding. In fact, managers explained that a branding process built upon desired position, rather than reality, is deemed to fail due to messages that do not reflect the actual organisation as well as the impossibility of delivering a brand promise that often exceeds the possibilities of the organisation. Managers' words suggest that, without a realistic and authentic brand, the already challenging process of "getting staff behind the brand" (Chapleo, 2010. p.180) can get even more complicated and difficult to achieve.

#### **6.1.4. The role of accreditations in the branding process**

Findings suggest that accreditations may be extremely important in shaping business school brands. Managers' opinions suggest that accreditations play an important role in shaping the identity of the school, and, sometimes, represent the main driver for changes in the schools.

From the words of both managers and academics it appears that universities, and in some cases even more individual schools, tend to shape the brand in a way that is desirable for intended accreditation-related purposes. More specifically, academics' views suggest that accreditations are key influencers in driving organisations towards specific directions, due to the necessity of university to comply with the required criteria. Consequently, the activities of academic staff appear to be heavily regulated in order to have them reflect the desired criteria, with staff being discouraged to undertake significant changes that may stray from the path. Although disliking the idea of imposed actions, academics addressed their acknowledgement of the harsh competitions between HEIs, explaining that the process that the business school was going through is pretty much non-negotiable and imposed from the outside. Different bodies that are affecting the way in which universities and school are managed and accredited were identified across the interviews, with academics explaining that the different types of external pressures ultimately impact on the nature of HE institutions, limiting what universities and schools can be.

Before moving to the implementation of internal branding, the next section will discuss further branding in HE, focusing on the topic of brand architecture, recognised in the literature review as important yet challenging in the context of universities.

### **6.1.5. Brand Architecture in HE**

One of the most interesting points identified in this research concerns the concept of brand architecture, a challenging concept when applied to universities.

Linking back to the literature review, brand architecture has been defined as: “An organising structure of the brand portfolio that specifies brand roles and the nature of relationships among brands” (Aaker and Joachimsthaler, 2009, p. 134). Organisations with multiple levels need to decide whether to use one single brand for all of them, or rather individual brands for each level (Aaker and Joachimsthaler, 2000; Olins, 2017).

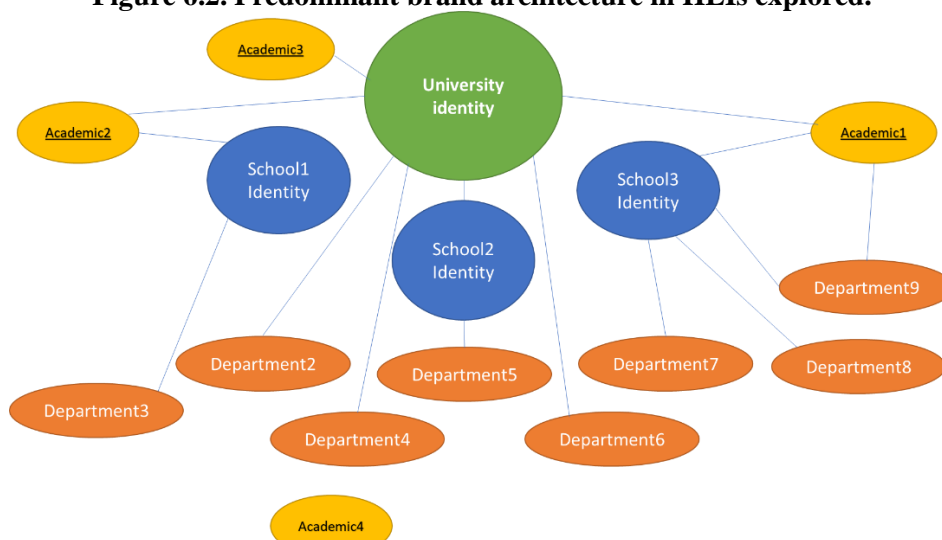
The study from Spry *et al.* (2018) introduced in the literature review is possibly the only one to date that has attempted to investigate in-depth the concept of brand architecture in university setting, noting that internal stakeholders may show different levels of attachment to the university brand and department brand. Although not focusing specifically on brand architecture in HE, few more studies observed that departments may show sub-brands characteristics when targeting specific external audiences (Chapleo, 2015) and that the existence of sub-brands in services may pose obstacles to the brand (Rahman & Areni, 2014) as it may lead to brand dilution (Devlin, 2003; Hsu *et al.* 2015). The limited literature available in the field of brand architecture in HE was identified in the literature as a clear gap that needs to be explored, and the same Spry *et al.* (2018) argues that further research is necessary, suggesting schools as a potential context of research in its recommendations. In line with previous studies recommendations, this study explores brand architecture in the HE context, contributing to the existing knowledge by adding perspectives of managers and academics towards university brands. When discussing the brand of their organisation with the interviewees, managers identified the existence of multiple brands within an institution, at university and school level. However, when discussing the concept with academic staff, the discussion acquired even more depth, adding two more potential layers to the brand hierarchy:

a) a potential middle level at department level, in line with Spry *et al.* 2018), and b) a new level which may be regarded as potentially the most powerful of the hierarchy, the ‘academic’ brand. The findings suggest that the studied universities seem to be increasingly attempting to shift towards a branded house (BH) architecture, whilst being adopting a hybrid architecture. Hybrid architectures are usually a mix of strategies, and in the case of universities, the architecture appears as a mix of branded house (BH) and house of brands (HoB). As discussed in the literature, branded house (BH) refers to a single overarching brand, which unites company and its business and products with a common identity (Uggla, 2006). On the other hand, houses of brands (HoB) were discussed as brand architectures that create distance between the corporate brand and the businesses and products (Petromilli *et al.*, 2002) avoiding associations with corporate brand (Muzellec & Lambkin, 2008). Whilst Gabrielli & Baghi (2015) maintain that HoB can be effective when the organisation is highly diversified, the findings suggest that the universities studied would always present some degree of association across courses, departments, schools and university, consequently moving away from the HoB architecture. The increasing centralisation efforts that emerged from the interviews with managers suggest that universities may be trying to create a cohesive identity centred around the overarching university brand. Nonetheless, schools in particular appear to ‘resist’ such efforts, with managers explaining the need of recognising some level of independency to the schools. Therefore, the finding suggests that the studied universities are ‘stuck’ in a hybrid architecture, where some efforts are made to create a central identity but those are faced with resistances, resulting in negotiations across the levels and the adoption of mostly visual contents. In one case, for example, the manager explained that the school wanted to adopt a logo different from the university one, and therefore the university developed a school logo embedding key features of the university, in an attempt to satisfy both parties. Two figures, shown below, have been created to address the architecture that appeared predominant at the time of the interviews (Figure 6.2) and the architecture that the universities appear to be pursuing (Figure 6.3) show the current situation that the universities appear to face, and the shift that they seem to be implementing.

Figure 1 below is intended to give visual representation of the findings. However, it is important to clarify that the labels such as “Academic1” are only for the purpose of discussion and not related to the coding adopted in the Data Analysis section.

Within the figure is possible to see that finding suggest the existence of multiple identities within a university. Such identities may exist at university, school, department and even academic level. As the figure suggest, the study uncovered that there may be different types of academics. For the purpose of the demonstration, the four types have been indicated with the labels ‘Academic1’, ‘Academic2’, ‘Academic3’ and ‘Academic4’. In line with the figure the Academic1 type may identify with department, school and university. Academic2, instead, may feel close to university and school identity, but not necessarily department identity. Academic3 may identify with university identity but perceive distance from school and departments. Starting from this point, the possible combinations can increase in a mix-and-match process (eg. an academic may feel close to a department but not necessarily to school and university, and so on) with each combination complicating the process of achieving a consistent identity. However, regarding the possible perceived identities the most interesting which was identified in this study is possibly the one labelled as ‘Academic4’. The study found that some academics may not identify with any of the institutional level, but just with their own role, since they may see their job as a vocation and a passion, that comes before any kind of organisational commitment. This point will be discussed shortly in section 6.1.5.2.

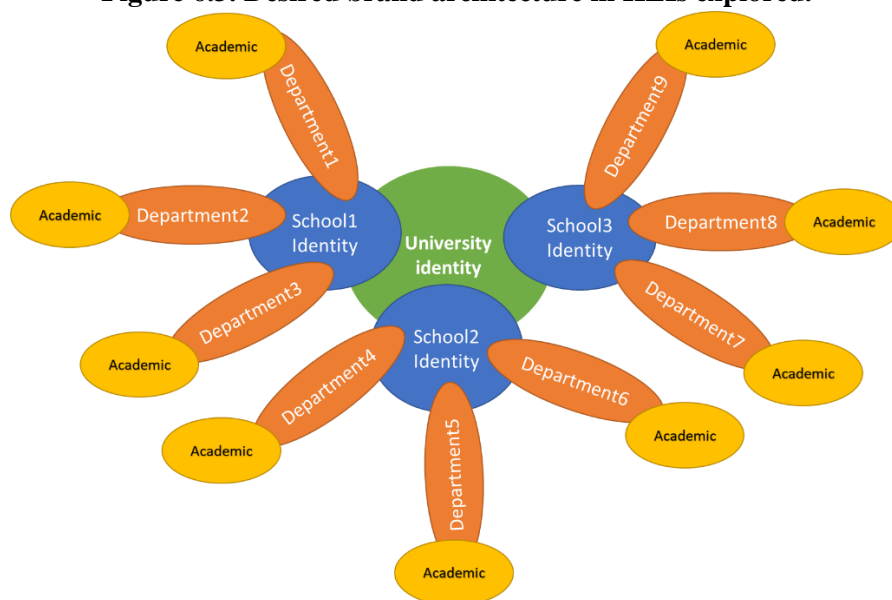
**Figure 6.2. Predominant brand architecture in HEIs explored.**



**Source: developed by the author, based on the findings.**

To follow on the discussion around brand architecture, the findings suggest that whilst universities may be adopting an architecture in the style of Figure 6.2, they may strive to achieve a BH structure in the style of Figure 6.3. Figure 6.3 shows a cohesive identity where all the levels are aligned to the central brand. In such architecture, academics would not feel different degrees of identification at different levels, since there would be one identity shared at all levels.

**Figure 6.3. Desired brand architecture in HEIs explored.**



**Source: developed by the author, based on the findings.**

Indeed, whilst a brand architecture in the style of Figure 2 may provide some benefits, which will be discussed in the next sections, achieving a consistent identity across all levels may be challenging, if not impossible within HE, due to the specific complexity of the field. The complexity of brand architecture in HE is presented in the following section, to provide further insight on the points discussed.

### **6.1.5.1. Overarching brand and sub-brands: University brand vs School brand**

When discussing the organisational brand, some of the managers highlighted the fact that the business school did not have a specific brand and was acting as an extension of the main university brand. In some other cases, instead, whilst still tied and associated to the university, the schools seemed to hold a higher level of independence, although sometimes only at visual branding level.



In one of the cases discussed, for example, the academic staff preferred the business school logo to the university one. Consequently, the university rebranded the logo and created a version for each school that contains elements of the main university brand. The approach was interesting as it shows that universities may acknowledge staff opinions and adjust to the staff preferences, rather than asking the staff to adjust. Indeed, this provides a clear example of challenges that may occur when attempting to centralise branding efforts in HE, whilst suggesting potential solution to such challenges.

In different cases, the gap between overarching brand and school brand was identified at a deeper level than visual, with managers explaining that a difference between university and school brands exist. In disagreement with the aforementioned studies (Devlin, 2003; Rahman & Areni, 2014; Hsu *et al.* 2015) that saw the potential gap between levels as a weakness, some managers suggested that the fact of having two different brands may actually result in a strength due to the dedicated positioning of both levels. Other opinions seemed to favour a more cohesive approach, although acknowledging the challenging situation, suggesting that, regardless of weakness and strength associated to the eventual distinction, schools simply cannot have their own independent brand as they are ultimately part of the university brand, in line with Hemsley-Brown and Goonawardana (2007) who supported the need of brand harmonisation between different levels. Furthermore, such views seem to also confirm to the results from Rahman & Areni (2014), with the managers' opinions picturing the academics feeling part of the schools but not of the university, also identifying an issue of competition between the different schools. Such competition was perceived as negative by managers, who explained that contrasts across schools should be avoided, and schools should be ultimately collaborating towards the success of the university they belong, or are affiliated to. In some cases, management behaviour appears aligned to Rahman & Areni (2014), with managers explaining that the internal branding efforts were intentionally focused at university level, rather than school level, in order to centralise the outcomes towards a central cohesive brand. Even in those cases the efforts of the university seemed to be aimed at incentivising joint efforts towards the brand, whilst respecting the individuality of the schools. In fact, all the studied universities seem to recognise the need to give some degree of independence to schools and avoid forcing brand policies upon them, with the degree of independence varying across

institutions. Further to that, the issue of not necessarily identifying with the university identity appears not just limited to those managing the business school, but rather extended to everyone who is part of the schools and may not identify with the university brand. Such results confirm what reviewed by Spry *et al.* (2018) who, in line with previous studies, suggested that the identity of a HE institution equals the sum of mixed subcultures.

When discussing the same concept with academics, the academic staff explained that the type of organisation posed a problem for a consistent internal branding process. Academics appeared confused by university and school's brands due to their position as formal employees of the university but their actual daily working environment of the business school, suggesting that, in line with Rahman & Areni (2014), the intentional use of two separate brands may not be ideal as it would ultimately confuse the staff. Challenges in encompassing a consistent brand in HE were identified by academics in the existence of multiple layers expecting and claiming different things about the brand, which eventually could cause ambiguity and lack of clarity. Therefore, supporting the discussion with managers, academics' words as well seem to confirm the existence of subcultures within universities (Harris & de Chernatony, 2001; Sujchaphong, Nguyen & Melewar, 2015; Spry *et al.*; 2018), nonetheless further clarifying the issues connected to such mix of subcultures. In fact, academics' words help adding a new piece to the puzzle, explaining that the main issue in such multileveled structure lies within the resulting lack of consistency across the messages of the university central department, schools and different departments. Such a situation would inevitably hinder the capacity of conveying a coherent message, with academics explaining the difficulty of supporting something that is not clear.

Some academics identified the existence of a sense of identity within the business school, although recognising the difficulties of identifying clearly with it due to the multiple brand perspectives and inputs occurring within the same school that would inevitably undermine clarity and coherency. This point suggests that having a clearly defined brand, which is consistent across the internal point of contacts, would facilitate the creation of a sense of identity in academic staff. In some cases, academics did not express a strong opinion towards the multiple brand layers, showing a flexible approach where they would identify with the brand of either school or university according to the context. Other participants explained that

although they may identify with both school and university, they may feel primarily part of the university, due to their feeling of being part of a larger whole. Such idea of ‘choosing a side’ between school and university may be also induced by the actual organisation, with the two levels projecting different, and sometimes incompatible, messages. Academics expressed their disappointment towards the mission and vision statements that, at different levels, sometimes moved in different directions, making it difficult for the staff to identify with the brand, especially when considering the expectations of coherence across the levels. The divergent positions between universities and schools, with misaligned mission and values statements, may result in contrasting opinions within academics, who, according to personal views, may feel closer to either school or university brand. The entire section seems to suggest a need for coherence and alignment across the internal branding efforts. The findings suggest a need for consistency across university and school brands and, in the event that the two brands may differ, a necessity of having values integrated at both brands level in order to reduce eventual contrasting positions.

#### **6.1.5.2. A further level: the ‘academic’ brand**

If employees do not totally understand what are the brand and the brand values of their institution, ending up reflecting their own values instead of the university’s one (Jevons, 2006) a high risk of failing the brand promise of the institution arises, with consequent danger of damaging the credibility of the brand (Stensaker, 2005). Further to that, even understanding the values may not necessarily mean accepting and sharing them. Previous studies (He & Balmer, 2007) noted that staff may have a strong interest in shared values, suggesting that the actual values of an institution should ideally incorporate those of the staff, along with any eventual external contribution. The reason for that can be found in the nature of the academic roles, as well as the way in which academics perceive themselves. Indeed, academia is a challenging environment.

When looking at the internal structure of universities, Middlehurst and Elton (1992) recognised the existence of “divided loyalties in HE, where academic loyalties to the discipline are normally much stronger than those to the institution” (p.257). Along these lines, one of the most interesting results identified in this research, which was either implied or clearly discussed across the totality of the interviews with academics, concerns a new layer of identification for

the academic staff: the academics' identification with the profession, also seen as a vocation, which transcends any universities and schools' boundaries. Such findings support an existing argument about the fact that many teachers may regard their career as a vocational choice (Education and Training Foundation, 2015). Arguably, this may represent one of the key aspects to take in consideration when implementing any kind of internal branding activities. Academics explained the weight of such layer of identification by defining clearly the existing difference between committing to the profession and to a specific organisation. A significant gap was identified for academics, who find themselves juggling between an almost lifelong commitment with their vocation and a temporary engagement with the temporary organisation. Such idea suggests that, considering the strong academics' identification with their role, attempts of involvement for the co-creation of shared values (HE & Balmer, 2007) may help bridging the identified gap, supporting Dean *et al.* (2016) who suggests that brand meaning is generated as a result of co-creation processes. In line with this, and taking in account all the mixed opinions towards university and school brands, the next section attempts to clarify further how managers feel towards the creation of brands and the involvement of internal stakeholders within the process.

#### **6.1.6. Different approaches for brand creation and internal branding implementation**

When asked about the best approach in creating the brand, managers showed different opinions. In some cases, some managers strongly believe that the organisational brand should encompass the history of the university and its positioning in the market, supporting Chapleo's (2010) results that suggest that organisational brand stems from "a collective view of culture and a way of thinking from the early years" (p.177). However, other managers appeared more focused on the present, deeming the inclusion of the staff members' perspectives as a necessary requirement for a successful brand. In order to appraise the interviewees' opinions, a definition was provided, and the participants were asked to express their thoughts. The definition provided is presented as follows: "Internal branding can be defined as an internal process that, through the engagement of employers with employees, enables the latter to understand and internalise the brand values, allowing them to align their behaviour to such values and deliver the brand promise in a coherent way".

The answers show that some managers were not particularly fond of the idea of organisations formally influencing staff behaviour, explaining that instead a link between internal branding and organisational culture established through synergy across the organisation would have been preferred. The main source of disappointment with the definition came from the managers' disagreement with the suggested level of engagement, which saw employers and employees as distinct sides of the process, rather than collectively engaged. Although the need for a collective approach was shared by some managers, the challenging nature for such implementation was also addressed.

After being asked about their opinions towards the concept of internal branding, the managers were asked how they felt about the actual implementation of internal branding activities and whether they regarded such implementation as successful. Some managers identified flaws within the implementation of internal branding, explaining that the phase of creation of the brand is essential pre-requirement of any internal branding process.

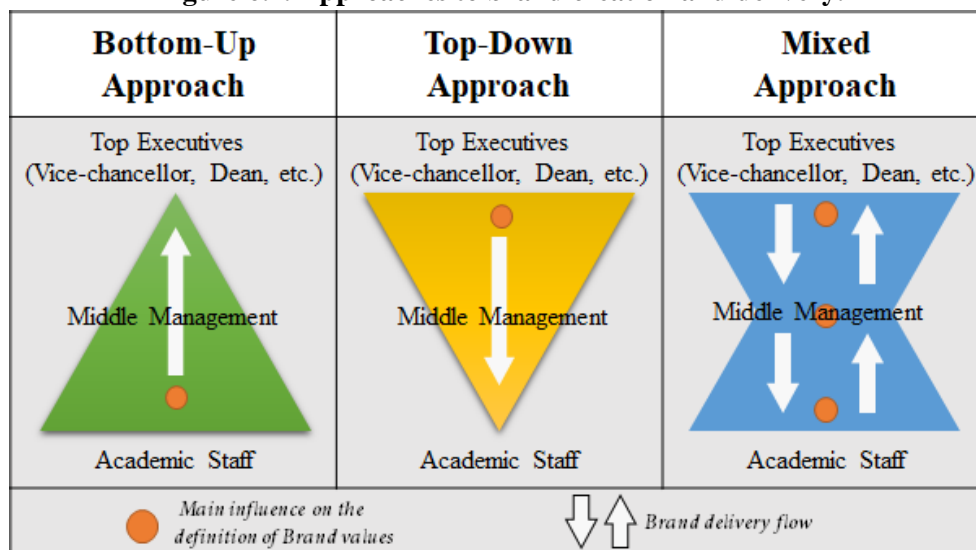
In fact, in order to carry out internal branding actions, indeed brand has to exist first. Several participants indicated that their schools were going through, or recently had, a rebranding exercise.

#### **6.1.6.1. Brand Creation and Co-Creation**

Previous research (Jacobs, 2003) observed that, in order to achieve employee participation and support in the branding efforts, staff should be actively involved in the design of the branding programme. Indeed, whether a new brand is created or the current one is relaunched, organisations need to decide who will be taking part in the decisions aimed at shaping the brand.

The current study explored the approaches adopted by business schools in creating the brand, identifying distinct approaches driven by different opinions of the initiators towards the process of internal branding and co-creation of the brand. Three main approaches were identified, below presented (Figure 6.4) as '*Top-Down Approach*', '*Mixed Approach*' and '*Bottom-Up Approach*'.

**Figure 6.4. Approaches to brand creation and delivery.**



**Source: developed by the author, based on the findings.**

The approaches are now individually discussed, and the main points of each approach are outlined.

### ***The Bottom-Up Approach***

Some schools seem to adopt a fully inclusive approach, attempting to involve the totality of the staff and valuing the opinions of the individual members through a clearly organised process.

The key points identified are:

- All members of staff involved in the creation of the brand. Brand derived from the staff
- Staff and middle management opinion extremely valued
- Efforts in co-creating the brand as well as co-deliver it
- Belief that without being involved from scratch in the creation, staff would not feel connected to it

Involvement of staff is regarded as important and the participant recalled efforts to ensure a joint effort in the shaping of the brand. In similar cases, the values and interests of the staff were aligned to the aspiration of the school, which facilitated the creation of a cohesive brand. It can be argued that this facilitated the positioning of the school which, according to the interviews, managed to attract further members of staff whose interest were aligned to the brand.

### ***The Top-Down Approach***

If the bottom-up approach held the belief that involving all members of staff was a necessary requirement for building a brand, some managers explained the impossibility of implementing such inclusive process.

One of the main reasons addressed was the challenge behind satisfying the disparate individual opinions. Time was identified as a further constraint, with limited timeframes potentially inadequate for the task. The approach seemed to be built around a different perception of the internal branding process, which can be resumed in the following key points:

- People at the top (Vice-chancellor, deans, etc.) defining the brand;
- Little or inexistent input from middle management and/or staff
- Efforts in delivering internally the brand, rather than co-creating it
- Belief that the employees should automatically buy into the brand

By looking at the data results, the perspective towards internal branding seem to influence the belief towards the efforts necessary to implement a successful strategy, with the difficulty of including everybody in the process seen more as an inevitable limitation rather than an obstacle to overcome.

Some managers recognised a trend in top-executives having this kind of one-sided approach to define and communicate the brand. Nonetheless, whilst a number of managers believed this type of implementation was necessary or inevitable, some identified limitations in this approach, deeming it to fail that due to its non-involving nature. The reflection was extended to the nature of the HE context, identifying further challenges linked to the fact that employees tend to work for the same institution for many years experiencing different management efforts and, eventually, losing trust towards management efforts.

### ***The Mixed Approach***

When looking at top-down and bottom-up approaches, these could be seen as the extremes of a spectrum going from a point A, with huge efforts to include every single member of staff to a point B, with very limited efforts of inclusion and the decision making process restrained at the top. However, possibly due to the drastic position of both approaches, a more balanced

approach has been identified which could be positioned in between the two previously mentioned. Such approach has been defined as the Mixed Approach, since it touches on areas from both sides in what could be seen as an attempt to reconcile the two extreme views. The key points of this approach have been identified as:

- Brand created by involving representatives from each department to provide influential input
- Middle management as spokespeople having the power to involve the staff
- Moderate efforts in co-creating the brand as well as co-deliver it
- Belief that departments' representatives speak for their members and consequently those would buy into the brand

### *Is there a preferable approach?*

The joint findings of managers and academics suggest that, where possible, a 'bottom-up' approach would be preferable to deal with the challenges of HE, since it would allow the staff to be actively interested in the process, potentially reducing cynicism and promoting involvement. The findings suggest that the 'top-down' approach, although being the most common potentially due to the increased level of managerialism in HE, may be the least preferable for internal branding implementations. Reasons for that can be found in the fact that, although the academic staff may not openly oppose the approach and even accept it, such approach may create distance between management and staff, who would feel excluded from the process with consequent low involvement. Indeed, a bottom-up approach could be difficult to implement due to the challenges posed by the high number of staff, whilst a top-down approach may be easier to implement but fail in involving the staff. Whereas the two approaches may be regarded as not ideal, due to the respective limitations, a 'mixed approach' may offer a more balanced alternative. In fact, through such approach, would allow a higher degree of involvement, compared to the 'top-down' approach, whilst offering a more manageable alternative of staff views, compared to 'bottom-up' approach. Indeed, involving the staff appears to be a very important step, with Celly and Knepper (2010) explaining that universities should make efforts to involve the staff in order to achieve for what Chapleo's (2010) regards as "getting staff behind the brand" (p.180). In this chapter, the perspectives of staff towards their involvement in the branding processes will be discussed. However, in order



to present the situation fully, academic staffs' understanding and support of the brand needs to be explored, since such understanding represent a prerequisite for any supporting behaviour (Judson *et al.*, 2006, 2009). Academic staff's understanding and support of brand values are discussed in the following chapter, with a focus on the role of involvement.

## **6.2: Academic Staff Support of the Branding Strategy**

The second question addressed in this research concerns the perceived academic staff's understanding and support of the branding strategy, in the form of behaviour and commitment, from the perspectives of managers and staff members.

This section discusses the existence of relationships between internal branding and brand supporting behaviour in HE and explores the nature of such relationship. The ways in which internal branding efforts may succeed, or eventually fail, in developing brand supporting behaviour are observed in this study, as well as the reasons behind academic staff's interest in supporting the brand through eventual incorporation of brand values in their daily operations.

The question proposed to address the identified gap in the literature is:

*2) How does the academic staff of a Business School support the internal branding strategy?*

### **6.2.1. Understanding the brand to support it**

The first area discussed in the previous research question concerns the actual understanding of the brand form staffs members. Indeed, without understanding the brand, supporting it may be very difficult for staff members as also suggested by previous studies in universities (Judson *et al.*, 2006, 2009), which note that there is a positive correlation between the employees' understanding of the institution's brand and related values, and their adoption of such values in their daily work practices. The findings of this study suggest that academics may not have a full understanding of the values, although some degree of uncertainty about the values may be extended to managers as well. In fact, although all the managers seemed to be somehow familiar with the brand values, most struggled with listing the exact words chosen to define such values and felt more confident with describing them instead. In most cases, the managers seemed to believe no difference existed between brand values, mission statement and vision

statement. Indeed, Jaworski (1988) argued that communicating the values through vision and mission may facilitate their understanding and Urde (2003) noted that brand values are often directly linked to such mission and vision. Nonetheless, the fact that managers may not be able to consciously distinguish among brand values and organisational mission and vision could identify an issue in understanding which may potentially affect the way in which the values are communicated to the academic staff.

When looking at the academic staff side of the process, the findings from this study suggest that some managers may hold the belief that, upon taking a new academic role, new staff should be aware of the school/university brands and should be acting in line with these. However, concurring with Kunde (2000) although a new staff member may be aware of the brand, the individual perception of the staff member will not necessarily align to the intended brand image, and may still require some aid and clarification. In fact, Kunde (2000) observed that the capacity of understanding of brand may vary according to individual perception of the brand. Such an idea seems to be shared by the interviewed managers, whose words suggest that the background of the specific academic members may have an impact on the brand understanding, with some areas of expertise or previous experience capable of facilitating the process. This perspective seems to share the same view of Burmann and Zeplin (2005), who acknowledged the diversity of backgrounds across an institution, suggesting that the brand messages need to be comprehensible by a wider audience despite of their background, rather than only those with a marketing background.

Managers' assumptions that staff should be automatically aware of the brand values was denied by the academic findings. In fact, although the managers may have in general a clear idea of the values, such clarity slightly faded when discussing the same concept with academics. More specifically, academics' words suggest that, although the staff may be aware of what their school 'stands for', as also observed by Chapleo (2015) their recognition of brand values may not be guaranteed and vary strongly across individuals, ranging from a complete recognition to a total lack of awareness of brand values. In very few cases academics were able to clearly identify the brand values, suggesting that academic staff tends to be able recognise some factors that define their organisation and makes it different but may struggle to associate specific concepts or terms. In line with previous studies (eg. Spry *et al.*, 2018), the current research

suggests that reasons for difficulties in recognising and identifying clearly the brand values may be linked to some degree of cynicism in staff members and their difficulties in actually believing in the values, seen as not necessarily authentic. Academics' reasons for such cynicism and disconnect are regarded by the researcher as a key topic requiring investigation. Since degrees of cynicism have been reported by previous studies (Whisman, 2009; Waeraas and Solbakk, 2009, Chapleo, 2010, Spry *et al.* 2018), but reasons behind it have not been uncovered, the next section explores views and opinion of academic staff and management, attempting to add a new piece to the existing literature.

### **6.2.2. Reasons behind cynicism**

As previously noted, the existing studies (Whisman, 2009; Wearaas and Solbakk, 2009; Chapleo, 2010; Spry *et al.* 2018) recognised resistances and forms of cynicism in staff, although not investigating the reasons for such resistance. To contribute to the existing literature, this study collected management and staff opinions towards the reasons for such resistances. In the words of managers, lack of support may be caused by academic staff tendencies to be independent and not particularly inclined to get involved in areas outside of their specific interests. Such diversity in research areas and individual interests was seen by managers as challenging for standardising approaches.

Discussions with academic staff provided a deeper insight on the situation, revealing that their suggested cynicism may be due to concrete reasons and be consequence of past experiences, supporting the views from Mahnert & Torres (2007). The first point recognised as a potential reason for resistance concerns the recently mentioned need for an authentic and trustworthy brand. Staff may be reluctant in believing in the brand and its values if the university's claims about the brand are not honest and not reflecting the reality. There may be gaps between university brand claims and reality, as clearly identified in the example of an organisation built around the values of ethical involvement and social responsibility, whilst being unethical and not caring about the wellbeing of the employees. Academics' words suggest that organisations' attempts to portray a brand that does not reflect reality will certainly result in failure and, further to that, may lead the staff to question the organisation's actions and integrity, due to its questionable efforts in portray an image different from reality.

A very interesting point was identified in relationship between brand and organization. Academics' words suggest that, although there may be unclear branding efforts and uncertainty about the nature of the brand and values, staff may still undergo a conscious effort to support the brand due to its attachment to the organization. Similarly, findings suggest that disappointment that staff members may show towards the brand and the branding efforts could be due to their desire of improving the process and have a clearer direction to head towards. The findings suggest that loyalty to the organisation can be regarded as an indicator of willingness to accept and support the brand.

#### **6.2.2.1. Reducing cynicism through involvement, whilst facilitating support**

Across the several interviews with academics, it was extremely interesting to learn about the branding processes and the involvement of the academic staff in such processes, since the degree of involvement seems to affect staff perceptions towards the brand (Whisman, 2009; Hemsley-Brown and Goonawardana, 2007).

When evaluating the academic staff perception towards their involvement with the brand, the results were extremely interesting as they unveiled the fact that decisions about the brand can affect the perceived degree of involvement of the staff, with positive outcomes when the academic staff opinions are reflected in the brand decisions, due to the staff feeling considered. Academic staff seem to appreciate the opportunity of providing own opinions, despite of the fact that they may not be reflected in the final creation of the brand. Such idea of staff appreciating the opportunity of providing their opinions was confirmed in most of the interviews. Nonetheless, the participants' words suggest that although the academic staff members are keen to share their opinions, they also recognise the difficulties of an all-inclusive approach, outlining a critical perspective towards the topic, and potentially a flexible position towards the outcome of the process. On the other hand, interviews suggest that not being involved in the process of creation and development of the brand would result in staff not feeling part of the process, with consequent feelings that their views are not important and there are not many expectations from them. The disappointment appear to increase in circumstances where students have opportunities to share their opinion whilst the academic staff are not able to, suggesting that in some instances students may have a stronger influence on the brand than academic staff. From the academic staff point of view, such process appears to be perceived as

unequal, and potentially unfair. In fact, whilst students may actually contribute to shaping the brand, academic staff may only be told what to deliver it, without really getting involved in any of the decisions made.

The relationship between brand, students and staff appears challenging in some instances. Academics suggested that the involvement with the brand may be reflected in the creation and delivery of the courses, explaining that part of that process should be based on the feedback received by the students. However, the participants explained that, for this to happen, academics' efforts should be acknowledged, and a conversation should take place, where the positive outcomes of the course are recognised and the areas for improvement discussed to agree on a future strategy. When this does not happen, the staff members will feel like numbers, simply limited to deliver the activities without any role in shaping the brand contents.

In one of the examples, the interviewed academic noted that, at the time of the interview, a rebranding exercise had recently taken place. The participant explained that the communications department shared with the staff potential logos and asked them to provide opinions and preferences. The participant regarded positively such involvement efforts, suggesting that including the staff in the brand decision will increase their satisfaction towards the organisation and, potentially, the brand. Further discussions seem to suggest that when staff opinions are not taken into account, staff may feel “not appreciated” and, in some cases, “insignificant”, arguably leading to failure in the achievement of self-actualization needs (Maslow, 1962). Furthermore, the words of the interviewees also suggested that staff tends to be interested in improving the brand and supporting the university strategy, showing commitment within academics, suggesting that some members of staff may already be “behind the brand” (Chapleo, 2010, p.180). Findings suggest that, not recognising such interest in members of staff would potentially result in a missed opportunity of involvement for the organisation.

Indeed, the findings of this study, supported by the review of the literature (DiMaggio and Powell, 1983), suggest that defining values may prove a challenging process for HE Institutions. In line with that, further to the just introduced role of staff in shaping such values, the next sections will discuss eventual influences which may affect the creation and definition of brand values.

### **6.2.3. Academic staff's inclusion of brand values into daily operations**

The danger of damaging the reputation of a HE institution is direct consequence of the high influence of academic staff. Previous studies (e.g., Naude and Ivy, 1999; Ivy, 2001) carried out in important and long-established universities show the correlation between employees and their institutional brand, recognising to such employees huge influence when representing their institution in public contexts, due, for instance, to the staff reputation, high quality teaching and research output associated to the institutional brand. In light of the important link between the reputation associated to brands and staff behaviour identified in the literature (Naude and Ivy, 1999; Ivy, 2001), this section explores the effective inclusion of brand values into staff daily operations. Managers' words suggest that academics tend to take in consideration the brand values, attempting to include them in their academic practices, such as designing and delivering courses to students. Nonetheless, this approach may not reflect the entirety of the academic staff. In fact, managers felt that some academic staff members may not be interested in supporting the brand, due to the previously mentioned issue of cynicism (See section 6.2.2.1), and consequently make no consistent efforts to include it into their daily duties. The academic context itself was identified as a possible cause due to its specific challenging setting, and, in order to overcome such issue, managers highlighted the importance of respecting the uniqueness of each staff members as an essential pre-requirement for successful branding. Managers concluded that, also due to the nature of academic jobs, some academic staff members will necessarily 'live the brand' (Ind, 2007) more than others, which links back to the challenges posed by the HE context, specifically in the roles of academics.

The same concept was then discussed with academics, who, in line with Kunde (2000), explained that the inclusion of values would be certainly related to the individual perception and understanding of the values. Following this idea, an interesting point emerged in the fact that some academics believed that the academic area of expertise of the staff may facilitate the inclusion of such values at subconscious level. More specifically, academics suggested that members of staff with a marketing-related background may have a better understanding of the brand and its values, supporting Burmann and Zeplin (2005), and that, although this may not affect their activities at a conscious level, they may still have an impact subconsciously. The words of the academics suggest that having a background related to branding may help

understanding the importance and the usefulness and, consequently, accept the concept of branding itself, confirming what Mahnert & Torres (2007) regarded as the employees' education, referring to the previous experiences of the staff.

Academic staff seem to take in account the brand when carrying out activities external with external stakeholders. The words of the academics suggest that staff may feel responsible towards the brand, with the academic members aware that their actions could affect the brand in either positive or negative way. Such link between staff behaviour and impact on the brand was previously suggested by Naude and Ivy (1999) and Ivy (2001), which, however, did not explore the staff perceived involvement with the process. When discussing with academics their role in shaping the brand, the conversations moved towards their role in external activities. When referring to activities taking place externally to the university, academics referred to the university brand, rather than the school brand. The findings suggest that the university brand may hold a stronger sense of identification at external level. On the other hand, when discussing activities happening internally, the academics seemed to identify mostly with the business school. While discussing the internal activities, the interactions with students were identified by academics as a key step of their contribution to the brand. The finding of this study suggest that attention should be paid to the academics' inclusion of values in their interactions with students. The topic is discussed in the next section.

#### **6.2.4. Academic staff's consideration of brand when dealing with students**

Previous studies (Woodall *et al.* 2014) noted that academic staff tend to spend a significant amount of time with students and establish personal relationships, with academics consequently strongly influencing the way in which students experience the university brands (Yu *et al.* 2016).

Confirming the findings from Yu *et al.* (2016), this study identified that, further to representing the school, and eventually the university, academics regard themselves as playing a key role on shaping the brand proposition, by being actively involved in processes that define the courses offer, as well as shaping the learning path of the students. Previous research (e.g., Aaker, 1996; Padgett & Allen, 1997) notes that when organisations put efforts into developing student-valued innovation and show a strong student orientation, this may result in a

strengthened brand image. The brand image is indeed an important asset, since a strong image will eventually lead to increased commitment (Davis *et al.* 2008). For example, when the brand image portrays student-driven orientation and interest in student-valued innovations, students will be more likely to stay committed to the institution and its offerings, and, ultimately, to the brand (Nguyen *et al.*, 2016). Dacin and Brown (2006) observed that the development of such this long-term commitment is directly related to the students' experience of the brand. In fact, the experience of the brand at different points will result in the student creating an encompassing brand image of the university (Dacin and Brown, 2006). Examples of factors contributing to the brand experience may refer to the quality of university facilities and quality of teaching, which will translate into students' perception of strength, value and reliability of the university brand (Nguyen *et al.*, 2016).

When asked about the influence of the brand on their daily activities, academics highlighted different processes where their transmission of the brand values to students may happen either on a conscious or subconscious level. Academics seem to believe that teaching could be certainly related to brand values. The results confirm Dacin and Brown's (2006) views, with academics recognising the importance of including the values of the organisation within the module and its delivery, although without necessarily seeing it as a conscious branding effort.

In other cases, the brand appeared more explicitly taken in consideration, with staff members being aware of their importance in shaping the brand delivery and, ultimately, affecting the brand image, confirming what suggested by Nguyen *et al.* (2016). In fact academics explained that their role would inevitably include activities where the brand has a weight, and consequently their actions were influenced by the brand and carried out with the brand in mind. When discussing the idea of incorporating the brand into interactions with students, academics highlighted the importance of presenting positive aspects about the organization. According to staff, students go through a process of identification to find their own meaning of being students and therefore, particularly at postgraduate level with short courses, academics play a key role in building and developing a sense of identity with the institution. Such idea concurs with Balmer and Liao (2007) who noted the importance of aiding the development of a sense of identity and belonging within students, as this will ultimately affect their perception towards the corporate brand (Hatch and Schultz, 2003). Further to that, the findings support Pinar *et al.*,



(2011) who explained that the different points of contact and activities that affect students' experience in the universities, which, by contributing to their sense of belonging with the organisation (Hatch and Schultz, 2003; Balmer and Liao, 2007), will ultimately affect their brand perception.

Academics questioned whether students should be considered as an external or internal audience of the university, explaining that, regardless of how they are considered, dealing with students represents certainly the most important activity, with the need of ensuring that the values of the organisation are effectively conveyed. Although university experiences may help students learn about the brand (Pinar *et al.* 2011), findings suggest that the opposite may also be possible, with the activities aligned to the brand capable of helping students learn about the organisation. Supporting Dacin and Brown (2006) and Nguyen *et al.* (2016) arguments, the brand was identified by academics as a focal point for students to understand the organisation, and the need of align the ways of engaging with them to the brand was suggested.

Further academic views suggest that the way in which the staff understands and supports the brand will certainly affect the way of working with the students and is therefore extremely important to engage the internal staff with the brand. Gotsi & Wilson (2001) noted that staff can assume the role of 'brand ambassadors' holding the potential or representing and deliver the brand. Confirming the views from Gotsi & Wilson (2001), some members of staff adopted the same term regarding themselves as potential brand ambassadors, since the findings suggest that the brand can be reflected in views, opinions and contributions of the staff, in activities such as teaching, creation and delivery of the modules. Although studies (eg. Whisman, 2009; Hemsley-Brown and Goonawardana, 2007) had already noted the importance of academics in delivering the brand the fact that academics themselves recognised and suggested the importance of their role in such process represents a key finding as it suggests the existence of a brand responsibility within the staff. Academics suggest that creating contents in line with the brand guidelines would allow the staff to be more relaxed and confident with the delivery of the module, and consequently more capable to motivate the students.

### **6.3: Brand-Training and Development Activities and Internal Communications**

When reviewing the literature, a significant gap was identified with limited or non-existent literature regarding the use of internal branding application through brand-centred training and development activities and internal communication in the HE context. Previous studies (eg. Judson *et al.*, 2006; Whisman, 2009) investigated the phenomenon of internal branding and the capacity of employees to understand and carry brand values. Kaewsurin (2012) carried out an interesting study, testing hypothesis and gathering data from academics, although leaving the management opinions unexplored. The same Kaewsurin (2012) recommended to focus on management in the future direction of this study. Such limited literature represents one of the gaps that this research aims to fill.

The question proposed to address the gaps identified in the current section is:

*3) How do Business School's academics and management perceive internal branding training and communications?*

### **6.3.1. Internal branding training and development activities**

The literature review outlined that previous research (eg. Aurand *et al.*, 2005; Mosley, 2007; Ind, 2007; King and Grace, 2008; Punjaisri and Wilson, 2011, Kaewsurin, 2012) recognises an important role and a significant potential to brand-centred training and development in conveying an organization's brand values to its employee. More specifically, focused research (eg. Gotsi and Wilson, 2001; Aurand *et al.* 2005; Punjaisri and Wilson, 2011) showed that when activities are aligned to brand values, they are likely to succeed in influencing employees to commit to the brand and reflect the brand values.

Examples of activities that can positively influence the behaviour of the employees are: orientation programmes, to provide an initial direction to follow for the employees, and development courses, to make sure that employees follow the path outlined by the orientation programmes (Punjaisri and Wilson, 2011); performance evaluation (Aurand *et al.*, 2005) and appraisal (Gotsi and Wilson, 2001), useful to evaluate how the employees are performing and, in a certain way, driving them to behave in a certain way when the importance of such evaluation is previously expressed (Aurand *et al.*, 2005); brand training (Gotsi and Wilson, 2001), to allow the employees to acquire and/or improve the skills and knowledge necessary to behave coherently with the brand.

When asked about the initiatives in place in their organisations, managers shared several opinions regarding the types of training and development activities taking place in the school, as well as the criteria of selection for such activities and the expected outcomes. Most of the managers were not able to identify activities dedicated specifically to the brand, suggesting nonetheless that generic training and development activities could also influence the brand through an indirect, implicit approach. Such type of activities can be regarded as what Jaworski (1998) defined ‘input control’ activities, regarding them as activities related to the brand values, although not necessarily mentioning them, initiated in order to drive employee behaviour. Input control activities are defined in Chapter 2 as one of the sub-types of ‘formal control’ activities, focusing on the input stage (Jaworski, 1998).

#### **6.3.1.1. Types of internal branding training and development activities**

When asked about the existence of training and development activities, as previously mentioned the participants were not able to identify any specific ‘brand’ training, but rather activities that may indirectly inform the staff about the brand and influenced them to act in line with it (Jaworski, 1988).

Managers were asked to identify potential useful brand training activities. One of the activities identified involved professional development days, events aimed at preparing managers for their professional development reviews, a process ultimately aimed at evaluating whether the staff accomplished the organisational goals by acting in line with the strategy. Such professional development reviews can be seen as what previous studies regarded as performance evaluation (Aurand *et al.*, 2005) and appraisal (Gotsi and Wilson, 2001), useful to evaluate how the employees are performing and, in a certain way, driving them to behave in a certain way when the importance of such evaluation is previously expressed (Aurand *et al.*, 2005). Away days were identified by several managers as events holding potential for the transmission of brand information and fostering brand identity, useful in enhancing brand acceptance and support in the staff. Such events may be seen as part of what Punjaisri and Wilson (2011) regards as useful activities for internal branding implementation, with the authors highlighting the importance of group meetings, briefings, training and orientation. Conversations about the challenge of fitting the department identity within school and university and aligning the internal and external communications were mentioned. Such

conversations reinforce the view that the previously discussed concept of brand architecture in HE can effectively pose challenges for academic members, supporting the views from Spry *et al.* (2018) and confirming the challenges identified by Rahman and Areni (2014).

When discussing how to approach the internal branding process, managers suggested that management may deliberately avoid mentioning specific terms such as branding, favouring a more direct approach and explicitly asking the staff to behave in a way that aligns to strategy and brand. Once again, this may be seen as an example of ‘input control activities’ with management willingly deciding to promote the brand values indirectly through more general discussions of the strategy (Jaworski, 1988). Such approach seems to be linked to the management’s belief that academics staff does not favour the inclusion of branding practices within HE, identifying management’s efforts in respecting academic staff’s perspectives.

When discussing with academics the training and activities that they deemed useful to learn more about the brand, in line with the managers and previous studies (Punjaisri and Wilson, 2011) all the staff members indicated away days as a type of event intended for the purpose, suggesting usefulness in this specific event. Nonetheless, although academics may regard away days as useful in the internal branding exercise, they also identified limitations, suggesting that these events are not necessarily enjoyable and meaningful. One of the main reasons can be linked to the fact that academics wish to provide opinions and have a say in important matters, as this would allow a sense of participation, suggesting the importance of involving academic staff into brand discussions. Indeed Jacobs (2003) recognised that, by being the main actors involved in the delivery of the brand, employees will necessarily affect the way in which the brand is perceived by the ‘receiving’ stakeholders. Consequently, a co-creation approach would be ideal (Jacobs, 2003). Findings suggest that academics may feel disappointed by the lack of involvement in decisions around the brand, regarding such exclusion as a non-democratic approach where academics are expected to deliver a brand that they have not contributed to create. The situation becomes even more complicated for those brands that portray inclusiveness and democracy across their values, whilst not reflecting it in practice, leading arguably to contrasts and even paradoxes, ultimately resulting in staff scepticism. The findings also align to a recent study by Clark, Chapleo and Suomi (2019) who noted the importance of

including the staff in the branding process, suggesting that staff consultations should take place before and after a rebranding exercise, in order to promote involvement and reduce resistance. Then, managers regarded introductory documents and materials, initial meetings and orientation programmes as key resources and activities that could allow and facilitate understanding of the brand, as a first point of contact with the new staff. Initial one-to-one meetings were seen as useful to provide background on what happens at the university. Such views can be linked back to Punjaisri and Wilson (2011), who identified the orientation stage as an important initial step to convey the brand and the brand values. Online courses about university practices were identified as potentially useful to enrich the familiarity with the brand, in line with Goodridge (2001) and Ind (2007) who recognised the potential of e-learning to support the internal branding strategy. In some cases, the Human Resources department was identified as a potential facilitator for internal branding, confirming the findings from Punjaisri *et al.* (2009). Nonetheless, the HR potential was mainly identified in the transmission of values, rather than in a strategical involvement in the definition of the brand or the branding strategy, confirming the observations from Mosley (2007).

Academics views seem to confirm managers' beliefs and Punjaisri and Wilson' (2011) findings, seeing orientation days as useful activities for conveying information about the brand. Academics explained that the orientation days are useful in meeting interesting people, although often lacking a follow-up approach which would facilitate any further interactions with such people. Such idea suggests that organisations may need to look at orientation activities as starting points for a long-term identity building process, rather than an event standing on its own, in line with Berry and Parasuraman (1992), Mortimer (2002) and Ind (2007) who observe the importance of following-up on initial efforts. Academics also identified that orientation activities tend to happen at university level, rather than school level. At the business school, the new staff members tend to be informally introduced to the new colleagues, without any formal event taking place. This may be linked to the findings discussed Section 6.2.3.1., where managers explained that the internal branding efforts were intentionally focused at university level, rather than school level, in order to centralise the outcomes towards a central cohesive brand.

Further reasons for this may be linked to some managers' belief that the brand is acquired naturally by living it (Ind, 2007), without the need of a formal process.

Moreover, management saw recruitment also as an important aspect of the process as it appears as the first step for identifying potential staff with values aligned to the brand values, which would facilitate acceptance and support. Such view confirms the findings from Bergstrom, Blumenthal and Crothers, (2002) who regarded recruitment as an important step to ensure employees' readiness to internal branding programmes. Academics also identified recruitment as an important step approach, although it was explained that job applicants may show convenient behaviours for the interview, which not necessarily reflect their real values and opinions. Such issue shares concerns with de Chernatony (1999) who highlighted the importance of verifying beforehand the eventual existence of prejudices, beliefs, attitudes and mental models. Therefore, the researcher argues that, in order to reduce misalignment across staff and brand values, organisations should strive to reduce the risk by filtering the applicants with a genuine alignment to the brand values from those who are only pretending to improve their chances of getting the job.

Following the discussion regarding the fact that external pressures influence the objectives of universities and business schools, such as accreditations and academic frameworks, academics explained that the external expectations are filtered internally through performance appraisals, with performance indicators aimed at defining activities relevant to satisfy the external requirements. The perceived usefulness of performance evaluation and appraisal seem to confirm the findings of previous studies (Gotsi and Wilson, 2001; Aurand *et al.*, 2005), that saw such activities as appropriate to convey the brand.

Managers suggested that organising activities and training efforts aligned to the brand can help understanding the brand and foster its acceptance in academic staff. Interviews suggest that universities can facilitate brand acceptance and support through workshops where the staff can ask questions and receive clear answers, making the brand easy to understand and use at a visual level, confirming what previously suggested by Burmann and Zeplin (2005) and Kaewsurin (2012). Academics explained that such events and training may be more likely to happen with new members of staff within the school, with less efforts on senior academics whose alignment may be taken for granted as consequence of their experiencing the brand (Ind,

2007). Nonetheless, the intended outcome of the training may not be necessarily to inform and align the behaviour of the academic to the brand values, but rather to specific accreditations criteria. Indeed, the accreditations criteria may have some degree of alignment to the brand values. For example, Aaker and Joachimsthaler (2000) observed that organisational policies may help conveying the brand. However, the findings suggest that such link between policies and brand may also result in negative outcomes. More specifically, the finding suggest that, whilst such type of activities may on the one hand help the organisation to demonstrate how they meet the accreditations' criteria, on the other hand they may not be perceived as meaningful and/or useful by the academic staff. In such cases, the policies would create instead a negative effect on the employees, which may then affect their perception towards the linked brand. In line with that, academics explained that, when this type of policy-related events occur, a paradox may be in place. Although these events may be created with the purpose of development for the staff, on the other hand it could actually hinder such development by taking too much time that could have been otherwise invested in experiencing the institution (Ind, 2007), the nature of the new role and developing sense of community and belonging.

### **6.3.2. Internal brand communications**

Davis and Dunn (2002) specify that if an organisation wants its employees to deliver effectively the brand promise, it needs to communicate to them 'what the brand stands for' as well as what makes the brand different and unique. Therefore, defining the brand clearly would help to describe what the essential key brand values are, and ensuring that employees clearly understand such values would allow the staff to deliver efficiently what it is expected from the brand (Urde, 2003). It is important to explain to employees their key role in influencing the brand experience of their customers, otherwise they will not be interested in understanding their organisation's brand identity (Burmam and Zeplin, 2005). Communications should be touching all the important points of the brand identity, being memorable and capable of sticking in the target's' mind (Thomson *et al.*, 1999, Ind, 2007). Building upon Burmann and Zeplin (2005), Sujchaphong, Nguyen & Melewar (2015) reviewed the activities and factors generating brand support, explaining the need to explore in a practical setting the concepts reviewed theoretically. To address such call for research the current section explores the adoption of brand-centred internal communications in HE, to identify what kind of communications are

implemented in the chosen universities, how are they carried out and, most important, what is the perception of academic staff and management towards these communications. The aim is to explore managers and academic staff's opinions towards the internal communications, to understand whether they regard those communications as useful to the branding strategy and, if not, what are the reasons behind such belief.

When asked about the perceived useful ways to convey brand values to the staff, managers' words identified useful channels and suggested that, further than channels, the nature of the messages plays a key role for a successful communication. In line with previous studies (eg. Judson *et al.* 2006, Punjaisri & Wilson, 2011), emails were identified as a first point of contact for overall communications, although not always brand-related. Forms of email branding could be identified in the practice of what Schein (1985) defines as 'organisational storytelling', with emails keeping the staff updated on what is happening in the organisation with the aim of keeping academic members engaged and promote involvement. The internal communications department was identified as a separate department often in charge of the process. The intranet was also seen by managers as a suitable channel to communicate internally, in line with the findings from Judson *et al.* (2006) and Punjaisri & Wilson (2011). Then, other tools identified by as capable of communicating the brand were posters, guidelines, staff handbook, documentation and literature on what the school stands for, confirming previous studies in HE (eg. Judson *et al.*, 2006) and other contexts (eg. Burmann and Zeplin, 2005; Ind, 2007; Punjaisri & Wilson, 2011). The Virtual Learning Environment was the channel identified where the staff could access brand-related documents, adding a new channel to the list of those previously identified by the previous studies. This may be particularly relevant since the use of VLEs would allow the staff members to access the information on a platform that is already widely used for teaching purposes, resulting in a direct access more likely to happen naturally.

From the academics' words it can be inferred that, although different documents to access information about exist, there are no specific brand-training courses currently taking place.

The interviews suggest that, although VLE can be useful to access brand-related documents, the lack of brand-related courses can be extended to the online aspects as well. The participants explained that, although they have different online courses for general training, no specific



brand courses or e-learning seem to be in place, neither about the brand, nor about mission and vision linked to the brand. This may represent a missed opportunity for organisations to convey information about the brand and communicate the brand proposition for the staff.

An important point that emerged concerns the nature of the communications. Managers suggested that further than the message delivered, it is important to define the tone of voice intended for such messages, and to have a coherent way of communicating, in line with the brand and the brand guidelines. Then, some managers explained that specific templates may be designed for the different types of emails, but all of them should be aligned to the brand. The results seem to show that in most cases the ones in charge of communications seems to be aware of the importance of aligning the shared contents to the brand guidelines, suggesting high levels of control over the communications.

Further brand communications identified by managers consisted of brand straplines, brand manual containing several brand related important factors, such as messaging, tone of voice, photography style, design, logos, pop ups banners. The way in which organisations talk about themselves internally and externally appears as an important factor in conveying the nature of the brand, arguably requiring attention. Brand manuals are created to guide the staff actions when interacting with external stakeholders, and the complexity and comprehensiveness of some brand manuals suggest that, although there may not be formal attempts to deliver the brand internally, there may still be a significant interest in influencing the external delivery of the brand. This may represent an internal marketing effort, rather than internal branding process, as discussed in the section 2.2.1 of the literature review.

Events involving personal interaction are seen by some managers as potential ways to convey the brand, although those appear to be mostly carried out through a formal top-down process. In some cases, the processes in place to convey the strategy and ensure alignment with the actions of the staff was outlined through a governance structure where the information is cascaded across the school through recurring formal events. When reflecting on interactions, in line with the discussion in the training and development activities section, genuine and informal meetings are regarded by both academic staff and managers as capable of developing a community feeling and, consequently, a sense of attachment to the organisation and ultimately to the brand.

### **6.3.2.1. The importance of authenticity in communications**

In line with managers, academic staff also regards emails as traditional tools to communicate the brand within the organisation. However, staff explained that regardless of how meaningful the emails sent may be, if the staff does not read them the effort will be pointless. Such a position suggests that sending emails is simply not enough, and organisation should firstly ensure the establishment of an environment where academics are interested in receiving information, and only then communicate such information. In fact, as previously discussed, there may be forms of cynicism or detachment from the brand and the organisational initiatives. In order to act on it, organisations should start by ensuring that honesty and reality are reflected in the brand messages conveyed, since the words of academics suggest authenticity as a determinant of success.

### **6.3.2.2. The importance of continuity in communications**

Such limited effectiveness is not only limited to authenticity but also continuity. For example, booklets were identified as capable of fostering brand identity, with a process of storytelling to tell the history of the organisation and how it evolved along the years. However, although individual activities may be useful, academics suggest that regardless of how effective a specific communication effort may be, it will be meaningless if it's not part of a continuous and coherent long-term process. Consequently, linking back to the issue raised by orientation programmes as one-off events, organisations should regard the branding process as a continue exchange of information, ideally structured in the long-term period. Lack of continuity will potentially lead to academics seeing the branding efforts as a rhetorical exercise lacking consistency and, consequently, academics will struggle to believe and buy into the brand. Such view seem to confirm Mitchell's (2004) views, who suggests that, once the initial excitement vanishes, the final outcome of branding activities (eg. carefully crafted and expensive events, storytelling, away-days, workshops, cascading programmes, dramatizations, sessions, newsletters and internal videos) ends up being null. To support this idea, the author (Mitchell, 2004) explains that the problem may be related to the fact that organisations tend to focus too much on changing the way in which employees act, without putting enough effort in translating the brand values into real-life experiences (Mitchell, 2004). Such idea of a too detached approach is supported by Karmark (2005), who suggests that when brand values are

communicated using communication tools, such as brand books for instance, these are likely to little relate, or not relate at all, to the employees' daily operations, failing in developing that continuity across daily activities.

### **6.3.2.3. The importance of a branded environment**

Academics seem to strongly believe that the most effective form of communication comes from experiencing the institution, rather than accessing formal events or seminars. Experiencing the organisation may happen in different ways. Whilst daily activities may be useful, the actual environment of the organisation may help building the sense of identity. Members of staff discussed the importance of having a branded environment explaining that, without it, the rooms and the offices may appear as any other university, with no physical evidence defining the place and a consequent missed opportunity to create sense of belonging. Although previous studies looked at individual communications and tools or discussed the usefulness of visual environments for external branding (Mampaey and Huisman, 2016), up to date no existing study in HE outlined the importance of an integrating the several tools at visual level within a comprehensive branded environment, outlining a new addition to the existing literature.

### **6.3.2.4. Brand conceptualisation as prerequisite for clear communications**

However, whilst the visual aspect could be useful in contributing to the internal awareness and acceptance of the brand, the words of the participants suggest that it will only represent the tip of the iceberg. The most important aspect for any kind of communications appears to be a clear idea or conceptualisation of what is going to be communicated. In fact, the participants explained that visual efforts, as well as any kind of communications, would be pointless if a lack of conceptualisation of the brand subsists. The finding suggest that, without clarity, the efforts will result in ambiguity ending up confusing the staff about what is expected from them. Such view links back to Zeithaml *et al.* (1996), who previously noted that lack of clear information will hinder communications resulting in employees experiencing ambiguity.

### **6.3.2.5. Communicating the brand whilst respecting freedom**

Further conversations with academics revealed that forcing activities and communications on staff will have negative effect, reinforcing once again the idea of freedom of choice as

prerogative for internal branding success in HE. The findings align to the recent study from Clark, Chapleo and Suomi (2019) who noted the importance of providing to staff members information about the branding process in order to allow them to willingly decide to support the process, and respect their freedom (Wearaas and Solbakk, 2009). In the current study, such idea can be seen in an example involving the use of branded screensavers that the staff could not replace or deactivate which was seen by academics as an imposition and had a negative effect on them. Such example can be linked back to the idea of a ‘branded environment’, suggesting that, although having a comprehensive and integrated number of visual tools can help building a sense of belonging within the staff, at the same time the individual tools should be selected carefully, with each tools benefits and limitations taken in account.

A table in the next page resumes all the key training and communications tools and activities identified in this research, including comments from the researcher based on the findings.

**Table 6.1. Key training and communications activities identified in the research.**

Training and Communication Activities Identified	Literature	Perceived as useful by Managers	Perceived as useful by Academics	Researcher comments
Professional Development days	Aurang <i>et al.</i> , (2005); Gotsi and Wilson (2001)	Yes	N/A	Management believe that these events are useful for preparing the managers for their professional development review with the academics, since the reviews may be aligned to the strategy and, ultimately the brand.
Performance Indicators	Aurang <i>et al.</i> , (2015); Gotsi and Wilson (2001)	Yes	Yes	Aligning the performance indicators to the brand strategy may help conveying the values, since academics may act in line with strategy in order to fulfil the requirements of the indicators.
Away Days	Punjaisri and Wilson (2011)	Yes	Yes, but...	Away days appear useful to convey information about the brand. However, academics clarified that these events should involve them and allow them to share the opinion. Ideally, when addressing the creation of the brand and the brand values during away days, a co-creation approach involving academics should be pursued.
1-to-1 meetings,	Punjaisri and Wilson (2011)	Yes	Yes, but...	Academics seem to believe that 1-to-1 meetings can be useful to learn information about the brand. However, findings suggest that approaching the academics informally may improve their involvement and interest. Consequently, a 1-to-1 informal meeting in a comfortable environment (eg. a friendly chat in the office) would be ideal to convey information.
Orientation activities	Punjaisri and Wilson (2011)	Yes	Yes, but...	Academics seem to believe that these types of activities can be useful to learn information about the organisation and this brand. However, findings suggest that the initial orientations activities should be followed up, since this would allow them to meet again interesting colleagues and ultimately influence their sense of belongings (eg. having a recurring event every 6 months where the academics can get updates on the brand and catch up with colleagues)
E-Learning	Goodridge (2001); Ind (2007)	Yes, but...	Yes, but...	Both managers and academics suggested that e-learning courses could be used to convey the brand. VLEs were identified as potential channels, since academics tend to engage with them in their activities.
Recruitment	Bergstrom, Blumenthal and Crothers (2002)	Yes	Yes, but...	Academics seem to believe recruitment may be useful to select staff whose values naturally align to the brand. However, it was explained that job applicants may show convenient behaviours in the interview, behaviours that may not reflect their real values and opinions. Therefore, organisations should attempt to filter the applicants with a genuine alignment to the brand values from those who are only pretending to improve their chances of getting the job.
Workshops	Burmann and Zeplin (2005)	Yes	Yes, but...	Finding suggest that the intended outcome of the training may not be necessarily to inform and align the behaviour of the academic to the brand values, but rather to specific accreditations criteria. Nonetheless, the accreditations criteria may have some degree of alignment to the brand values. However, the findings suggest that, whilst such type of activities may help the organisation demonstrating how they meet the accreditations' criteria, they may not be perceived as meaningful and/or useful by the academic staff potentially affecting negatively their perception.
Emails	Judson <i>et al.</i> (2006); Punjaisri and Wilson (2011)	Yes	Yes, but...	Academics seem to believe that emails may be useful to get information about the brand, but the number of emails sent should be adequate and the content should be relevant. Academics suggested that, ideally, formal communications should be complementary to informal ones. Regarding the actual brand to communicate, it should be authentic, communicated in the long-term to build continuity, and the communications should not be forced on the academics
Organisational Storytelling	Schein (1985)	Yes	Yes	Findings suggest that talking about the history of the school and its development can be useful, but even here there should be an attempt to keep the contents relevant to the academics.
Intranet	Judson <i>et al.</i> (2006); Punjaisri and Wilson (2011)	Yes	N/A	Findings suggest that the intranet may be a potential channel to communicate with academics, but no specific comments were made on its benefits or limitations.
Introductory Materials, Poster, guidelines, staff handbook, documentation, brand manuals, literature on 'what the school stands for'	Judson <i>et al.</i> (2006); Punjaisri and Wilson (2011)	Yes	Yes, but...	Academics seem to believe that any kind of brand material can be mainly useful as a supporting item, but only when the brand and the values are authentic. Once again, the brand to communicate should be authentic, communicated in the long-term to build continuity, and the communications should not be forced on the academics

**Source: created by the author of this research according to the findings.**

## **6.4: BRANDS, LEADERSHIP AND BRAND LEADERSHIP**

The topic of leadership holds interest for the current research, as the change-inspiring characteristics of leaders can be reconnected to the previously introduced internal branding's interest in influencing employees in order to have them internalise the brand and the brand values and behave in a manner that supports the brand of the organisation, coherent with its values. Existing research on the topic of brand leadership in HE is limited, with few studies focusing on the academic staff perspective (Dean *et al.*, 2016; Kaewsurin, 2012). However, the existing studies focused either on the brand co-creation (Dean *et al.*, 2016) or tested applicability of internal branding and leadership in HE from the academic staff perspective (Kaewsurin, 2012). Building upon Burmann and Zeplin (2005), Sujchaphong, Nguyen & Melewar (2015) reviewed theoretically the topic of leadership discussing factors generating brand support, explaining the need to explore in a practical setting the concepts reviewed. Of the existing studies concerning the academic staff's perspective, none has attempted to explore in-depth the relationship between internal branding and leadership in HE while, from the perspective of the HE management, there are no studies available that explored such concepts. The limited research from academic staff perspective and lack of research from the management perspective identify another gap that the current research aims to explore.

This section will discuss the perception of both management and academic staff in universities towards the topic of leadership. From the management perspective, it will be explored managers' perception towards leaders' capacity of involving the staff in the creation and delivery of the brand values, supporting them in understanding and committing to the internal branding strategy of their business school and involving them in the overall branding programme. On the other hand, from the academic staff perspective, it will be analysed how and where academics get the information about their organisation brand values, how involved they feel, and have eventually felt, with the creation and delivery of brand values, how brand leadership is considered useful in supporting the internal branding strategy of the business school and supportive in the development of their understanding of the internal branding strategy and commitment to it; then, it will be investigated how the academic staff believes it contributes to the branding programme of the institution.

The question that will address the current gap is:

*4) How do Business School's academics and management perceive the role of leadership in the internal branding strategy?*

### **6.4.1. Brands and Leadership**

As discussed in the literature review, transformational leadership has been identified as a type of leadership whose characteristics and outcomes appear compatible with the aims of internal branding. In fact, the idea of affecting behaviour in order to develop support appears shared by both topics, leading to the discussion of a potential link between brand and transformational leadership.

The review of the literature showed that there are four dimensions usually used to characterise transformational leadership: 'charisma', 'inspirational motivation', 'individualised consideration' and 'intellectual stimulation' (Bass, 1990). Leaders reflecting the dimension of 'charisma' are capable of defining a sense of mission, cultivating commitment to success, embodying trust, and gaining trust and respect of those around them (Bass, 1990, 1997). The inspirational motivation was discussed as the capacity of articulating an interesting and appealing vision through positive attitudes, showing enthusiasm, optimism, ambition with high expectations and symbols to drive and focus efforts (Bass, 1990, 1997). The third dimension, individualised consideration, concerned the idea of the potential leaders treating the potential followers as unique individuals, with dedicated attentions to their needs and capacity of supporting them in the achievement of their full potential (Bass, 1990, 1997). Finally, the fourth dimension of intellectual stimulation can be seen as the capacity of leaders to challenge the potential followers to comprehend, conceptualise and analyse problem and situations in innovative and, eventually, alternative ways (Bass, 1990, 1997).

The discussion will now link the findings to the dimensions of transformational leadership, in order to establish what are the factors associated to brand leaders, in the views of managers and academics. The section will discuss the effective impact of the listed dimensions on generating acceptance and support of the brand.

When presented with the definition of brand leadership proposed in the literature review, the participants showed different reactions, each one of them valuable on its own right. Therefore,

to get to the discussion around brand leadership, it is necessary to start from the general view of brand that, once again, appears extremely challenging in HE.

Managers overall agreed that a concept of brand leadership is possible, explaining that some factors and actions can have positive effects on the staff. HE leaders are identified in those people having an influential role whilst showing satisfaction with their job and organisation, since their positive behaviour will be likely to convey their positive feelings towards the brand. Positivity and pride were identified as important factors in a branding effort, which can be linked to the dimension of 'inspirational motivation' (Bass, 1990, 1997).

Upon being asked whether they could think of any 'brand leader', regarded as individuals capable of driving brand-supporting behaviour, managers were able to identify some people which they felt responded to the definition provided, regarding their positivity as the key influential aspect of their role. Academic staff also recognised that leaders may be capable of influencing behaviour, although felt puzzled by the idea of academics going beyond their self-interests to benefit the brand. Academics' words suggest that the staff may be able to go beyond their normal responsibilities for the sake of their profession and their role, rather than for the sake of the brand, explaining that there is a difference between institutional role and academic role, with the latter apparently having a stronger influence on the staff's behaviour. Such idea links back to the previously mentioned identification with the profession, seen as a vocation, renewing the necessity of considering such aspect for any kind of internal branding process.

Interviews suggest that academics may feel like having obligations towards the organisation that are not necessarily stated in the contract and may willingly work overtime and make extra efforts if these are important for the organisation that they care about, suggesting the importance of emotional attachment as driver of goodwill.

The relationship between an organisation and its brand was discussed as well, with participants recognising the challenges behind separating the two concepts. Some academics clarified that an organisation and its brand do not necessarily overlap, with staff possibly feeling loyal to the organisation but not necessarily to the brand. Such gap may be due to the fact that, although being attached to the organisation, the academic staff may struggle to understand what the brand stands for and what is the direction taken, with consequent difficulties in buying into



such brand. Such view suggests that, in order to gain support and attachment of the staff, organisations should ensure clarity of the brand and its future direction.

In fact, academics clarified that being attached to an organisation does not necessarily mean being attached to its brand. The participants explained that the feeling of continuity, previously discussed in section 4 of this chapter, can be useful in creating some kind of attachment to the brand. Academics also noted that the fact the brand and its brand language tend to identify more with a cold commercial entity on the market, rather than a warm place of belonging, representing a potential obstacle for the desired attachment.

Academics explained that that whilst, for instance, in a sport context supporters may have strong feelings about the team brand and its story, rather than the actual players in the team, in an academic context staff may be more interested in the job and the people instead, consequently being likely to accept changes to the school brand. The words of the members of staff suggest that, compared to other contexts, in HE academics tend to have a weaker connection to the brand. This may be linked to the previous idea that most actions start at the top without input from the members of staff, suggesting that discussing new directions with the academic staff and explaining reasons behind the actions may facilitate acceptance of the changes and generate interest in supporting them. After discussing with academics their relationship with brands that appears fickle and potentially erratic, the conversation moved back to the concept of brand leadership. Academics identified in leadership a symbolic sense or symbolic focus for the organisation recognising that some successful companies have influential individuals, defined as leader, that embody the brand whilst others may not have specific individuals that stand out, nonetheless still successful. One of the interesting points of this study concerns the nature of those influential individuals carrying leadership traits. Burmann and Zeplin (2005), explained that, in terms of leadership, there are two brand-relevant levels in an organisation, a macro and micro level. The macro level concerns the higher levels, such as CEO and executive board in the brand management process, while the micro level addresses the personal leadership of the several executives across the institution (Burmann and Zeplin, 2005). Whilst the idea of 'formal leadership' discussed in the data analysis chapter can be easily linked to what Burmann and Zeplin (2005) define as 'macro leadership', the same cannot be said for the authors' concept of 'micro leadership'. In fact, 'micro leaders' (Burmann and Zeplin, 2005)

are seen as executives across the organisation (eg. middle managers) carrying leaders' traits. However, building upon Bass (1997), this study does not constrain leadership characteristics only to top and middle executives, but regards potential leaders as individuals capable of influencing others, regardless of their role within the organisation.

In line with the two ideas of leadership presented, when discussing the link between brand and leadership with managers and academic staff, following from the previous chapter the term leadership was used to identify two different concepts: 1) 'formal leadership', intended as the people that sits at the top of the university and school hierarchy (eg. Chancellors, vice-chancellors, deans); 2) leadership as the process capable of inspiring change and influence behaviour regardless of the formal status of the potential 'leader', referred as brand leadership when concerning the brand.

The two levels are discussed separately, for the sake of clarity, and linked to the transformational leadership theory discussed in the literature review.

#### **6.4.2. Formal Leadership and Brand**

This first section will discuss the topic of Formal leaders, those sitting at the top of university and schools, and their role within the branding strategy of HE institution. Indeed, when discussing brand leadership, the findings suggest that the roles of individuals can affect their credibility and degree of impact on other people, with "titles, capacity of attracting funding, charisma and networking skills" identified as features useful and important in influencing both students and staff members. In line with that, having some kind of formal recognitions and titles at senior level was indicated as a desirable, and sometimes essential, requirement to build credibility. More specifically, titles were seen as particularly beneficial when representing evidence of senior staff's expertise in processes that the staff is undertaking, and when the same titles are expected by the job applicants during recruitment processes. In fact, academics appear to perceive negatively an organisation which, for a junior role, demands requirements that not even the senior members of the staff fulfil.

Most of the managers identified the link between leadership and brand in the fact that formal leadership tends to define and create the brand. Some managers explained that formal

leadership tends to decide the brand through a top-down approach, nonetheless seeing it as not necessarily the most preferable process, as previously discussed in section 6.1.6.1.

Similarly, managers explained that, in some cases, formal leadership defines the brand and the brand objectives without any input from the staff. However, linking back to section 6.3.1.1, such approach was not seen as the most adequate, with the idea that instead the brand should truly represent the organisation in order to be embraced by its members, confirming the recent results from Clark, Chapleo and Suomi (2019). Following from this, managers explained that if a brand reflects the formal leadership views, rather than the organisation, it may incur in a lack of authenticity and may be consequently difficult to trust and buy into for the staff. Thus, the views of the formal leadership may pose an issue to the creation and delivery of a successful internal branding process, since the brand itself at the root may not be suitable for such process. Arguably, this factor requires attention for practitioners. In fact, managers' views suggest that formal leadership often plays a key role in the beginning of branding exercises and the shaping of the organisational brand. Findings suggest that formal leaders could support the internal branding process by embodying the brand and its values naturally, rather than as a separate process. Nonetheless, being in power and reflecting the brand may not necessarily be enough, in a process of successful brand leadership. In the previous section the idea of having an authentic and realistic brand was seen as a prerequisite of internal branding success. Perceived successful leadership seem to share the same requirements, with the need for leaders to embody an authentic brand.

The results from the analysis suggest that formal leadership's views about the brand affect the actual support of the internal strategy. As just discussed, managers argued that the brand should reflect what the organisation really is in order to be genuine. However, there is a possibility that formal leadership may not accept the genuine brand and therefore force a different one, an important factor since formal leaders appear to have huge influence in defining the brand. Regardless of whether they accept the authentic brand or try to define a 'new' one, leaders' buy-in of the brand appears essential in supporting the brand strategy. Results show that if formal leaders believe in the brand and the branding efforts, they will be involved in it, talk about the brand and disseminate it. On the other hand, managers' views suggests that a not involved formal leadership may hinder the success of the internal branding strategy, since the

lack of involvement and interest at the formal level will result in staff perception of a brand and that is not worth attention. Although, as discussed, formal leadership may oppose the authentic brand in some cases, managers' opinions suggest that once formal leaders define a brand they accept and believe in, they will be involved with it and facilitate the internal branding process. Managers suggested that even if the members of staff may not like the way the brand is defined, they will most likely accept the decision of the formal leadership and follow it, due to the need of prioritising their job role commitments. Such view seems to agree with Dearlove (1995), who regarded academics as individuals who prefer to be left alone to focus on their work (eg. teaching in universities and researching) and consequently may be keen and "prepared to trust empathetic leaders to do their organisational thinking for them" (Dearlove, 1995, p.167). Nonetheless, the findings suggest that acceptance of the formal leadership decisions will not necessarily translate into acceptance of the brand. Academics explained that staff members may find it difficult to put their confidence in leadership whose objectives are built upon aspiration, rather than a solid background.

Findings suggest that formal leadership's decisions should be crafted looking at the reality of facts, rather than the aspirations. Academics may disagree with leadership decisions that do not reflect reality, believing that they may not necessarily benefit the university/school. Such idea further suggests that, as discussed previously, academics' resistances may be due to their commitment towards the organisation and willingness to improve it.

Arguably, this may lead to academics acting in a way that conforms to formal leadership expectations on the surface, but most likely not buying into the brand and its values. This process may result in an artificial delivery of the brand, where the academics do what is expected from them rather than what they feel is right, consequently not being able to "live the brand" (Ind, 2007). The data results suggest that formal leaders seem to share such view, attempting to involve other members of the organisation and drive acceptance of the brand. According to the findings of this study, when actively involved with the brand, formal leaders could facilitate the understanding of the brand and support it by embodying the brand in their activities and communications.

#### **6.4.2.1. Formal leaders' potential in internal branding**

An interesting point of discussion for this study concerns the concept of a 'social leader'. Academics' words defined a key difference between managers and formal leaders. Formal leaders were seen as people of power who should show efforts in interacting socially with the staff on daily basis, with attempts to motivate the staff and inform them about news, opportunities and events. The interactions should happen informally and spontaneously. The concept of 'Interaction' was identified as a major requirement to classify someone as a leader. However, whilst managers listed official events, such as graduation days and open days, as the ones they believed having a huge impact upon the success of the branding strategy, academics' views suggested that formal interactions may not be the most adequate for conveying the brand. Academics regarded personal, face to face exchanges as important and explained that leaders should visit the offices, chat with the staff and inspire, rather than just instruct. Such view links back to the previously discussed idea (section 6.4.2) that informal chats may be more useful than formal events and workshops, when trying to convey the brand. Similarly, the idea of communicating through standardised email was seen mostly as a functional exercise, missing the point of tailoring communications to the audience. Findings suggest that the interactions between formal leaders and staff play an important role, and that the type of interactions may be directly linked to the leadership style adopted.

Interviews revealed that academics recognise the existence of different school of thoughts about leadership, with staff explaining that perhaps there is not a single style of successful leadership, but rather different styles that can be adequate and successful according to the specific context they are implemented within. Academics seem to believe that leadership is context specific and it's also process specific and it should be tailored to the specific case, suggesting a flexible mind-set and willingness to compromise, as long as the context and the organisational culture justifies the adopted style. Such view seem to confirm Fiedler's (1967) views, who noted that there is not just one approach of leadership available, and leaders may need to choose the right style of leadership according to context and situation in order to exert a successful influence over the members of the organisation. In line with that, academics seem to believe that successful leadership should not be fixed and predefined and not imposed on people but rather flexible and capable of adjusting to the context. The importance of a social context can be found in both managers and academics' opinions. Managers identified social

interactions between leaders and employees as the main channels to promote the brand and endorse it. Academics suggested that potential leaders should interact with their subordinates and learn from them, in order to adjust to them and identify the most suitable leadership style. Such idea can be linked to the transformational dimension of 'individualised consideration' (Bass, 1990, 1997), suggesting that leaders should interact with potential followers in a dedicated way, in order to learn from them and adjust their activities accordingly.

As discussed at the beginning of the section, potential issues may occur when an autocratic style is adopted, for example, with a leader that prioritise its own views over the reality of facts and the potential followers put in a position where they either conform to it or are perceived as resisting the leadership efforts. Findings suggest that such approach will fail in cultivating commitment in those around, ending up affecting the perception of the staff who may not see them as 'charismatic' (Bass, 1990, 1997). On the other hand, a supportive and involving leadership style may help clarifying and reinforcing the brand message internally. The effectiveness of leadership styles may also be affected by the potential followers' ideas, culture and beliefs, and whether those match the leader's ones. The same ideas may be perceived in different ways due to the potential gaps in perspectives, culture and beliefs, and the context itself may give different meaning to specific actions. Such challenges seem to confirm once again the usefulness of 'individualized consideration' (Bass, 1990, 1997) in interactions between 'leaders' and 'followers', which may act as a bridge to reduce such gap and facilitate mutual understanding.

In the eyes of academics, successful leadership traits can be identified in individuals' capacity of responding to all the challenges despite of context, in a way that unifies the different views under a common idea. A leader that can identify challenges and problems and provide solutions will potentially be accepted despite the fact that views of the participants may be different. Such ideas can be linked back to the components of the dimension of 'charisma' (Bass, 1990, 1997). Academics believe that whilst management may be focused on processes, leaders should be focused on people. The ability to empower staff, inspire and support them was seen as an important indicator of good leadership, which would affect staff perception about the organisation and, potentially of the brand associated to it. In the view of academics, successful leaders are individuals who lead by example, by showing to employees how interesting and

productive things could be, rather than just asking them to do such things. Such views can be framed within the dimension of ‘inspirational motivation’ (Bass, 1990, 1997). Acknowledging the merits of the individual academics in achieving the organisational goal was seen as a key step in the process, as well as involving them in the achievement of future goals and offering support along the journey. Such ideas link to the dimensions of ‘charisma’, in defining goals and building commitment, ‘inspirational motivation’, in driving enthusiasm and commitment, and ‘individualised consideration’, in the process of acknowledging the efforts of each member of staff and supporting them in their activities (Bass, 1990, 1997). The idea of listening to the individual needs of potential followers, as a determinant of successful leadership, was also pointed out by Northouse (2004). Vallaster and de Chernatony (2005) then explained that leaders facilitating social interaction could facilitate the development of brand support behaviours in employees. In line, with Vallaster and de Chernatony (2005), results suggest that, further to the leader-staff interactions, leadership should also promote interactions among the staff members. Finding suggest the existence of a degree of co-inspiration among staff members, where the leaders’ role would consist in initiating and facilitating such process. Such views can be linked to the dimensions of ‘charisma’, where the leader defines the sense of mission and builds the interest in the staff, and potentially ‘intellectual stimulation’, with the leader facilitating the development of alternative ways (ie. co-inspiration processes) to foster the commitment to the brand.

### **6.4.3. The conscious decision of supporting the brand**

When both managers and academics tried to identify potential leaders in academia, they struggled in doing so, suggesting that perhaps the nature of the academic context poses some difficulties in defining duties, with roles that often overlap. Academics noted that, although there may be people who embody the brand externally, the same does not necessarily happen internally, with consequent difficulty in identifying any brand leader from an internal perspective. Finding suggest that the gap between external and internal branding efforts may be also extended to the concepts of brand leaders. The discussion moved on a reflection on what defines a brand leader, and the topic of ‘freedom’ was identified as an extremely important concept for brand leadership. Freedom seems to be a key factor in defining a brand leader. From the academics’ perspective, freedom to act in a way that conforms to own views appears

extremely important. When reflecting on formal leaders, academics seem to perceive the ones in power as 'free' to choose their own actions, having limited or inexistent pressures from the top. The concept of freedom was then extended to draw a line between management and (formal) leadership.

Academics regarded freedom as a key difference between manager and leaders, suggesting that managers are required to adhere to the same regulations imposed on staff, whilst (formal) leaders are the ones creating the regulations and are free to choose to what degree follow such rules. Following from this idea, academics seem to believe that, since those in power are free to choose their actions, if formal leaders decide to believe in the brand and are consciously willing to embrace it and, ideally, embody it, this will have a positive effect on the staff. Such case can be seen an example of 'inspirational motivation', with the leader deciding consciously to represent and support the brand, action that could lead to the leader being perceived as 'charismatic' and leading by example (Bass, 1990, 1997). On the other hand, if the staff perceive that the formal leaders are not committed to the brand, it will result in staff questioning a brand that not even the formal leaders believe in. Since formal leaders are perceived as free to choose what they want to do, their decision of supporting the brand may be even more impactful than any other member of the organisation, as it will be a conscious decision, rather than a directive from the top.

Across the discussions with the academic staff, such freedom of choice was not extended to managers. In the academics' views, manager, or academics with management duties (eg. heads of department) can be classified as colleagues when following regulations from the top. Staff members explained that often academic unit heads are the only point of contacts that they have outside of job roles and colleagues, and therefore see them as the eventual key figure in getting information about the brand. Such view, recognise the importance of mid-management and academics with management duties in the branding process, suggesting that middle level managers, who interact closely with academic members of staff, may have a strong influence in conveying the brand and, eventually, carry brand leaders traits.

In line with this, formal leaders were not the only ones identified as potentially carrying brand leadership potential. Findings suggest that, in business schools, the individuals who have the formal power to influence decisions, the formal leaders, are not necessarily the ones advocating



and supporting the brand. Academics seem to believe that brand leaders should be the ones expressing, advocating and talking about the brand to the other members of staff, especially junior ones.

Academics interestingly noted that the individuals who embrace and embody the brand are often not associated with senior managerial roles, but rather outstanding individuals such as successful researchers or head of groups who end up symbolising the organisation. This view suggest that middle-managers, head of departments and even staff without any management duty may show elements of ‘charisma’ (Bass, 1990, 1997) and have a key role in conveying the brand, due to their direct influence and achievements. This view also seem to support Decker, (1982), who suggests that leaders who are perceived as experts by their followers will be more likely to affect the followers’ behaviour. Linking back to Bass (1997) who explained that formal leaders may be not the only ones carrying transformational values, finding suggest that the transformational leader characteristics may be extended to all the members of an organisation, with their individual achievements and charisma playing a bigger role than their formal position.

Building upon the idea that brand leadership potential may not be limited to ‘formal’ leaders, but also extended to an informal level concerning the different members across the institution (Bass, 1997), the next section focuses on discussing leadership potential for internal branding purposes, discussing the findings from a transformational (Bass, 1990, 1997) perspective.

#### **6.4.4. Informal leaders and brand endorsers**

Data results suggest that, in the academic setting, brand leaders are influential individuals who associate to the brand and embody the brand. The interviews suggested that the use of ‘We’ rather than ‘I’ indicates the fact that the individual is associating the achievement and results to the school, rather than claiming them as its own, fostering the image of the institution and, potentially, earning support and respect of the other members of staff. Such findings suggest that ‘charisma’ and ‘inspirational motivation’ (Bass, 1990, 1997) may be once again the key features to influence potential followers’ behaviour. As previously mentioned, such idea could be potentially extended to any member of an organisation, regardless of their job position. In fact, findings suggest that more than the role of a specific individual, what would really affect

someone's capacity of influencing others is linked to whether the specific individuals are naturally disposed, their behaviour, ethics and morals. The idea of being naturally predisposed links strongly to the concept of 'charisma', whilst the actions taken and the ethics and morals may be linked to the 'inspirational motivation' (Bass, 1990, 1997). In the words of academics, these factors are more effective in influencing behaviour, when compared to simply label individual as 'leaders'.

Previous research outside HE (Ind, 2007) noted that eventual employees, whose values naturally align to the brand, may already exist within an organisation, and involving them within the branding processes would facilitate a genuine input from staff. The finding suggest that Ind (2007)'s views may be extended to HE, with some members of staff explaining that during their normal duties they may be indirectly influencing the brands by advocating it with their colleagues. This may represent an opportunity for organisations, since involving predisposed members of staff within the branding activities could result in staff naturally endorsing the brand.

Academics appear to be more likely to engage in endorsing or opposing behaviours when strong feelings are associated to the organisation, in a positive or negative way. For example, academic staff members that are happy to be working in a specific context may be likely to share their positive views naturally with their colleagues. On the other hand, members of staff disappointed with the brand may end up negatively influencing the perception of their colleagues, suggesting once again the importance projecting positivity towards the staff. Such idea suggest that informal leaders may effectively influence those around when carrying 'inspirational motivation' values (Bass, 1990, 1997).

Following this consideration, in some organisations an interesting phenomenon seems to be taking place, with the organisation recognising the importance of internal perception towards the brand and involving the staff in brand-related activities. Data results suggest that in some HE institutions a 'brand champion' role has been created, to foster involvement with the brand. According to findings, brand champions' activities may consist in providing feedback on organisational decisions and suggesting future directions in order to help the organisation understand how such decisions will impact on the internal perception of the brand. Participants

explained that members of staff have the opportunity of volunteering as brand champions and including such activities within their performance review.

Although the participants recognised the existence of such appointed brand champions and some of the activities they had been involved with, academics struggled to define the usefulness of such brand champions. In fact, the discussion with academics suggested that these efforts may be meaningless if the members of staff do not know about what the role of brand champions involve and what the point of such position is. This links back to the point that a clear communication is required to involve academics as well as to the idea of continuity as a key aspect for a successful initiative, suggesting once again that, in line with Berry and Parasuraman (1992), Mortimer (2002) and Ind (2007), brand initiatives will achieve the expected outcomes only if the initial steps are followed-up in a consistent effort.

Further discussions revealed that some organisations may have realised the benefits of adopting brand endorsers, trying to positively influence stakeholders through the use of influential individuals. In fact, academics explained that there are individual members of staff that may be influential and affect other academics' operations and perception towards the organisation. Such people seem to be usually adopted as endorsers by schools and universities, who may use their influence by giving them visibility in press releases, conferences and media. The findings suggest that organisations may be attempting to identify individuals seen as 'charismatic' (Bass, 1990, 1997) in order to give them visibility and enhance their potential effect on the other members of staff.

The interviews show that, although the academic staff members may recognise influence and merit to these illustrious individuals, on the other hand they may not be necessarily happy to see always the same individuals appearing on the media, believing that there are other members contributing with their work and that their efforts should be acknowledged. Academics explained that more inclusion of other members of staff would enhance diversity within the internal and external branding efforts, suggesting once again the idea that academics want to be considered, provide their opinion and eventually contribute to the achievement of a successful brand. This idea suggests that lack of 'individualised consideration' (Bass, 1990, 1997) will result in disengaged members of staff, suggesting the importance of the dimension in brand leadership process.

## 6.5. OBSTACLES TO INTERNAL BRANDING

The discussion up to this point explored the concept of branding and internal branding in universities, looking at the perception and support towards these topics, the means to convey the brand (eg. training and development activities, communications) and exploring a link between branding and leadership. Nonetheless, the research highlighted also some challenges that can arise during the internal branding implementation. Some of the challenges were extrapolated from the discussions about the previous topics with managers and staff, whilst others were specifically outlined by the participants, either of their own will or upon questions of the researcher. In some cases, the participants explained implicitly some form of obstacles occurred during the brand-related activities, whilst, in other instances, the participants were asked directly what they believed could hinder the internal branding strategies and explicit perspectives regarding the issues were provided.

Altogether, the opinions collected were clustered in 7 dimensions, in line with the model from Mahnert & Torres (2007, p. 56) presented in the literature review. The dimensions identified concern: *Organisation; Information; Management; Communication; Strategy, Staff, Education.*

Although the model is useful to explore the internal obstacles that may affect the implementation of internal branding within an organisations, it fails to address the relationship between such organisations and its context. Therefore, an extra section has been added, namely ‘The Challenges of the HE Context’, which addresses the external issues occurring in the HE Context and how they may hinder the internal branding process.

By addressing the external challenges that universities face in the HE market, and exploring the internal obstacles with the aid of Mahnert & Torres’ (2007, p. 56) dimensions, the following sections attempt to uncover the overall difficulties that Business Schools may face when implementing internal branding. Altogether, the research question that this final part of the chapter discusses is presented as:

*5) What are the factors that may hinder the internal branding strategy of a Business School?*

The potential external issues linked to the context are now presented. Then the discussion moves to the internal issue in line with the 7 dimensions identified by Mahnert & Torres (2007).

### **6.5.1. The Challenges of the HE Context**

The first area discussed looks at the importance of the HE Context and its role in the successful implementation of internal branding.

The first issue discussed concerns the difficulty for organisation in differentiating their brand proposition, arguably pre-requirement for a successful positioning in the marketplace, as previously suggested by existing studies (eg. Hemsley-Brown and Oplatka, 2006; Mampaey, Huisman and Seeber, 2016) and discussed in the literature. Findings suggest that universities find themselves in a time of high competition where differentiating is challenging, and the possibilities are limited. In fact, universities seem to be attempting to differentiate their offering, whilst still being bound to expectations of both prospective students and accrediting bodies, in line with findings from previous studies (DiMaggio and Powell, 1983; Hemsley-Brown and Oplatka, 2006; Mampaey, Huisman and Seeber, 2016).

Building upon Kok *et al.* (2010), who discussed the difference between traditional and new universities, one of the issues identified within the findings concerns distinction between applied and research universities. Applied universities are seen as the ones more oriented towards practical implementation, both in terms of preparation of students and research conducted, whilst research universities tend to be associated mostly to those that focus their resources on research excellence for the sake of knowledge. Linking back to Kok *et al.* (2010) who discussed the different university orientations, the findings indicate that some organisations may stand in between the two sides without taking a clear position, eventually affecting their positioning in the market.

Following from the doubts regarding the balance of universities between research and practice, the results show that branding may be regarded as an important yet useless concept in HE. The participants of this study seemed to regard it as important because the competitive nature of the market requires it, but, at the same time, useless since the system itself is not ideal for such practice. Consequently, the findings suggest that the ambiguous positioning of some

universities may attributed to the unclear concept of university itself, rather than issues associated to the individual organisations.

The results suggest that faculties may perceive the competition within HE as a negative factor. The reason for such view is linked to the belief that the increasing struggle over students is resulting in universities moving away from their identity in order to portray a more appealing image and increase the numbers of students' applications. Such process may result in organisations that end up lowering their standards and offering the same basic propositions, rather than committing to differentiate and ensure a unique value proposition, resulting in the delivery of devalued degrees. Such ideas advance the suggestions of Molesworth *et al.* (2009), who identified potential issues with the new marketisation of HE and the shift of students into consumers. Building upon this idea, findings suggest that issues with the internal branding implementation may arise due to the fact that the context of HE itself and the nature of academic roles may not facilitate branding processes. In fact, academics may have decided to work in HE due to strong beliefs and passion towards the profession, which they may see as a vocation (see section 6.2.3.2.), resulting in a mind-set potentially harder to influence when compared to traditional businesses' employees. Such point supports Molesworth *et al.* (2009) views, in the idea that not all academics may accept the shift towards marketisation, and some faculties may support a being culture, where universities are seen as places to learn and far from commercial positions. Arguably, when such detachment to the modern marketisation of HE arises within faculties, the desired achievement of "getting staff behind the brand" (Chapleo, 2010, p.180) appears an even more challenging task.

#### **6.5.1.1. Present and future of HE**

Further reflections with the interviewees about HE, highlighted that the difficulties in implementing internal branding in universities may not necessarily be limited to the acceptance of a commercial concept in an educational context, but perhaps having deeper roots within the overall changes affecting HE. An interesting discussion highlighted the idea that universities are nowadays lowering their standards in terms of students' grades, in order to increase passes and reduce fails, since higher numbers of passes will positively affect the rankings and, consequently, the way in which the brand is perceived. Rankings and massification of

education may have led to numbering, with HEIs more focused on increasing their ladder rank than focusing on their value proposition.

Findings suggest that participants see the concept of university itself in jeopardy, with the focus switching from enhancing the educational aspects to a pure focus on improving the brand name. The opinions of the participants suggest that a more genuine approach, focused on delivering good education and looking after students, staff and stakeholders in general, would be desirable. The belief shared suggest that such approach would organically contribute to the development of the brand without forcing and pressuring it. Whilst suggesting that the current approaches undertaken by organisation may be not ideal for the internal stakeholders, the academics also reflected on the external perception of the brand.

Finding suggest that, according to academics, the weight of the university brands may not be limited to the establishment of internal processes but affect heavily the external perceptions. In fact, participants' words suggested that the concept of a university brand may be seen negatively also due to its perception of a 'label' affixed on the graduates. The words of the participants suggest that the brand of the university where a graduate got its degree may influence the job seeking process. More specifically, the university brand may impact upon the employers' perception of graduates, putting a label on them and leading to prejudices and bias. In such process, the applicants themselves may feel uncomfortable in applying to job positions, questioning their own worth according to the institution that awarded their degree. Such process appears even more dramatic in the context of HE employment, with academics feeling uncertain about applying to universities with higher ranks than the one where they have obtained their degree.

#### **6.5.1.2. University vs University, Academics vs Academics: The focused competition**

Further discussions revealed that the brand labelling process may apply mostly to universities, which may give more importance to the university where the applicants studied, when compared to the private sector. Participants explained that, according to their experiences, employers in private companies may be more interested in the practical skills of the applicants and whether their study path is aligned to the job requirements and specifications. The overall weight of the brand, especially in the HE context, leads to the issue that perhaps lower ranked

universities may struggle even more to build internal brand acceptance, since the rank of the brand may influence not only the external, but also the internal perception the brand.

The discussion highlighted the fact that the context of HE can pose some *outside-in challenges* in the internal branding implementation. The next sections will now focus on the challenges that may arise *within* the actual universities, discussing them in line with Mahnert & Torres' (2007, p. 56) framework.

## **6.5.2. Internal challenges for internal branding**

The following sections discuss individually the 7 dimensions that Manhart & Torres (2007) proposed as useful to define successful brands. The dimensions (ie. *Organisation; Information; Management; Communication; Strategy, Staff, Education*) are now presented and linked to the findings.

### **6.5.2.1. Organisation**

The dimension of 'organization' concerns its structure, its culture and the existence of insular thinking and internal competition (Mahnert & Torres, 2007).

As observed in section 6.3.2, one of the issues identified concerned the lack of customisations of buildings and offices, resulting in the lack of a 'branded environment'. The findings suggest that the environment plays a role in affecting positively the internal perception of the brand, allowing the staff to subconsciously buy into it.

Then, the size of the organisation was also identified as a potential issue in the process of conveying a coherent message. Finding suggests that coherency and consistency of may be lost when delivering messages across big organisations, also due to the multiple departments and teams involved in the branding efforts, which may convey different messages misaligned with each other.

Reflecting on the culture, another issue that may arise concerns the fact that the university brand may be built around students but not necessarily reflect the staff. For example, a brand that promotes diversity may be reflected within the diverse student population. However, if this representation does not apply to staff as well, the staff may not feel taken in consideration. In line with this, if the values promote the integration of members of staff within the internal



culture and community but are not reflected in reality, this will negatively impact on credibility of the brand for the staff and their sense of identification with it, previously identified as an important prerequisite for buying into the brand. Finally, if the brand only represents students but fails in representing staff, the staff members will hardly identify with such brand and not feel confident about advocating it since they will not feel reflected in it.

#### **6.5.2.2. Information**

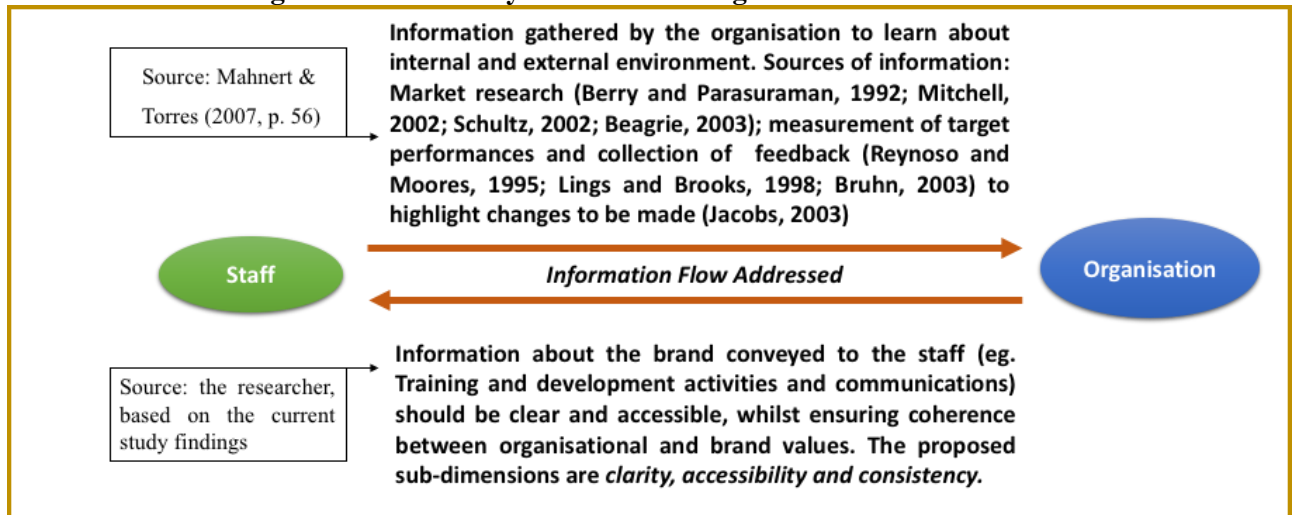
The dimension of ‘information’ (Mahnert & Torres, 2007) concerns the need of searching information about the institution, which can be achieved through market research (Berry and Parasuraman, 1992; Mitchell, 2002; Schultz, 2002; Beagrie, 2003), and the usefulness of measurement and feedback to evaluate the programmes (Reynoso and Moores, 1995; Lings and Brooks, 1998; Bruhn, 2003), in order to identify eventual required changes (Jacobs, 2003).

Indeed, the findings suggest that the concepts identified by Mahnert & Torres (2007) under the dimension of information are important for a successful internal branding and implementation. More specifically, this study has shown that the actions undertaken by leadership and management to develop brand acceptance and support may not always be the most adequate, suggesting the need of learning from staff’s views and adjusting to them. Such point would indeed align to Mahnert & Torres (2007) concept of ‘information’, seen as the process of gathering information from the organizational point of view.

Whilst believing that the aforementioned point is indeed important in order to gather feedback and evaluate the activities, which could be seen as an information exchange *from* staff (and external sources) *towards* organisation, the researcher suggests that there may be another level of ‘information’, which should focus on the information exchanged *from* the organisation *towards* the staff.

The proposed two-way model is illustrated in figure 6.5 below:

**Figure 6.5. A two-way model addressing information flow.**



Developed by the researcher, expanding on contents from Mahnert & Torres (2007, p.56)

### ***Clarity***

The first sub-dimension proposed by the researcher concerns *clarity*, discussed as the co-existence of awareness and clarity towards the brand. Findings suggest that awareness towards a brand and its values should be considered the main requirement for any successful branding effort, since lack of awareness would result in the staff not knowing about the brand and acting according to their own beliefs and opinions. Further to that, lack of clarity of information may hinder the delivery of messages. The information provided should be clear and try to clarify the implications and benefits for the staff.

Clarity should also be extended to the actual brand definition, being it the starting point of the internal branding effort. Findings suggest that lack of clarity in the conceptualisation of the brand will likely lead to internal branding failures, since it may result in a poor implementation where the core message to deliver is not clear.

### ***Accessibility***

The second sub-dimension proposed, *accessibility* concerns the need to ensure that the staff is able to access the information about the brand. If no measures are taken to ensure an efficient way of conveying information, the brand message may not reach the staff.

### ***Consistency***

Then, the third sub-dimension proposed, concerns *consistency* seen as the need of coherence between an organisation and its brand.

Findings suggest that staff may have strong feelings towards an organisation, but the same feelings may not exist towards its brand. Reasons for that may link to a disconnect between organisation and brand. Further to that, linking back to the idea of clarity, whilst a member of staff may experience an organisation from 'within', conceptualise and eventually like it, the same may not happen with the brand. Reason for this may be linked to issues with the brand, which may not be clear or distinctive enough for staff to buy into it or see its directions and priorities.

In general, information appears as a key facilitator for staff involvement with the brand. The results of the study suggest that lack of information will result in staff unsure about the brand and not feeling confident about sharing opinions and actively contributing to its development.

### **6.5.2.3. Management/Leadership**

The dimension of 'management' concerns one of the main focuses of this current study, addressing the involvement of the management in the internal branding programme. Management is required to support and respect the program to ensure credibility (Farrell, 2002; Jacobs, 2003) and guide, through forms of leadership, the employees (Tosti and Stotz, 2001). The formation of brand teams is seen a useful way to positively influence the branding programme application.

Across this chapter, the importance of management and leadership for a successful internal branding effort has been discussed, observing that issues with the aforementioned processes will eventually affect negatively the implementation of internal branding.

One of the points discussed in the interviews concerns the fact that in some cases members of staff may not even be aware of the people at the top of the hierarchy who potentially hold higher levels of influence over the brand, with their interactions limited to their middle manager/leader (eg. Head of department). Consequently, having middle management not interested in the brand, or even seeing it as a negative factor, may end up influencing negatively the perception of the staff as well.

Then, as discussed in sections 6.2 and 6.4 the style of leadership and the brand management process may represent an issue when these are not involving the academic staff, resulting in staff feeling disappointed and in a sense of exclusion. Academics believe that, since they are the first point of contact of students and the one delivering the brand directly, they should be involved in the branding process. Findings suggest that failure in doing so will result in lack of interest towards the brand and in a missed opportunity for its improvement. In line with that, not acknowledging the role of the academic staff and giving them the possibility of sharing their views, will arguably reduce motivation and sense of belonging, previously discussed as key elements of successful internal branding implementation.

If staff cannot identify managers or formal leaders interested in receiving constructive feedback, or if those executives are not interested in the feedback, it will result in discouraged staff members who will lose interest in contributing to the brand. This will lead to a disconnect where information is only passed in a top-down approach, with no contribution from the bottom, leading in frustration for the staff members that will feel as passive receivers who cannot shape a brand they are supposed to deliver. Findings suggest that such frustration could even grow in situations of ambiguity, where the original message sent from the top loses coherency, getting influenced by the views of the middle-management involved in the top-down delivery.

Further to that, if the leadership style does not welcome staff opinions and feedback, it may not only result in staff losing interest but even in them getting afraid of sharing an opinion that is not requested.

Regardless of leadership style, across the interviews it emerged that leaders should be the ones 'walking the talk', meaning that they should be the ones behaving in line with the brand and, ideally, embodying and reflecting the brand values. Failure in doing so may result in obstacles in the brand buy-in of staff members, since the brand communications will appear as a rhetorical exercise without a firm support behind it.

Finally, findings suggest that the turnover of formal leaders may lead to issues in internal branding implementation. Participants explained that often the arrival of a new dean results in a re-branding exercise due to the fact that the dean may want to make an impression and highlight its contribution to the organisation. However, whilst the re-branding exercise itself

may not have a negative connotation, once the formal leaders decide to change job and leave their role, a new cycle starts with the brand continuously being reshaped by the new ones in charge. Such lack of continuity would result in challenges to establish a coherent and consistent strategy in the long term, with staff potentially perceiving the brand as a flexible topic directly associated to those in power, rather than long-term oriented concept connected to the organisation.

The next section will introduce the dimension of ‘communications’.

#### **6.5.2.4. Communications**

The dimension of ‘communication’, has been previously discussed (section 6.3.2) and reflects on the necessity for the internal brand message to be aligned to the external message and communicated to all the internal stakeholders in a clear and understandable way (Ind, 2007; Mahnert & Torres, 2007).

When looking at the internal communication of the brand message, some of the issues identified concern the quantity and quality of communications. Academics felt that there may be too many emails that lacks relevance to the receivers who may feel not reflected in the messages, which will result in the staff looking at the emails and ignoring or deleting them. Some members of staff explained that they felt ‘bombarded’ by the multiple emails received, suggesting that an excessive number of emails will result in failure in reaching the staff. Further to that, lack of customisation in communication channels and messages may hinder the reception of the messages conveyed. People will have different preferences in terms of communications, and therefore, in order to successfully convey the intended message, organisations should adjust to the personal preferences of the staff.

Furthermore, lack of consistency across the different levels of the organisation may hinder the communications of the brand message. More specifically, results suggest that the message initiated from the top may experience ‘noise’, with gaps between the message sent and the one received. Such issue may be caused by multiple teams involved in brand-related communications, which, upon receiving the brand messages, may present a different interpretation the message and consequently deliver their own ‘version’ of the message. Arguably, this process may result in failures in conveying a coherent message.

Communications certainly play an important role in conveying the brand message internally. However, although the communication mix of tools and channels adopted may be useful in delivering an internal message, such message should be set and organised in a strategic way. In line with this, the next dimension presented is 'strategy'.

#### **6.5.2.5. Strategy**

The dimension of 'strategy' implies that the organisation should have a strategy coherent with brand and organisational objectives (Jacobs, 2003). Conflicts between brand and objectives of the organisation will cause confusion and damage the credibility of the brand and the internal branding programme (Manhert & Torres, 2007). Ideally, an internal branding programme should attempt to find the most suitable timing and allocate the right budget (Heyman, 2000; Frook, 2001; Simms, 2003; Thomson, 2003).

One of the issues identified, concerned how realistic the set strategy should be. The participants explained that creating an unrealistic and overambitious strategy will create an issue to the staff, due to the impossibility of achieving it.

The organisation should acknowledge the interest of the staff member and recognise their efforts in contributing to the decisions. Ideally, communications should seek honest involvement and listen constructively to opinions of those involved. The organisation should build an environment capable of allowing and facilitating constructive contributions. Failure in doing so will result in staff being not considered and questioning the worth of their contributions, potentially ending up seeing their own efforts as having a negative impact rather than a positive contribution.

An interesting concept that emerged across the interviews revolved around the fact that the brand strategy should be capable of reflecting the changes happening internally. Ideally, the brand strategy should be short-term oriented and flexible, rather than long-term oriented and static due to the complexity of the organisation. Considering the high staff turnover, with staff members continually changing, the brand strategy should be constantly updated to reflect the new members' opinions and inputs. Failure in doing so would result on the creation of a brand outdated that will not be relevant for the new staff members.

Another problem identified concerns the budget allocated to branding. Organisations may not see the value of investing resources in internal branding efforts. Branding as a whole may be seen as not necessary in some organisations, with the internal implementation valued even less than the external one.

The interviews suggest that even though the availability of financial resources may be a crucial factor in promoting or hindering internal branding implementations, what seems to hold even a major importance is the motivation to carry out such efforts, which links back to the just mentioned need of seeing value within internal branding. Motivation will lead to commitment to the branding strategy, which will result in more efforts, in terms of both time and finances invested.

Motivation is not important only for the one initiating and implementing internal branding activities, but also to the academic staff subject to such implementation. Participants explained that if management carries out activities of formal control, such as annual reviews based on KPI, these may result in the staff behaving in a certain way, in line with the review factors. Nonetheless, the participants explained that imposed behaviour will only result in academic staff feeling forced to carry out some actions, without a genuine motivation to do so, defying the purpose of internal branding as a natural approach.

The interviews suggested that having staff whose values are aligned to the brand will certainly facilitate their readiness to buy into the brand.

Recruitment was identified as a useful approach to identify predisposed candidates, although it was explained that job applicants may show convenient behaviours for the interview, which do not necessarily reflect their real values and opinions. Organisations should be capable of filtering the applicants with a genuine alignment to the brand values from those who are only pretending to improve their chances of getting the job.

Trying to develop motivation and facilitate changes by offering rewards may not be easy, due to the fact that members of staff may be happy to retain their current position, and enjoy higher levels of freedom, without being necessarily interested in career progression, which would involve more limitations.

Further to that rewards useful for career progression may not necessarily influence behaviour. In fact, academic staff may behave in a way only to fulfil the promotions requirements without necessarily buying into the brand-related beliefs.

### ***Micromanagement***

The interviews suggest that perhaps the trend in HE is too oriented towards control with not enough focus on empowering and developing the staff. Expecting staff to complete task and duties without enabling them with necessary knowledge and guidelines will result in staff perceiving negatively the management processes, eventually affecting their motivation to be actively part of them.

#### **6.5.2.6. Staff/Job Role**

The next dimension, ‘staff’, concerns the other main focus of this study and recognises the importance of recruiting, motivating and rewarding staff to influence their readiness to internal branding programmes (Bergstrom, Blumenthal and Crothers, 2002) as well as the importance of segmenting the internal audience in order to convey the right message to the specific segment, increasing the effectiveness (Joseph, 1996). Furthermore, internal branding programmes are seen as most effective when staff members are involved in the creation of such programmes (Thomson *et al.*, 1999; Davis, 2001; Buckley, 2002; Jacobs, 2003; Pappasolomou-Doukaki, 2003) highlighting the importance of involving the staff in the creative process.

One of the potential issues identified, when reflecting about people involved in the internal branding process, could be that individual aspiration may not reflect the values and objectives of the school. This kind of issue could occur both at top level, management, or bottom level, academic staff.

Also, staff may not be interested in processes where they cannot see some kind of added value, such as personal rewards or recognition for career advancement and promotions. On the other hand, academics may be interested in rewards and pretend to buy into the brand only to obtain them, as discussed in the previous section.



Furthermore, the demanding job role and limited time may force academic to be selective about what events they can actually attend. In some cases, the job commitments added to the personal life may completely prevent staff to take part in brand related activities.

Furthermore, despite of all the efforts, individuals may just not buy into the brand. Reasons for that may be some negative experience or the feeling of not being treated fairly by the organisation, which will result in them not being interested in supporting the brand. In some cases, the participants felt that people are made in a certain way and it is very difficult to change their beliefs. The participants argued that the only way to affect behaviour is through control processes, such as the creation of key performance indicator aligned to the intended brand outcomes, explaining that even doing so will not necessarily change staff beliefs, values and morals.

### ***Teaching as a vocation***

Although KPIs were identified as factors capable of affecting behaviour, at the same time, the participants highlighted limitations for such approach, explaining that the establishment of KPIs and the strict control of it would not be taken positively by the academic staff, who may see their job is a vocation and consequently dislike the idea of being constrained by standardised parameters.

In line with this idea, the common idea that emerged across the interviews is that academics identify themselves with the role of academics rather than members of staff of a specific organisation.

### **6.5.2.7. Education**

The final dimension 'education' concerns the fact that management and employees may have different experience and knowledge and, therefore, the outcome of the internal branding programmes may be negatively affected due to ignorance (de Chernatony, 1997) and flawed preconceptions (Mahnert & Torres, 2007). It is therefore suggested to verify beforehand the eventual existence of prejudices, beliefs, attitudes and mental models (de Chernatony, 1999) and the alignment to organisational objectives through education (Quester and Kelly, 1999; Varey and Lewis, 1999; Mortimer, 2002; Papasolomou-Doukakis, 2003).

Managers explained that lack of understanding of branding and what it involves may be an issue. For example, the staff may regard re-branding exercises as visual efforts involving visual aspects, such as the logo. However, since the re-branding exercises may require more than just the visual changes, the staff may not fully comprehend the initiatives and perceive negatively changes beyond the visual aspects. The words from the academics seem to confirm the manager views, with the academic staff suggesting that having a background and previous experiences related to branding may help understanding the importance and the usefulness of the concept. The words of the participants suggest that if members of staff lack brand-related knowledge and experiences this could hinder the understanding and acceptance of the topic.

The managers reflected on the nature of the HE context, with employees that tend to work for the same institution for many years experiencing different management efforts and, eventually, losing trust in the initiatives due to previous experiences. The managers noted that obstacles may actually be linked to how those experiences changed the staff members, explaining that unsuccessful branding efforts may result in staff members develop a negative way of thinking towards further branding exercises. This view appears supported by the academic staff, whose words suggest that having past experiences linked to past branding efforts may lead to staff not trusting new branding implementations. Consequently, those in charge of implementing new internal branding efforts should take in considerations what has been done in the past in order to reduce the negative effects of past activities and recognise the existence of prejudices among the staff.

### **6.5.3. Proposed obstacles framework**

Building upon the categorisations (ie. *Organisation; Information; Management; Communication; Strategy, Staff, Education*) from Manhart & Torres (2007), and incorporating the findings from this study regarding the external challenges of the HE Context (see section 6.5.1), and the proposed two-way information (see section 6.5.2.2), the researcher proposes an obstacles framework, addressing the potential challenges that can arise when implementing internal branding in Higher Education. The framework is mainly intended for business schools, since the findings are based on data collected at the school level. Nonetheless, the researcher argues that the identified challenges may be also relevant at university level, since the various

data collected discussed business school in relation to universities, uncovering aspects relevant to both HEIs' levels. The framework is included below in table 6.2 and represents the basis for future recommendations to practitioners that will be addressed in section 7.2.2 of the conclusion chapter.

**Table 6.2. Framework of possible obstacles to internal branding in HE.**

Type of obstacles	Dimensions	Sub-Dimensions
External obstacles	HE Context	Challenges to differentiate for both Schools and Universities, with a constant struggle to be different whilst legitimate
		Unclear positioning between Applied and Research
		Staff's perception towards different types of Institutions (eg. New vs Traditional, Applied vs Research)
		Academics' passion towards their profession seen as a vocation, which does not align to the shift towards HE marketisation
		Competitive pressures that force universities to lower standards to increase pass rates and improve rankings
		HE brands seen as labels that 'quantify' graduates or staff perception of own value.
Internal obstacles	Organisation	Lack of customisation of physical places, lack of 'branded environment'
		The size of the organisation may reduce coherency and consistency due to the disjointed building and/or multiple departments and teams may convey misaligned messages.
		HE brands may be built around the students, but not necessarily around the staff (eg. promoting diversity which is reflected in the student community but not in the staff population). If the brand claims are not reflected in the activity of the organisation, it may affect the brand credibility.
	Information	HEIs may address the information flow <i>from</i> the staff, neglecting the flow <i>towards</i> the staff.
		Clarity – Lack of clarity about the brand values will affect the delivery of such values since it will create confusion for the staff.
		Accessibility – Lack of accessibility will result in the staff not being able to access the information about the brand
		Consistency – Lack of consistency across the institution and the brand may lead to different feelings towards them for the staff (eg. the strong feelings towards the institution but not necessarily towards the brand). This may be due to a brand not distinctive enough for the staff to understand it or buy into it.
	Management and Leadership	Academics may not know the top executives and have middle managers as only point of contact.
		Leaders may not involve the staff in the brand processes, resulting in lack of interest and sense of exclusion.
		Leaders/Mangers may not listen to staff feedback or not being interested in it. This may cause loss of interest and frustration, potentially leading to ambiguity and an altered brand message. Ultimately, the staff may become afraid of sharing an unwelcomed opinion.

		Leaders may not behave according to the brand values they preach, losing credibility and resulting in the branding perceived as a rhetorical exercise.
		Upon taking a new role leaders/ top executives (eg. Deans) often adopt re-branding exercises to mark the beginning of their new role. This kind of activities may result in the brand being associated to the temporary dean, rather than being perceived as a long-term concept associated to the university.
	Communication	Excessive quantity of communications and lack of relevancy will result in staff ignoring the communications. The lack of customisation in the channels may result in failure in reaching the staff.
		Communications may lack consistency due to multiple teams involved in the process, which may end up altering the original message.
	Strategy	Brand strategies may be overambitious, which may create an issue due to the impossibility of achieving it and lead to the loss of credibility.
		Brand strategies may not involve the staff, and the organisational culture may not allow academics to get involved.
		Brand strategies may be static and not able to adjust to the changes in the institution. Failure to adjust may result in the creation of an outdated brand that does not reflect the current institution.
		Lack of motivation may hinder the internal branding implementation, both at management and staff level.
		Recruitment may help identifying candidates whose values align to the brand. However, some job applicants may show convenient behaviour during the interview to increase the chances of getting the job.
		Linking brand-related behaviours to promotion criteria may help, but only superficially.
		HE strategies may be too oriented towards control with little focus on empowering and developing the staff.
	Staff	Academics' role and duties may not allow them to see the involvement with the brand as something useful.
		Negative experiences and feelings of not being treated fairly may affect academics' perceptions of the brand.
		Academics may not like the idea of control mechanism, such as Key Performance Indicators, due to their perception of their role as a vocation that should not be constrained by standardised parameters.
	Education	Lack of understanding of branding topics may result: - at management level, in a poor implementation of branding processes; -at academics' level, in poor understanding, recognition of value in branding efforts.
		Previous experiences with branding activities may affect the way in which new branding efforts are perceived by academics.

## 6.6. Summary

This chapter discussed the findings from this study, explaining how the results from the qualitative interviews addressed the different research questions proposed. Indeed, the chapter helped shedding light upon different areas that concern the implementation of internal branding

in HE, attempting to clarify the complexities reported by existing studies (eg. Naidoo *et al.*, 2014; Chapleo, 2007). The position of staff and management towards the topic of internal branding was explored. The potential of brand training and communications and the importance of brand leaders were discussed, with a focus on perceived best practices and useful suggestions for successful implementations. However, further than successful practices, the chapter provides insight on potential obstacles that could arise during internal branding implementation, addressing different factors to consider at both theoretical and practical level. A framework was developed to guide future researchers and practitioners towards the possible challenges that can arise when studying, or implementing, internal branding activities in business schools and, potentially, HEIs in general. In line with such view, the following chapter will summarise the key findings of this study, explaining how this research enriches the existing literature, and how it helps providing guidance for practical implementations.

## **CHAPTER 7**

### **CONCLUSIONS**

#### **7. Introduction**

This study has explored the concept of internal branding in HE in the context of business schools, focusing on a) the meaning of internal branding for managers and academics, b) the academic staff support of the internal branding strategy, c) the perception of academics and managers towards internal branding training and communication activities; d) the perception of academics and management towards the role of leadership within the internal branding strategy; e) the potential obstacles that may hinder the internal branding strategy of a Business School.

As an exploratory study, the aim of this research was to get a better in-depth understanding of the internal branding implications within the HE context, to fill research gaps suggested by previous studies and identify new directions for future research. In line with that, the study adopted a qualitative method approach, identified as the most suitable to carry out in-depth investigations and ensure richness of information, and the opinions of managers and academics were collected and then analysed. The analysis allowed the establishment of a link between the information collected in the current research and the previous studies reviewed. Such link was discussed in the previous chapter, the discussion, opening up different directions for future research based on the findings, whilst providing more clarity on topics previously discussed and outlined in the literature. The research is valuable from an implementation's perspective for managers and policy makers, and may help clarifying the processes happening in HE for academic staff. The topic builds upon a growing literature, with the findings adding new insights to existing knowledge. The results have a pedagogic implications, looking at how the brand values and the internal branding efforts may affect teaching and the daily activities of academics, exploring the levels of awareness of the values within the staff and their degree of inclusion and consideration of such values in their academic practices.

To provide a brief summary of the findings, the research identified that, due to the marketisation of HE and the consequently increased competition among universities, institutions are resorting to branding as a way to differentiate. Following from that, policy makers, top executives and managers are increasingly acknowledging the importance of having staff members onboard with the branding strategy, as well as recognizing difficulties and resistances in the achievement of such objective. Consequently, the idea of using activities and communications to facilitate the staff buy-in of the brand, which can be identified within the internal branding process, is gaining the attention of those creating and developing brand strategies, with increasing efforts implemented to achieve the desired result. Managers appear to have mixed feelings towards the process. Some seem to believe that communicating information about the brand should be enough for staff to know what is expected from them and get involved with the brand, whilst other believe that the leaders should actively trying to involve the staff from the beginning of the branding process, to ensure buy-in of the brand. Academics, however, may have their own views which may not necessarily align to the ones of those defining the brand and the brand values, as well as having different opinions about the best way to communicate that brand internally. The discussion explored the views regarding the current internal branding efforts, with the conversation highlighting the possible reasons for failures of the process.

Indeed, whilst providing an overview of what this study achieved, this initial section is intended just as starting point to address the contributions made by this research. This final chapter will expand on the research findings, explaining how they answer to the original research questions and ultimately contribute to theory and practice. The research contributions will be discussed in detail, linking the findings of this study to the previous research in order to clarify how this study contributes to existing literature. Then, a dedicated section will address the implications for practitioners, outlining how the findings can aid the implementation of internal branding and providing recommendations based on the results of this research. Finally, the limitations of this study will be highlighted and the directions for future research presented. The findings are now discussed in line with the original research questions.

## **7.1. Summary of the findings**

This section will summarise the findings of the research, reiterating the research questions of this study and explaining the way in which the section addressed and fulfilled each question.

### **7.1.1. RQ1: What does internal branding mean to academic staff and management in a Business School context?**

The first question addressed concerns the managers and academics' perceived meaning of internal branding. RQ1 was addressed with both stakeholders' groups providing their views about the branding discipline, and the results outlined that the perceived meaning of internal branding is affected by the perception towards external branding and that the branding efforts implemented internally and externally may differ. The perceived meaning of brands appears to be linked to how the brand is shaped and communicated, with influencing factors including the brand reflecting ambitions, rather than reality, and the need to comply with external pressures, such as accreditations. Furthermore, brand architectures were discussed, since the existence of brands at different levels within HEIs appear to shape the way in which the corporate brand is perceived. Finally, the importance of involving academics within the branding activities in a co-creation effort was noted, since such co-creation appears to influence positively the perception of the brand and the consequent decision to buy into it.

Findings suggest that managers seem to be in most cases familiar with the concept of branding, whereas academic staff may struggle in some cases, sometimes entirely rejecting the brand concepts. Some academics may accept the concept of brand as commercial, with brands perceived as worth the value they generate and the employability of the graduates. Accreditations, certificates and memberships linked to the offered degree were seen as key points for adding value to the brand and making it attractive to students. However, other academics rejected the idea of a brand manufactured for commercial purposes, believing that the brand should be "one with the staff and the organisation". Being the brand a subjective concept, the understanding of brand may vary across academics. The heritage of the organisations may play a role, with traditional universities focused on strengthening the historical heritage and project an image of research excellency, and the new ones focused more on emphasising their 'applied' nature and the graduates' employability. Such different



positioning strategies appear capable of influencing the internal perception of academics, suggesting that further to representing an asset for external branding (Bulotaite, 2003), heritage could also play a role in internal branding processes. Nonetheless, the daily working experiences appear even more influential on the staff perception of the brand. A gap between the perception of external and internal brand may exist, possible due to different external and internal branding efforts, which may result in a gap between the brand promise and its delivery. Such gap may hinder the creation of a successful brand.

#### **7.1.1.1. Internal vs external branding**

Managers appear to have clear ideas about external branding, whilst struggling to identify a coherent concept in internal branding. Academics seem to recognise the value of external branding, seeing it as useful to attract potential students and staff members, but may not see the need for internal branding. Academics feel that the brand will be naturally understood internally as long as this is authentic and reflects staff and students' views. Projecting a non-authentic brand will be perceived as an attempt to force a false identity on the staff, leading to academics' resistances. Successful internal branding comes from not pressuring staff and naturally involving them in the activities of the school, since it would allow the staff to *live the brand* (Ind, 2007) in a natural way. Mitchell (2004) that organisations tend to focus too much on changing employees' behaviour, rather than translating the brand values into real-life experiences. This study suggest that the limited internal efforts towards the internal audience may be due to the primary focus of HEIs towards external audiences, due to financial reasons. External efforts appear to be a priority to attract students and obtain funding through tuition fees. Some managers recognised the need of increasing internal branding efforts suggesting the acknowledgement of its benefits.

#### **7.1.1.2. Aspiration, reality and accreditations**

One of the contributions of this study concerns the approaches to create and manage HE brands. Managers explained that often the formal leaders create a brand that reflect their own preferences, rather than the organisation. A branding process built upon desired position, rather than reality, was deemed to fail due to lack of authenticity and a brand promise that often exceeds the possibilities of the organisation, which would result in staff hardly buying into the

brand. Accreditations appear extremely important in shaping business schools' identities and brands, sometimes representing the main driver for changes, due to the necessity of schools to comply with the required criteria. This results in academics' activities to be heavily regulated to have them matching the requirements and staff being discouraged to undertake initiative misaligned to accreditations. Although disliking the idea of imposed actions, academics seem to understand the reasons for such control due to the harsh competitions between HEIs, arguing external pressures heavily affect HE institutions, limiting what universities can be.

### **7.1.1.3. Brand architecture**

Brand architecture in HE is certainly important, due to the multiple schools, colleges and departments portraying their own brand, sometimes different from the university one. The research in this area is scarce and this study contribute to the limited literature. Managers recognised the potential existence of different brands within universities, at university and school levels, and academics added that a department level may exist, in line with Spry *et al.* (2018), and that the same academics may have their own brand, which may be the one academics identify the most with. In some of the studied institutions, university and schools have been unified under a common brand. In others, the schools presented branding differences from the university. Some of the institutions presented differences mostly at visual level, whilst in others the gap was deeper, with schools having their own positioning and branding strategies. Most of the universities seem to be going through a centralisation approach, with attempts to unify the branding activities under the main university brand. However, in some cases, university managers rebranded the logo according to staff and schools' views, adjusting to academics' preferences rather than asking the academics to adjust, showing interest in a joint effort rather than an imposed one from the top. Some managers regarded having two different brands at university and school level as a strength, due to the fact that each level will have its own dedicated positioning. Others observed that schools are ultimately part of universities, and therefore there should be alignment and brand harmonisation across the different levels. With misalignment, the academics may feel part of the school but not necessarily of the university, perceiving in them two distinct identities.

Furthermore, this study found out that schools within the same university may be competing against each other, instead of co-operating for the development of the university. Ideally, universities should respect the individuality of each school and avoiding forcing brand policies upon them, incentivising joint brand efforts across university and schools, pursuing brand harmonisation.

Then, this study noted the existence of mixed subcultures within HE organisations, possibly caused by the different brand levels within universities, resulting in challenges for the internal stakeholders to identify with the university brand. Consequently, the intentional use of separate brands may not be ideal as it would ultimately confuse the staff, supporting the views from previous studies (Rahman & Areni, 2014). Multiple brand layers would cause ambiguity for the academics and lack of consistency across the level, hindering the capacity of conveying a coherent message. Academics will struggle to support something that is not clear. Furthermore, academics staff may identify with either schools or university brands. If the positioning of universities and school contrast, academics will inevitably be forced to choose a side. Consequently, schools and universities should align their positioning and reduce contrasts, once again promoting brand harmonisation across the brand levels.

#### ***The 'academic' brand***

One of the most interesting results identified in this research, which was either implied or clearly discussed across all the interviews with academics, concerns their identification with the profession, also seen as a vocation, which transcends any universities and schools' boundaries. This study suggest that this may represent one of the key aspects to take in consideration in internal branding activities due the weight of such layer of identification. A significant gap was identified for academics, who find themselves juggling between an almost lifelong commitment with their vocation and a temporary engagement with the organisations. Considering the strong academics' identification with their role, attempts of involvement for the co-creation of shared values may help bridging the identified gap.

#### **7.1.1.4. Brand Creation and Co-Creation**

This study explored the process of creation and delivery of the brand, with three main approaches identified as '*Bottom-Up Approach*', '*Top-Down Approach*', '*Mixed Approach*'.

### ***The Bottom-Up Approach***

Some schools adopt a fully inclusive approach, attempting to involve the totality of the academics in the creation of the brand, to ensure they are reflected into it. The opinions of academics and middle managers is extremely valued, and there are efforts in co-creating the brand and co-deliver it internally. The underpinning belief is that if the staff members are not involved from scratch in the creation of the brand, they would not feel connected to it.

### ***The Top-Down Approach***

Some managers explained the impossibility of every single academic, due to the impossibility of satisfying the individual opinions within limited timeframes. The top-down approach regards top executives (Vice-chancellor, deans, etc.) as the ones in charge of defining the brand, with little or in-existent input from middle management and/or staff and the focus on the internal delivery of the brand, rather than its co-delivery. The underpinning belief is that the staff should automatically buy into the brand, without necessarily requiring to be involved in the process. Whilst some managers believed this type of implementation was necessary or inevitable, those involved in the branding process recognised limitations in its non-involving nature.

### ***The Mixed Approach***

A more balanced approach was identified, which could be positioned in between the two previously mentioned, defined as the Mixed Approach. The mixed approach concerns the brand created by involving representatives from each department to provide influential input, recognising an important role to middle management as spokespeople having the power to involve the staff. Rather than involving every single member of the organisation, the approach seeks to involve key figures for each department, showing moderate efforts in co-creating the brand as well as co-deliver it. The underpinning belief for the Mixed Approach is that departments' representatives involved would speak for their members and consequently those would buy into the brand.

### ***The preferable approach***

A comprehensive analysis of the findings of this study suggest that a 'bottom-up' approach would be preferable to deal with the challenges of HE, since it would allow the staff to be

actively interested in the process, potentially reducing cynicism and promoting involvement. The findings suggest that the ‘top-down’ approach may be the least preferable for internal branding implementations. Although academics may accept the approach they may feel excluded from it, resulting in distance between management and staff. Therefore, a bottom-up approach could be difficult to implement due to the challenges posed by the high number of staff, whilst a top-down approach may be easier to implement but fail in involving the staff. Considering these limitations, a ‘mixed approach’ may offer a more balanced alternative, allowing a higher degree of involvement, compared to the ‘top-down’ approach, whilst offering a more manageable inclusion of academics’ views, compared to ‘bottom-up’ approach.

Within this first section, RQ1 was successfully addressed, clarifying that there are multiple forces that affect the way in which the brand is shaped and, consequently, perceived. Indeed, when defining the brand, it appears important to take in consideration how the external pressures will affect it. Similarly, when attempting to communicate the brand internally and generate buy-in it appears essential to take in consideration how brand architectures shape stakeholders’ perception, and what other factors may influence the way in which the brand is perceived. The next section reflects on academics’ support of the brand, focusing on the factors that may facilitate, or eventually hinder, academics’ decision to buy into the brand and include it in their activities.

### **7.1.2. RQ2: How does the academic staff of a Business School support the internal branding strategy?**

The second research question was created to explore the eventual existence of brand supporting behaviour within the academic staff and understand the factors necessary for such support to exist. RQ2 was addressed by exploring academics’ understanding of the brand, reasons behind academics’ decision to support or ‘resist’ the branding efforts, and whether and how the brand is included within the academics’ daily activities and interactions with students.

The discussion outlined that without understanding the brand, supporting it will be very difficult for members of staff. Academics, and in some cases managers, may not have a full understanding of the values. Most participants struggled with listing the exact words chosen to define such values and felt more confident with describing them instead. In most cases, the

managers seemed to believe no difference existed between brand values, mission statement and vision identifying potential issues in understanding which may affect the way in which the values are communicated to the academic staff.

Some managers believe that new academics should know the values of the organisation they chose to work for and act in line with them. However, individual perception of the staff member will not necessarily align to the intended brand image and may still require some aid and clarification. In fact, academics findings suggest that, although the staff may be aware of what their school 'stands for', their recognition of brand values may vary strongly across individuals. Academic staff tends to be able recognise some factors that define their organisation and makes it different but may struggle to associate specific concepts or terms. The current research suggests that reasons for difficulties in identifying clearly the brand values may be linked to academics' difficulties in actually believing in the values, seen as not necessarily authentic. Cases of cynicism have been reported by previous studies but reasons behind it have not been uncovered. This study contributes to the existing literature by exploring reasons for such resistances. Managers believe that lack of support may be caused by academics' tendencies to be independent and not particularly inclined to get involved in areas outside of their specific interests. Such diversity in individual interests was seen by managers as challenging for standardising approaches. Academics' words suggest that cynicism may be due to concrete reasons and consequence of past experiences. Staff may be reluctant to believe in the brand if the university's claims about the brand are not honest and not reflecting the reality. Organisations' attempts to portray a non-authentic brand will result in failure and may lead the staff to question the organisation's actions and integrity, due to its questionable efforts in portraying an image different from reality. Nonetheless, academics' words suggest that although there may be unclear branding efforts, academics may still support the brand due to their attachment to the organization. Similarly, findings suggest that disappointment of academics towards the brand may be due to their desire of improving it and making it clearer. Loyalty to the organisation appears a facilitator of acceptance and support of the brand.

The involvement of academics within the branding process may help reducing the identified issue of cynicism, since they will feel considered, despite of the fact that their opinions may not be reflected in the brand. Not involving the academics would result in them feeling

excluded, perceiving their own views as not important. The disappointment increases when students can share their views whilst academics are not able to, suggesting that, in some instances, students may have a stronger influence on the brand than academic staff.

Academics suggested that the involvement with the brand may be reflected in the creation and delivery of the courses. Academics' efforts and positive outcomes should be acknowledged and the areas for improvement discussed to agree on a future brand strategy. If academics' contributions are not acknowledged, they will feel like numbers, limited to deliver the activities without any role in shaping the brand contents feeling "not appreciated" and, in some cases, "insignificant". Findings suggest that staff tends to be interested in improving the brand and supporting the university strategy, showing commitments, suggesting that some members of staff may already be "behind the brand" (Chapleo, 2010, p.180). Not recognising such interest in members of staff will result in a missed opportunity of involvement for organisations.

Managers' noted that not every academic may be interested in supporting the brand, due to the previously mentioned issue of cynicism, highlighting the importance of respecting the uniqueness of each staff member concluding that, some academics will necessarily 'live the brand' (Ind, 2007) more than others.

Academics explained that the decision of supporting the brand may link to the individual perception of the values. Findings suggest that the academic area of expertise of the staff may play a role. For example, staff with a marketing-related background may have a better understanding of the brand and its values and, although this may not affect their activities at a conscious level, it may still have an impact subconsciously.

Academic staff seems to take in account the brand when carrying out activities with external stakeholders. The words of the academics suggest that staff may feel responsible towards the brand, aware that their actions could affect the brand in either positive or negative way. When discussing with academics their role in shaping the brand and the activities taking place externally to the university, academics identified with the university brand, rather than the school brand. On the other hand, when discussing activities happening internally, the academics seemed to identify mostly with the business school. This aspect suggest that the sense of identification may be affected by the specific context and situations the academics are in.

Academics appear aware of their importance in shaping the brand explaining that their role would inevitably include activities where the brand has a weight. Some academics regarded themselves as potential ‘brand ambassadors’, with the brand reflected in their views, opinions and contributions in activities such as teaching, creation and delivery of the modules. Although studies (eg. Whisman, 2009; Hemsley-Brown and Goonawardana, 2007) had already suggested the importance of academics in delivering the brand, the fact that academics may be aware of their role in such process represents a key finding as it suggests the existence of responsibility towards the brand. When discussing the incorporation of the brand in the interactions with students, academics highlighted the importance of incorporating the brand values within the teaching activities and presenting positive aspects about the organization. According to staff, students go through a process of identification with the organisation and therefore, particularly at postgraduate level with short courses, academics play a key role in developing such sense of identification with the institution. The staff suggested that dealing with students represents the most important activity, with the need of ensuring that the values of the organisation are effectively conveyed. Since academics’ understanding and support of the brand will certainly affect their interactions with the students, engaging the internal staff with the brand appears essential. Although university experiences may help students learning about the brand (Pinar *et al.* 2011), findings suggest that the opposite may also be possible when brand and organisation are aligned, with brand-related activities capable of helping students learn about the organisation.

RQ2 addressed academics’ support of the brand, focusing on their understanding of the brand, their reasons to support or ‘resist’ the branding efforts, and whether and how they include and deliver the brand within their daily activities. The next section addresses managers and academics’ perception of internal branding training and communications, in order to explore the possible means to convey the brand.

### **7.1.3. RQ3: How do Business School’s academics and management perceive internal branding training and communications?**

When reviewing the literature, a significant gap was identified with limited or non-existent literature regarding the role of brand-centred training and communications activities in the HE



context, leading to the creation of RQ3 to address the issue. This study fulfilled the expectation of RQ3, outlining what appear to be useful training initiatives and adequate ways to communicate the brand internally.

When asked about the initiatives in place in their organisations, most of the managers were not able to identify activities dedicated specifically to the brand, suggesting nonetheless that generic training and development activities could also help communicating implicitly the brand.

One of the activities identified involved professional development days, events aimed at preparing managers for their professional development reviews, a process ultimately aimed at evaluating whether the staff accomplished the organisational goals by acting in line with the brand strategy. Then, away days were identified by several managers as events holding potential for the transmission of brand information and fostering brand identity, useful in enhancing brand acceptance and support in the staff. Conversations about the challenge of fitting the department identity within school and university and aligning the internal and external communications were mentioned. Such conversations reinforce the view that the previously discussed concept of brand architecture in HE can effectively pose challenges for academic members.

Findings suggest that management may deliberately avoid mentioning specific terms such as branding, favouring a more direct approach and explicitly asking the staff to behave in a way that aligns to strategy. This may be seen as an example of ‘input control activities’ with management willingly deciding to promote the brand values indirectly through more general discussions of the strategy (Jaworski, 1988). Such approach appears linked to management’s belief that academics staff does not favour the inclusion of branding practices within HE, identifying management’s efforts in respecting academic staff perspectives. When discussing with academics the training and activities that they felt useful to learn more about the brand all the staff indicated away days as the main type of event. Nonetheless, academics also identified limitations, suggesting that these events are not necessarily enjoyable and meaningful. One of the main reasons is that academics wish to provide opinions and have a say in important matters, as this would allow a sense of participation, but may not be able to, suggesting the importance of involving academic staff into brand discussions. In fact, academics may feel

disappointed by the lack of involvement in decisions about the brand that they are expected to deliver. The findings resonate with a recent study by Clark, Chapleo and Suomi (2019) who noted the importance of including the staff in the branding process, suggesting that staff consultations should take place before and after a rebranding exercise, in order to promote involvement and reduce resistance.

Managers regarded introductory documents and materials, initial meetings and orientation programmes as key resources and activities that could allow and facilitate understanding of the brand, as a first point of contact with the new staff. Initial one-to-one meetings were seen as useful to provide background on what happens at the university. Online courses about university practices were identified as potentially useful to enrich the familiarity with the brand. In some cases, the Human Resources department was identified as a potential facilitator for internal branding, although its potential was mainly identified in the transmission of values, rather than in a strategic involvement in the definition of the brand or the branding strategy.

Academics also recognised orientation days as useful activities for conveying information about the brand, explaining that such events are useful in meeting interesting people, although often lacking a follow-up approach which would facilitate further interactions with the attendees. Such idea suggests that organisations may need to look at orientation activities as starting points for a long-term identity building process, rather than an event standing on its own. Orientation activities tend to happen at university level, rather than school level. At the business school, the new staff members tend to be informally introduced to the new colleagues, without any formal event taking place.

Recruitment was identified by managers and academics as a useful step to identify potential staff with values aligned to the brand. However, academics explained that job applicants may show convenient behaviours for the interview, which not necessarily reflect their real values and opinions. Therefore, the researcher argues that, in order to reduce misalignment across staff and brand values, organisations should strive to reduce the risk by filtering the applicants with a genuine alignment to the brand values from those who are only pretending to improve their chances of getting the job.

Following the discussion regarding the fact that external pressures influence the objectives of universities and business schools, such as accreditations and academic frameworks, academics

explained that the external expectations are filtered internally through performance appraisals, with performance indicators aimed at defining activities relevant to satisfy the external requirements.

Events that can help the staff learning about the organisation and the brand seem to be mainly aimed at junior members of staff and, in such events, the main focus appears to align behaviour to accreditations criteria. Staff, felt that this kind of events tend to be not useful or meaningful, perceiving them as a waste of time which could have otherwise been spent experiencing the organisation and developing a sense of belonging.

### ***Internal Communications***

Emails were identified as the first point of contact for overall communications, although not always brand related. The internal communications department was identified as a dedicated department often in charge of overall communications, including brand ones. The intranet, posters, guidelines, staff handbook, documentation, storytelling and literature on what the schools stands for were identified as useful, confirming findings from previous studies in and outside HE. The Virtual Learning Environment (VLE) was the channel identified where the staff could access brand-related documents, adding a new channel to the list of those previously identified by the previous studies.

This may be particularly relevant since the use of VLEs would allow the staff members to access the information about the brand on a platform that is already widely used for teaching purposes, resulting in a direct access more likely to happen naturally. The participants explained that, although they have different online courses for general training, no specific brand courses or e-learning seem to be in place, neither about the brand, nor about mission and vision linked to the brand. This may represent a missed opportunity for organisations to convey information about the brand and communicate the brand proposition for the staff.

Managers suggested that further than the message delivered, it is important to define the tone of voice intended for such messages, and to have a coherent way of communicating, in line with the brand and the brand guidelines. Then, some managers explained that specific templates may be designed for the different types of emails, but all of them should be aligned to the brand. The results seem to show that in most cases the ones in charge of communications seems to be

aware of the importance of aligning the shared contents to the brand guidelines, suggesting high levels of control over the communications.

Communications regarding external interactions identified include brand straplines, brand manual containing several brand-related important factors, such as messaging, tone of voice, photography style, design, logos, pop ups banners. Comprehensive brand manuals are created to guide the staff actions when interacting with external stakeholders suggesting that, although there may not be formal attempts to deliver the brand internally, there may still be a significant interest in influencing its external delivery.

Genuine and informal meetings are regarded by both academic staff and managers as capable of developing a community feeling and, consequently, a sense of attachment to the organisation and ultimately to the brand. Since there may be forms of cynicism or detachment from the brand and the organisational initiatives, regardless of the channel adopted, organisations should start by ensuring that honesty and reality are reflected in the brand messages conveyed, since the words of academics suggest authenticity as a determinant of success. Continuity was also identified as a key factor. Findings suggest that regardless of how effective a specific communication effort may be, it will be meaningless if it's not part of a continuous and coherent long-term process. Lack of continuity will potentially lead to academics seeing the branding efforts as a rhetorical exercise lacking consistency.

The importance of having a branded environment was noted in the study. Without it, the rooms and the offices may appear as any other university, with no physical evidence defining the place and a consequent missed opportunity to create sense of belonging. Up to date no existing studies in HE outlined the importance of an integrating the several tools at visual level within a comprehensive branded environment, outlining a new addition to the existing literature.

The participants explained that any kind of communications would be pointless if a lack of conceptualisation of the brand subsists. With clarity about what to communicate, the efforts will result in ambiguity ending up confusing the staff about what is expected from them.

Forcing activities and communications on staff will have negative effect, reinforcing once again the idea of freedom of choice as prerogative for internal branding success in HE. Furthermore, although having a comprehensive and integrated number of visual tools may help

building a sense of belonging within the staff, at the same time the individual tools should be selected carefully, with each tools benefits and limitations taken in account.

#### **7.1.4. RQ4: How do Business School’s academics and management perceive the role of leadership in the internal branding strategy?**

This study addressed and fulfilled RQ4 by exploring the perception of academics and managers towards the topic of brand leadership, with the results clarifying the relationship between brands and leadership, factors that these key stakeholders associate to influential leaders, and further points such as the fact that, when it comes to brands, top executives are not necessarily the ones associated to leaders.

Managers overall agreed that a concept of brand leadership is possible, identifying HE in those individuals having an influential role whilst showing satisfaction with their job and organisation, since their positive behaviour and pride in their job will be likely to convey their positive feelings towards the brand. Academic staff also recognised that leaders may be capable of influencing behaviour, although explaining that academics may be able to go beyond their normal responsibilities for the sake of their role, rather than for the sake of the brand, linking back to the previously mentioned identification with the profession, seen as a vocation, renewing the necessity of considering such aspect for any kind of internal branding process.

Academics may make extra efforts if these are important for the organisation that they are loyal to, suggesting the importance of emotional attachment as driver of goodwill. However, staff may be loyal to the organisation but not necessarily to the brand, especially when this is not clear or misaligned to the organisation. Academics identified in leadership a symbolic sense or symbolic focus for the organisation.

##### ***Formal Leaders***

When discussing brand leadership, the roles of individuals can affect their credibility and degree of impact on other people, with “titles, capacity of attracting funding, charisma and networking skills” useful in influencing both students and staff members. Having some kind of formal recognitions and titles at senior level was indicated as an important requirement to build credibility. Titles were seen as particularly beneficial when representing evidence of senior staff’s expertise in processes that the staff is undertaking, and when the same titles are

expected by the job applicants during recruitment processes. Formal leaders often tend to decide the brand through a top-down approach, without any input from the staff. Such approach appears not preferable with findings suggesting that the brand should truly represent the organisation to be embraced by its members. If formal leaders try to force a brand reflecting their views, rather than the organisation, it may incur in a lack of authenticity and may be consequently difficult to trust and buy into for the staff. Thus, the brand should be authentic and since formal leaders are the ones often initiating branding activities, they should support the internal branding process by embodying the brand naturally in their activities and communications. If leaders create a brand that not reflect the reality of the organisation and embody that 'artificial' brand, although staff members may still accept the decision, they will not necessarily accept the brand. This will result in academics artificially delivering the brand, rather than genuinely living it. In fact, academics may disagree with leadership decisions that not reflect reality, believing that they may not necessarily benefit the university/school suggesting that academics' resistances may be due to their commitment towards the organisation and willingness to improve its brand.

Formal leaders are seen as people of power who should show efforts in interacting socially with the staff on daily basis, with attempts to motivate the staff and inform them about news, opportunities and events. The interactions should happen informally and spontaneously. The concept of 'interaction' was identified as a major requirement to classify someone as a brand leader. However, whilst managers listed official events, such as graduation days and open days, as the ones they believed having a huge impact upon the success of the branding strategy, academics' views suggested that formal interactions may not be the most adequate for conveying the brand, regarding personal, face-to-face exchanges as important and explaining that brand leaders should visit the offices, chat with the staff and inspire, rather than just instruct. Such view links back to the previously discussed idea that informal chats may be more useful than formal events and workshops, when trying to convey the brand.

Academics suggested that there may be different leadership styles, explaining that leadership is context specific and it's also process specific and it should be tailored to the specific case, suggesting a flexible mind-set and willingness to compromise, as long as the context justifies the adopted style. Successful leadership should not be fixed and imposed on people but rather

capable of adjusting to the context. The importance of a social context can be found in both managers and academics' opinions. Managers identified social interactions between leaders and employees as the main channels to promote the brand and endorse it. Academics suggested that potential leaders should interact with their subordinates and learn from them, in order to adjust to them and identify the most suitable leadership style.

A supportive and involving leadership style may help clarify and reinforce the brand message internally. The effectiveness of leadership styles may also be affected by the potential followers' ideas, culture and beliefs, and whether those match the leader's ones. Such challenges seem to confirm once again the usefulness of 'individualized consideration' in interactions between 'leaders' and 'followers', which may act as a bridge to reduce such gap and facilitate mutual understanding.

Successful leadership traits can be identified in individuals' capacity of responding to all the challenges despite of context, in a way that unifies the different views under a common idea. The ability to empower staff, inspire and support them appear as an indicator of good leadership, capable of affecting staff perception towards organisation and the brand. Leaders should lead by example, showing to employees how interesting and productive things could be, rather than just telling them how to behave. Acknowledging the merits of the individual academics in achieving the organisational goal was seen as a key step in the process, as well as involving them in the achievement of future goals and offering support along the journey.

Leadership should also promote interactions among the staff members, since the study identified existence of a degree of co-inspiration among staff members, where the leaders' role would consist in initiating and facilitating such process.

Academics regarded freedom as a key topic. Formal leaders are perceived as free to choose what they want to do and consequently their decision of supporting the brand may be even more impactful than any other member of the organisation, as it will be a conscious decision, rather than a directive from the top. Nonetheless, academics explained that often unit heads are the only figures that they interact with that could provide information about the brand. This study suggests that middle level managers, who interact closely with academic members of staff, may have a strong influence in conveying the brand and, eventually, carry brand leaders traits. In line with this, participants noted that the individuals who embrace and embody

the brand are often not associated with senior managerial roles, but rather outstanding individuals such as successful researchers or head of groups who end up symbolising the organisation. This view suggests that middle-managers, head of departments and even staff without any management duty may have a key role in conveying the brand, due to their direct influence and achievements.

### ***Informal leaders and brand endorsers***

More than the role of a specific individual, what would really affect someone's capacity of influencing others appears linked to whether the specific individuals are naturally disposed, their behaviour, ethics and morals. For example, finding suggest that when individuals associate the achievement and results to the school (eg. using 'We' instead of 'I'), rather than claiming them as their own, it may result in support and respect of the other members of staff who would feel part of that joint effort. Members of staff whose values naturally align to the brand, may already exist within an organisation, and involving them within the branding processes would facilitate a genuine and natural contribution and potentially result in an internal brand endorsement. In fact, academics appear to be more likely to engage in endorsing or opposing behaviours when strong feelings are associated to the organisation, in a positive or negative way, suggesting once again the importance of projecting positivity towards the members of staff.

Some organisations seem to recognise the importance of involving the staff in brand-related activities, creating a 'brand champion' role, to foster involvement with the brand. Brand champions' activities may consist in providing feedback on organisational decisions and suggesting future directions in order to help the organisation understand how such decisions will impact on the internal perception of the brand. Participants explained that members of staff have the opportunity of volunteering as brand champions and including such activities within their performance review.

Similarly, organisation seem to be trying to positively influence stakeholders' perception of the brand adopting influential individuals as endorsers giving them visibility in press releases, conferences and media. Academics may recognise influence of these illustrious individuals, although not being necessarily happy to see always the same people appearing on the media, believing that the efforts of other members should be acknowledged since this would enhance



diversity within the branding efforts. Findings suggest once again that academics want to be considered, provide their opinion and eventually contribute to the achievement of a successful brand.

This section addressed RQ4 discussing the relationship between brands and leadership, focusing on factors that managers and academics associate to influential leaders, and exploring what are the factors that may be associated to successful brand leaders. The next section will conclude the chapter by addressing the final research question, outlining the obstacles that may arise when implementing internal branding in business schools.

### **7.1.5. RQ5: What are the factors that may hinder the internal branding strategy of a Business School?**

This study identified potential obstacles to internal branding, which could be caused by external factors, such as the academic context, or internal factors, relevant to the specific organisations.

#### ***The academic context***

The first issue identified concerns the difficulty for organisation in differentiating their brand proposition, arguably pre-requirement for a successful positioning in the marketplace. Universities find themselves in a time of high competition where differentiating is challenging, and the possibilities are limited. In fact, universities seem to be attempting to differentiate their offering, whilst still being bound to expectations of both prospective students and accrediting bodies. Differentiation issues naturally link to positioning. An issue identified concerns distinction between applied and research universities with the findings indicating that some organisations may stand in between the two sides without taking a clear position, eventually affecting their positioning in the market. Furthermore, branding was not seen as necessarily useful for the HE context, and, together with the heavy competition in the market, perceived as a negative discipline. The reason suggested is that the increasing struggle over students is resulting in universities moving away to their identity in order to portray a more appealing image and increase the numbers of students' applications. Such process may result in organisations that end up lowering their standards and offering the same basic propositions, rather than committing to differentiate and ensure a unique value proposition, resulting in the delivery of devalued degrees. Academics may disagree with such changes, due to their strong

beliefs and passion towards the profession, which they may see as a vocation (see section 6.2.3.2), resulting in a mind-set potentially harder to influence when compared to traditional businesses' employees. On the same line, findings suggest that universities are nowadays lowering their standards in terms of students' grades, in order to increase passes and reduce fails, since higher numbers of passes will positively affect the rankings and, consequently, the way in which the brand is perceived. Rankings and 'massification' of education may have led to numbering, with HEIs more focused on increasing their ladder rank than focusing on their value proposition. Participants perceive the concept of university itself in jeopardy, with the focus switching from enhancing the educational aspects to a pure focus on improving the brand name. Furthermore, the concept of a university brand may be seen negatively also due to being perceived as a 'label' affixed to the graduates, which may influence the job seeking process affecting the employers' perception of graduates and leading to prejudices and bias. In such process, the applicants may feel uncomfortable in applying to job positions, questioning their own worth according to the institution that awarded their degree. Such process appears even more dramatic in the HE context, with academics feeling uncertain about applying to universities ranking higher than the one where they have obtained their degree. Consequently, lower ranked universities may struggle even more to build internal brand acceptance, since the rank of the brand may influence not only the external, but also its external perception.

### ***Internal obstacles***

When looking at the internal potential obstacles, the lack of a 'branded environment', in form of customised buildings and offices, may not allow to experience the organisation and associate fully to the brand. Then, the size of the organisation may be an issue, since coherency and consistency may be lost when delivering messages across big organisations, due to the multiple departments and teams involved in the branding efforts. Furthermore, the brand may be built around students but not necessarily reflect the staff, which will result in academics not identifying with it and not interested in advocating it.

This study has shown that the actions undertaken by leadership and management to develop brand acceptance and support may not always be the most adequate, suggesting the need of learning from staff's views and adjusting to them. Previous research noted the importance gathering feedback and evaluate the activities, which could be seen as an information exchange

*from* staff (and external sources) *towards* organization, with less focus to the information from the organization towards the staff. This study contributes to the dimension of ‘information’, proposing a model (see section 6.5.2.2) that addresses the flow of information towards the staff. The three key sub-dimensions proposed are *clarity*, *accessibility* and *consistency*. This study proposes that lack of *clarity* in information, such as conceptualization of the brand, will result in poor branding implementation where the core message is not clear. *Accessibility* concerns the need to ensure that the staff is able to access the information about the brand. If no measures are taken to ensure an efficient way of conveying information, the brand message may not reach the staff. *Consistency* seen as the need of coherence between an organisation and its brand, since, as previously discussed, staff may feel loyal to the organisation but not necessarily to the brand.

Then, discussing issues in management and leadership, in some cases members of staff may not be aware of the people at the top of the hierarchy, who potentially hold higher levels of influence over the brand, with their interactions limited to their middle manager/leader (eg. Head of department). Consequently, having middle management not interested in the brand, or even seeing it as a negative factor, may end up influencing negatively the perception of the staff as well. The style of leadership and the brand management process may represent an issue when these are not involving the academic staff, resulting in staff feeling disappointed and a sense of exclusion, with consequent lack of interest in the brand. Not acknowledging the role of the academics and giving them the possibility of sharing their views, will arguably reduce motivation and sense of belonging, previously discussed as key elements of successful internal branding implementation.

Leaders should be the ones ‘walking the talk’, meaning that they should be the ones behaving in line with the brand and, ideally, embodying and reflecting the brand values. Failure in doing so may result in obstacles in the brand buy-in of staff members, since the brand communications will appear as a rhetorical exercise without a firm support behind it. The turnover of formal leaders may lead to issues since often the arrival of a new dean results in a re-branding exercise due to the fact that the dean may want to make an impression. However, once the formal leaders abandon their role, a new cycle starts with the brand continuously being reshaped by the new ones in charge. Such lack of continuity result in staff potentially perceiving

the brand as a superficial topic directly associated to those in power, rather than long-term oriented concept connected to the organisation.

Communications can also cause issues in internal branding. Academics felt that there may be too many emails that lacks relevance to the receivers who may feel not reflected in the messages, which will result in the staff ignoring or deleting the emails. Some academics felt 'bombarded' by the multiple emails received, suggesting that an excessive number of emails will result in failure in reaching the staff. Lack of customisation in communication channels and messages may hinder the reception of the messages conveyed and adopting inadequate channels will reduce the chances of reaching the staff.

Furthermore, lack of consistency across the different levels of the organisation may hinder the communications of the brand message since, in case of multiple teams involved in brand-related communications, the brand messages may present a different interpretation and consequently delivery of an altered message lacking consistency.

The strategy set also plays an important role. An unrealistic and overambitious strategy will create an issue to the staff, due to the impossibility of achieving it. Furthermore, if the organisation defines the internal branding strategy without input from the staff, it may lead to failures and poor response. The strategy should not be static but rather short-term oriented and flexible. Considering the high staff turnover, with staff members continually changing, the brand strategy should be constantly updated to reflect the new members' opinions and inputs. Failure in doing so would result in a brand outdated that will not be relevant for the new staff members.

Furthermore, organisations may not see the value of investing in internal branding, identifying a lack of motivation for those in charge. Motivation is important for both initiators of the process and staff members. If management carries out activities of formal control, such as annual reviews based on KPI, these may result in the staff behaving in a certain way, in line with the review factors. Nonetheless, the use of formal control may be seen as imposed behaviour will only result in academic staff feeling forced to carry out some actions, without a genuine motivation to do so, defying the purpose of internal branding as a natural approach. Trying to develop motivation and facilitate changes by offering rewards may not be easy, due to the fact that members of staff may be happy to retain their current position, and enjoy higher

levels of freedom, without being necessarily interested in career progression. Even when interested, academic staff may behave in the desired way only to fulfil the promotions requirements without necessarily buying into the brand. This study suggests that the trend in HE is too oriented towards control with not limited focus on empowering, involving and developing the staff.

The staff itself may pose some challenges for internal branding. The demanding job role and limited time may force academics to be selective about what events they can actually attend. In some cases, the job commitments added to the personal life may completely prevent staff to take part in brand related activities. Although KPIs were identified as factors capable of affecting behaviour, the strict control from management would not be taken positively by the academic staff, who may see their job as a vocation and consequently dislike the idea of being constrained by standardised parameters. This study uncovered that academic members of staff may identify with their role of academics before their role of staff members of a specific organisation.

Furthermore, despite of all the efforts, individuals may just not buy into the brand. If members of staff lack brand-related knowledge and experiences this could hinder their understanding and acceptance of the topic and result in them perceiving negatively changes beyond the visual aspects. Previous experiences may also be important. Previous unsuccessful branding efforts may result in staff members developing a negative way of thinking towards further branding exercises. Further to that, the feeling of not being treated fairly by the organisation will lower the interest of the staff towards the organisation and its brand. Consequently, those in charge of implementing new internal branding efforts should take in considerations what has been done in the past in order to reduce the negative effects of past activities and recognise the existence of prejudices among the staff.

The research contributions to theory and practice will be now discussed in the next sections.

## **7.2. Research contributions**

The next sections discuss the research contributions at theoretical and practical level, highlighting respectively the contributions to the literature and guidelines for practitioners based on the findings.

### **7.2.1. Contributions to theory**

This study was built upon the scarcity of research in the specific sector of HE internal branding, in order to answer to the calls for further research of previous studies. The research questions helped framing the dimensions to explore, and the results successfully addressed such questions, ultimately addressing the research gaps and fulfilling the objectives of the study. A full list of contribution has been provided in Appendix 6, with dedicated explanation about how each contribution helps filling gaps in literature or address calls for research. The researcher recommends the reader to access the list in Appendix 6 for a detailed review of the ways in which the study contributed to existing literature. Nonetheless, some key points about the calls addressed have been provided below.

For example, among the calls for research, Curtis *et al.* (2009) addressed the relationship between corporate brand and corporate identity noting that these two concepts may not be aligned, calling for further research in the field of HE branding due the authors focusing only in one specific HE institution. The call for research was addressed specifically in RQ1, by exploring the perception towards branding and internal branding of managers and academics, and received insight from the findings of RQ2, with the participants explaining decisions and reasons to support the brand. Examples of factors identified include different branding efforts towards external and internal stakeholders and the fact that there may be attempts to shape the identity according to the desired image, rather than to the image of the organisation.

Then, Chapleo (2010, 2012, 2015) explored HE internal branding in-depth, recognising that there are challenges that may arise when implementing internal branding, reporting the existence of resistances to branding effort among academics and calling for further research in the issue. This study successfully addressed the issue in RQ2 and RQ5, outlining potential

reasons that may lead to failures in internal branding implementation, with a specific focus to the reasons that may prevent staff for getting “behind the brand” (Chapleo, 2010, p.180).

Additionally, Chapleo (2015) and Spry *et al.* (2018) recognised the challenges of brand architectures, noting that the existence of multiple brands within HEIs may heavily affect the successful implementation of branding and internal branding efforts and Sujchaphong, Nguyen & Melewar (2015, p.231) noting “that this is another level of branding that must be considered in future studies”. The three studies called for further research, in a field where no further research appears to exist, to clarify the perception of the different stakeholders towards the multiple brand, and potential identities, that may exist within an institution. The calls for research have been addressed in RQ1 and RQ2 through a detailed exploration of the managers and academics’ perception towards the multiple brands, as well as whether they felt it would pose an issue or an opportunity for HEIs. Within the discussion, a dedicated section attempted to picture the brand architecture strategies adopted in the studied institutions, supported by visual figures to illustrate the points.

Moreover, Sujchaphong, Nguyen & Melewar (2015) reviewed the existing literature regarding internal branding, noting that, at theoretical level, brand-centred training and communications activities may support the internal branding implementation. However, due to the theoretical nature of the paper, the authors addressed the need to explore the concept in a practical setting. This study explored academic and management’s perceptions towards brand-centred activities and communication, contributing to enrich the limited literature and addressing the call for further research. Within RQ3, the role of internal branding training and communications activities has been explored, outlining what appear to be the most adequate ways to communicate the branding. For example, it was noted the need to have a clear conceptualisation of the brand, the importance of authenticity and continuity in communications, the need to respect freedom and avoid forcing activities on the staff, and the role of branded environment to facilitate the subconscious buy-in of the brand.

Furthermore, calls for investigation highlighted the need to explore the under-researched area of brand leadership with previous studies (eg. Burmann & Zeplin, 2005; Kaewsurin, 2012) suggesting the need to explore the perception of the stakeholders involved in the process, as well as the need to explore the practical application of topics discussed at theoretical level

(Sujchaphong, Nguyen & Melewar, 2015). The call for research has been successfully addressed in RQ4, with the findings outlining interesting aspects such as the key factors that seem to be associated to brand leaders, the fact that leaders are not necessarily identified in top executives, the need to involve academics with the brand and the most adequate way to do so. Finally, Dean *et al.* (2016) addressed the role of brand co-creation in affecting the perceptions towards the brand, outlining the need for further investigation on the interpersonal relationships occurring among university stakeholders, and their role in affecting the perception towards the corporate brand. This study answered to such call for research primarily in RQ1, with a dedicated section addressing the different approaches to brand creation and delivery in HEIs, and clarified other aspects such as the way in which involvement affects brand support (RQ2), the type of communications that appear more suitable to involve the staff in brand co-creation (RQ3), the role of leaders in involving the staff (RQ4) and the obstacles that may arise when not involving the staff (RQ5).

In general, the study explored different areas, providing further insight on the implications of internal branding implementations in HEIs. Once again, a reading of the detailed contributions, provided in Appendix, is recommended to fully appreciate the relevance of this study. Indeed, universities and business schools tend to present similar structures, with the latter being in most cases part of the overall university organisation. Consequently, the findings provided in Appendix are expected to be relevant at both university and business school levels. Nonetheless, the next section provides a deeper focus on how the study enriches the literature in the specific setting of business schools.

#### **7.2.1.1. Contributions to Business School literature**

When focusing specifically on business schools, existing research addressing corporate brand building and corporate brand management is limited and have disparate focuses (eg. Balmer and Liao, 2007; Roper and Davies 2007; Naidoo *et al.*, 2014; Balmer and Wang, 2016a). Indeed, the essential role of business schools should be to promote and promulgate good practice in terms of organizational management (Balmer and Wang, 2016b). Such role can be achieved in many ways, but the focus that most of the business schools tend to share is on their



“outputs in terms of the quality, saliency and practicability of their research and teaching” (Balmer and Wang, 2016b, p11).

However, business schools’ needs are not limited to preach management theories and practices but also require the schools to be the first ones embracing what they preach, requiring them to be exemplars of ‘best practice’ in terms of input of the management of their organisations, and, of course, their corporate brands. Nonetheless, sometimes business schools experience difficulties in implementing successful internal branding, leading to issues that the current study attempted to clarify and, ideally, reduce. Indeed, in the specific setting of business schools, different studies provided different insights whilst identifying potential challenges. For instance, Pitt *et al.* (2006) asked directors and senior administrators to rate their own business school, concluding that the majority of the participant did not perceive their organisation as managing effectively their brand, suggesting that even though Business Schools teach brand management, the effective management of some own brand is done poorly. This non-alignment between external delivery and internal implementation was explored in the current study, along with the potential reasons for the different level of internal and external efforts.

Balmer and Wang, (2016a) identified that senior managers within top British business schools fully appreciate their custodianship role in managing and maintaining the corporate brand and that they recognise the importance of satisfying both internal and external stakeholder groups’ interests. However, the findings from the current study seem to suggest that, whilst in senior managers may ‘appreciate their custodianship role in managing and maintaining the corporate brand’, in line with Balmer and Wang (2016a), the same may not apply for their recognition of ‘the importance of satisfying both internal and external stakeholder groups’ interests’. In fact, this study suggests that both managers and academics feel that the efforts are mostly directed towards the external stakeholders, whilst limited only to specific stakeholders internally. More specifically, this study suggests that business schools, and potentially universities, may be actively seeking students’ feedback and preferences, whilst neglecting staff’s views and opinion. Findings suggest that if students have a say in shaping the brand, whilst the academic staff opinion are ignored, this will result in disappointed members of staff that may cease to be interested in the brand and detach from it. This would inevitably lead to failure of the internal

branding process. Consequently, this study recognises the importance of involving the academic staff within the brand creation as well as the usefulness of listening to staff views and feedback, particularly due to the staff key role in delivering the brand promise. In line with that, the study suggest that, regardless of the leadership style adopted in a business school, an inclusive leadership that seek to involve the staff in the ongoing brand processes and activities would be more likely to lead to brand support among the staff community. In the business school setting in particular, and potentially HE as whole, the transformational leadership characteristic of ‘individualized consideration’, was identified as key aspect to get staff involved with the brand and potentially lead to brand support. Indeed, the study suggests that the dimensions of ‘charisma’ and ‘inspirational motivations’, previously identified as the two main characteristics of brand leadership in the commercial sector (Bumann & Zeplin, 2005), still play a central role development of employee brand support in HE. Although not as crucial as the others three, the last dimension of transformational leadership, ‘intellectual stimulation’ appeared useful in facilitating the brand support by facilitating the creation of an environment where the staff feels stimulated and actively involved. This study identified that although efforts to facilitate peer working relationships may be initiated, organisations often fails in following up with recurring events where such relationships can be cultivated and nurtured, missing the opportunity of having staff developing a sense of belonging and feeling closer to the organisation and perhaps to the brand symbolising it. Indeed, staff require their own dedicated attention. A previous study from Roper and Davies (2007) explored internal stakeholders’ perceptions of Manchester Business School, from the perspectives of employers, students and staff. The study found out that those three groups have different perspectives and different indicators of satisfaction, suggesting that internal communications should be adapted according to the targets and that every general corporate communication should address the different stakeholder groups in a tailored way. Another contribution of this study deepens the findings from Roper and Davies (2007), suggesting the most preferable approach to adopt when communicating the brand internally. Those in charge of communicating internally the brand proposition should adapt to staff preferences, since staff seem to favour informal communications and activities over formal ones, with personal interaction seen as the most effective way to convey information and develop interest towards the brand. In fact, the traditional adoption of emails and corporate communications was often seen by the academics

as a rhetorical exercise, often lacking authenticity or even continuity, with initiatives started and messages delivered once, but not followed up. The brand should be communicated primarily informally, with formal activities used as a supporting role. All the communications, either formal or informal, should ensure the transmission of an authentic message that reflects the real nature of the organisation, rather than an artificially identity built at the top. Finally, the communications efforts should be continuous, ensuring that the initial messages and activities are followed up, building a continuum. This would allow the staff to perceive the activities as a 'serious' effort, rather than one-off activities only used to fulfil requirements, in a 'tick-all-the-boxes' approach with no deeper meaning behind it.

Business school and universities should be concerned about how internal stakeholders see the brand, and, in case of prejudices and preconceived opinions, attempt to improve the perception of the brand. Balmer and Liao (2007) found out that, in a leading business school, students were conscious of the reputation and prestige of their business school and that the corporate ethos and the identity traits of the school were found to be of material importance for them. This research found out that the same may apply to academic members of staff. In fact, this study found out that potential job applicant may have prejudices about the brand of the organisation they are applying to. Such prejudices seem to be built on the idea that old and traditional universities (eg. Ancient, Red bricks, Plate Glass) may be associated to better opportunity for development of the staff, in terms of teaching and research, and overall performances of the institutions, when compared to the newer universities (eg. Post-92, Ex-polytechnics). However, the study suggest that, although prejudices may exist, the staff will eventually build their own perception of the brand towards their daily experiences of it, suggesting that universities should look after their staff members and ensuring they feel supported and able to grow and develop in their current organisation. Further to that, Balmer and Liao (2007) found that students studying locally felt closer to the school brand, whilst student studying overseas associated mostly to the university brand. When looking at the academic staff, this study found that staff may feel closer to either school or university, according to their duties or the situation they are in. Some members felt closer to the school, since they explained it was the place where they spent most of their time working, whilst others

felt they were part of a larger whole, associating to the university brand in general. This study suggest that the brand architecture will play an important role in this regard.

A previous study by Gopalan, Stitts, and Herring (2006) explored business schools and MBA branding strategies, finding out that top ranked business schools' brands are often branded separately from the university they are affiliated to. Although universities may decide to willingly adopt different brands at university and school levels, the findings of this study, in line with the relevant literature (Devlin, 2003; Rahman & Areni, 2014; Hsu *et al.* 2015), suggest that having university and school brands aligned, in terms of values and positioning, would reduce ambiguity for staff members, ultimately facilitating the development of a sense of identity towards the different level unified within a unique brand. In line with such view, the findings of this study discourage organisations to adopt brands at university and school levels that portray different positioning, especially when they are contrasting with each other. An example of this, taken from the data analysis, saw a business school projecting an 'applied' image, with a focus on preparing the students for their employment career, with the university projecting a more research oriented image, focusing on promoting critical thinking and intellectual discovery. The interviewed participant explained that the brand proposition of the university as a place to discover knowledge was certainly more attractive than the applied one of the business school, consequently explaining that he could identify with the university but not necessarily to the business school. Such view reiterates the recommendation that those in charge of defining the brand proposition should reflect on the way the brands at different levels will be perceived, and reduce the risk of divergent brands that will force the staff to 'choose a side'. This is especially important, since both managers and academics interviewed in this study suggested that the existence of subcultures within universities, in line with previous studies (Harris & de Chernatony, 2001; Sujchaphong, Nguyen & Melewar, 2015; Spry *et al.*; 2018), which would further hinder the development of a consistent sense of identity. In line with the aforementioned discussion, this study suggests the need for brand harmonisation across the levels, which top executives and managers should pursue as a priority for internal brand buy-in. Lack of brand harmonisation would result in mixed messages lacking consistency and, consequently, the academic staff experiencing ambiguity.

### **7.2.2. Contributions to practice**

This study investigated the topic of internal branding, a practical discipline whose implementation in higher education is constantly increasing, despite of the limited number of studies available to guide practitioners in their activities. In order to clarify the ongoing internal branding approaches and identify potential obstacles, the study explored the perspectives of HE managers and academics, key stakeholders involved in the internal branding implementation. The results revealed interesting findings about the way in which those key stakeholders perceive brands and brand-related activities, as well as identifying reasons that may hinder a successful internal branding implementation. Consequently, this study is expected to provide an important contribution to practitioners in charge of defining branding strategies and policies in HE, and management, playing an important role in the creation and internal delivery of the brand. This research is expected to contribute to internal HE policies by offering a better understanding of staff's attitudes and behaviour, allowing practitioners to make informed decisions based on a robust and dedicated research study. The identification of potential issues may help institutions to limit, and potentially avoid, mistakes that could lead to failure in internal branding implementations. Furthermore, the study was carried out in a very specific context, the United Kingdom business schools. As business schools appear to be the ones with a higher degree of internal branding implementation, when compared to other schools, the exploration of practices and the identification of issues should particularly benefit these organisations.

In line with the potential obstacles' framework developed by author of this study (table 6.2), and presented in section 6.5.3, a number of recommendations have been outlined for practitioners and framed in the table below (table 7.1). The hope is that, by following the recommendations provided, practitioners will be able to limit the obstacles that may arise when initiating internal branding processes, facilitating a successful implementation.

**Table 7.1. Obstacles and recommendations' framework for HE internal branding.**

Type of obstacles	Dimensions	Sub-Dimensions	Researcher's recommendations for IB implementation
External obstacles	HE Context	Challenges to differentiate for both Schools and Universities, with a constant struggle to be different whilst legitimate	Practitioners should attempt to emphasize what is unique to the brand and makes it different (eg. heritage, geographic location) rather than focusing on aspects shared by other institutions (eg. applied/research positioning)
		Unclear positioning between Applied and Research	If the position of the brand is unclear, stakeholders will struggle to buy into it. Practitioners should avoid halfway positions and try to pursue a clear direction. This would reduce ambiguity for the stakeholders.
		Staff's perception towards different types of Institutions (eg. New vs Traditional, Applied vs Research)	Practitioners should acknowledge staff's potential prejudices towards the institution and mitigate them with actions/communications.
		Academics' passion towards their profession seen as a vocation, which does not align to the shift towards HE marketisation	Practitioners should prioritise respecting staff and try to communicate the brand internally in a way that relates to the academics and their values (eg. trying to learn staff views' and tailor messages accordingly).
		Competitive pressures that force universities to lower standards to increase pass rates and improve rankings	Practitioners should reflect on the way in which the internal operations (also non-brand related) will affect the staff perception, attempting to reduce the risk of portraying a negative image.
		HE brands seen as labels that 'quantify' graduates or staff's perception of own value.	Practitioners should acknowledge staff's perception, to evaluate whether the brand is perceived positively and reflect on how to improve it. This may be even more important in the cases of low-ranked universities.
Internal obstacles	Organisation	Lack of customisation of physical places, lack of 'branded environment'	The environment should provide 'physical evidence' since the presence of a 'branded environment' will help the staff to subconsciously buy into the brand.
		The size of the organisation may reduce coherency and consistency due to the disjointed building and/or multiple departments and teams may convey misaligned messages.	Practitioners should endeavour to align the messages across different locations. Training and reviews may be implemented to ensure that the different departments 'sing from the same hymn sheet' and deliver a consistent message.
		HE brands may be built around the students, but not necessarily around the staff (eg. promoting diversity which is reflected in the student community but not in the staff population). If the brand claims are not reflected in the activity of the organisation, it may affect the brand credibility.	Practitioners should define brand values reflecting on the different stakeholders, in order to create a brand relevant to them and facilitate the development of a sense of belonging. Also, to ensure credibility, the brand claims should be reflected in the communications and activities of the institution.
	Information	HEIs may address the information flow <i>from</i> the staff, neglecting the flow <i>towards</i> the staff.	Practitioners should adopt a two-way information model, reflecting on both the stream of information <i>from</i> the staff (eg. feedback) and <i>towards</i> the staff (eg. activities and communications), ensuring clarity, accessibility and consistency.
Clarity – Lack of clarity about the brand values will affect the delivery of such values since it will create confusion for the staff.		The brand and the brand values should be clear in order to ensure the delivery of the intended message	

		Accessibility – Lack of accessibility will result in the staff not being able to access the information about the brand	Practitioners should ensure an efficient way to convey the message and an easy way to access the information for the staff.
		Consistency – Lack of consistency across the institution and the brand may lead to different feelings towards them for the staff (eg. the strong feelings towards the institution but not necessarily towards the brand). This may be due to a brand not distinctive enough for the staff to understand it or buy into it.	Practitioners should attempt to create a consistent message across the institution and its brand (eg. organising activities that align to the brand). The information about the brand should be clear and consistent for staff to buy into it.
	<b>Management and Leadership</b>	Academics may not know the top executives and have middle managers as only point of contact.	Practitioners should ensure that the ones with highest influence over the brand are known by the staff. Furthermore, since middle managers (eg. head of department) tend to be first point of contact for the staff, they should be involved with the brand and, ideally, perceive it positively.
		Leaders may not involve the staff in the brand processes, resulting in lack of interest and sense of exclusion.	Practitioners should endeavour to involve the staff in the brand activities, since they are the first point of contact with the students and, in most cases, the ones responsible to deliver the brand promise.
		Leaders/Managers may not listen to staff feedback or not being interested in it. This may cause loss of interest and frustration, potentially leading to ambiguity and an altered brand message. Ultimately, the staff may become afraid of sharing an unwelcomed opinion.	Leaders/Managers should listen to staff and welcome feedback and contribution, recognising efforts and initiatives of the staff. Through a two-way communication the risks of misaligned interpretations of the brand should be reduced.
		Leaders may not behave according to the brand values they preach, losing credibility and resulting in branding perceived as a rhetorical exercise.	Leaders should act in line with the brand values and ideally embody them. This may help create credibility and trust towards the branding initiatives.
		New leaders/ top executives (eg. Deans) often adopt re-branding exercises to mark the beginning of their new role. Such activities may result in the brand being associated to the temporary dean, rather than being perceived as a long-term concept associated to the institution.	Due to the high turnover of formal leaders (eg. Deans) portraying a long-term brand may be difficult. To ensure continuity and long-term consistency, the brand should be defined based on the actual institution values, rather than the temporary leader, and the leader should adjust to them (not viceversa).
	<b>Communication</b>	Excessive quantity of communications and lack of relevancy will result in staff ignoring the communications. The lack of customisation in the channels may result in failure in reaching the staff.	Communications should be mindful of the receiver preference, adequate in quantity and relevant in terms of contents. Practitioners may collect internal feedback to evaluate staff preferences, as it would allow them to tailor the channel to the academics and increase the chances of reaching them.
		Communications may lack consistency due to multiple teams involved in the process, which may end up altering the original message.	This links back to the potential issues identified in the Organization section, since the challenge is linked to both structure of organisation and communication. Once again practitioners may adopt training and reviews may be implemented to ensure that the different departments ‘sing from the same hymn sheet’ and deliver a consistent message.
	<b>Strategy</b>	Brand strategies may be overambitious, which may create an	Brand strategies should be authentic and achievable, as it would allow to visualise the

		issue due to the impossibility of achieving it and lead to the loss of credibility.	direction taken and, ultimately, allow staff to get involved in a strategy that they may perceive as realistic.
		Brand strategies may not involve the staff, and the organisational culture may not allow academics to get involved.	Practitioners should build an environment allowing and facilitating constructive contributions from the staff, ensuring that their efforts are recognised.
		Brand strategies may be static and not able to adjust to the changes in the institution. Failure to adjust may result in the creation of an outdated brand that does not reflect the current institution.	Although the brand values should be consistent with the institution, rather than the leader, the strategy should be flexible to ensure that the values stay relevant. For example, following a significant reallocation of academic roles, the strategy should be questioned to evaluate whether it still reflects the new members of staff.
		Lack of motivation may hinder the internal branding implementation, both at management and staff level.	Leaders and managers not motivated to support the brand may result in a half-hearted delivery of the brand, reducing its effectiveness. Similarly lack of motivation in the staff may lead to limited efforts in buying into the brand. Consequently, practitioners are recommended to focus particularly on motivating the different stakeholders to get them involved with the brand.
		Recruitment may help identifying candidates whose values align to the brand. However, some job applicants may show convenient behaviour during the interview to increase the chances of getting the job.	Organisations should adopt techniques to filter the applicants and evaluate their effective alignment to the brand values.
		Linking brand-related behaviours to promotion criteria may help, but only superficially.	Academic staff may show convenient behaviours and act in line with the brand expectations in order to fulfil promotion criteria. However, whilst this may temporarily result in desirable behaviours, it will not necessarily translate into brand buy in.
		HE strategies may be too oriented towards control with little focus on empowering and developing the staff.	Practitioners should not force policies on academics and try to explain reasons behind requirement and needs for specific tasks. Academics should be provided with necessary knowledge to address their tasks, as this may help perceiving positively the organisation they work for.
	<b>Staff</b>	Academics' role and duties may not allow them to see the involvement with the brand as something useful.	The workload should leave some space for the academics to engage with activities outside of their normal duties. Some activities may be aligned to the normal duties, to allow the academics to learn about the brand and engage with it, without perceiving it as a forced time commitment.
		Negative experiences and feelings of not being treated fairly may affect academics' perceptions of the brand.	If the academics are disappointed with the institution and have had negative experience with it, they may be less likely to get involved with the brand. Practitioners are advised to seek ways to improve academics' perception towards the organisation, as this would facilitate brand buy-in.
		Academics may not like the idea of control mechanism, such as Key Performance Indicators, due to their perception of their role as a vocation that should not be constrained by standardised parameters.	Practitioners should consider that academics may identify with their own role before any kind of organisation that employ them. Consequently, rather than controlling behaviour, an approach that emphasises the research and/or pedagogical benefits of getting involved may facilitate brand buy-in.
	<b>Education</b>	Lack of understanding of branding topics may result:	Practitioners should attempt to test knowledge of those involved in the branding efforts, to ensure



		- at management level, in a poor implementation of branding processes; - at academics' level, in poor understanding, recognition of value in branding efforts.	that all the stakeholders are 'ready' and 'equipped' to embrace the brand.
		Previous experiences with branding activities may affect the way in which new branding efforts are perceived by academics.	Academics may have experienced re-branding exercises before, and perceive them as superficial recurring events, with no perceived value for them. Practitioners should evaluate the possibility of prejudices based on past experiences and address them explaining the added value of the new efforts and how they differ from the previous ones.

### 7.3. Limitations and Generalisations of this study

This research is expected to present some limitations, due to the approach chosen and the direction taken. For instance, as explained in the methodology chapter, the focus of the research is to explore individual opinions, rather than general ones, and therefore the findings are aimed at acquiring knowledge rather than uncover objective realities. Then, reflecting on the research setting, one of the limitations concerns the fact that the study is conducted only in the United Kingdom, in order to have a better focus on the topic and improved control over environmental and market differences (Conant, Mokwa and Varadarajan, 1990). Limiting the research to the single setting of the United Kingdom may affect the generalizability of the findings, limiting the applicability to other settings. The findings may be perhaps applied to other HE schools in the United Kingdom, although the literature clarified that business schools tends to be ones more likely to be familiar with marketing and branding related concepts (Melewar & Akel, 2005)., due to the affinity of the taught disciplines. Consequently, the findings may be mostly relevant to other business schools in the United Kingdom context. Nonetheless, quasi market policies are increasingly being employed by governments around the world, driving universities to shift towards a more market-oriented approach (Walford, 1996). Recent studies in other countries suggest that the marketization of HE is affecting those countries as well, with similar high degrees of managerialism occurring in other countries and business schools adjusting in similar ways to the United Kingdom. Although other institution may experience similar processes, perhaps the generalisation of this study could be mostly limited to those countries reflecting cultural values similar to those of the United Kingdom. Indeed, the

reflection just exposed presents itself limitations, due to the high levels of diversity among staff members which poses itself challenges for generalisation.

Further to that, the data was collected in a set time in specific organisations. Consequently, considering the ever changing nature of HE environment and its continuous evolution to adjust to the necessities of society, there is no guarantee that the same study carried out at a different time would show the same results. Along those lines, changes in the actual organisation studied would perhaps offer different insights. Although the aim of this study is explorative in nature, focused on acquiring knowledge rather than uncover objective realities, it is still important to recognise the limits of the chosen approach to provide a better picture and suggest future directions.

Then, the study has mainly explored opinions of managers and academic members of staff, seen as important part of the internal branding process. Indeed, this provided a quite interesting overview of what is currently occurring in HE. However, since top executives seem to play a key role in defining the brand and in any process of brand leadership, perhaps the inclusion of their perspectives may have enriched the findings by adding further details. Similarly an extra perspective could have been provided by the admin staff or the current students, also seen as key internal stakeholders for universities. Indeed, due to the set time allocated to this research, adding further subjects to the sample would have broaden the number of opinions but reduced the depth of information. Reflecting on the fact that the limited time available affected the sampling decisions, time itself can be seen as a limitation of this research.

### **7.3.1. Methodological Limitations**

When reflecting on the collection of data, it is important to note that some bias may occur during the process, threatening the integrity of the results. For example, Baumgartner and Steenkamp (2001) explain that when people are asked questions in interviews, their responses could be influence or manipulated by “content-irrelevant factors” (p.143). These forms of responses that are not based on content are often defined as ‘response biases’ (Baumgartner & Steenkamp, 2001). For instance, an example of response biases is given by the fact that participants in interviews often over-report positive attitudes, whilst trying to hide or under-report attitudes they perceive as unfavourable (Tellis & Chandrasekaran, 2010). For instance,

considering the current research, a participant that has positive feelings toward its business school or its employer could emphasize the positive application and outcomes of internal branding programmes in the school, while hiding or reporting only partially information that could harm the image of the institution, due to the personal feelings and involvement. On the other hand, a participant who has experienced problems during his working experience with the school may attempt to give a negative image of the institution to harm its reputation, while hiding positive factors. This type of response bias is usually defined as ‘socially desirable responding’ (Tellis & Chandrasekaran, 2010; Baumgartner & Steenkamp, 2001, p.143)

Social desirability bias is also present when people alter the information to create a distort opinion on the topic due to personal circumstances (Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Lee and Podsakoff, 2003), both consciously and unconsciously (eg. employees may avoid talking about something that harms their image and instead say something untrue to give a better image of themselves). This study involves interviews and therefore, along the conversation, social desirability bias may affect the responses and, consequently, the results of the study. For instance, a member of the academic staff may have reported that he has always been committed to the brand values and working in line with them, in order to protect and enhance his/her own position. On the other hand, management may have tried to give a better image of the institution, for instance including activities that are not actually carried out or just describing things in a more positive way that they actually are. Therefore, social desirability bias can affect the results in the analysis stage, especially affecting the exploration of the relationships among the different topics (Ganster, Hennessey & Luthans, 1983). Arguably, academic staff member should be less likely to report altered information about the organisation, when compared to the management counterpart, due to their minor involvement in the internal management, but would present higher risk of bias in the personal involvement aspect. To tackle the issue, the researcher emphasised the anonymity of the data gathered for both sides involved in the research, explaining therefore that there is no need to alter the information, and stressing the potential usefulness of the research in practices, in order to have managers contributing to a research that will benefit their institution.

## **7.4. Recommendations for future research**

This final section proposes recommendations for future research. The aim is to provide guidance about possible directions for future studies in internal branding in the HE context.

The first point to make is that this study designed the main areas of investigation in line with Karmark's (2005) marketing and communication based perspectives, focused on the use of formal control activities. However, the study suggests that informal approaches may be more effective than formal ones, suggesting the need to pay attention to the norms and values based perspective (Karmark, 2005). Consequently, future studies may explore the concept of internal branding through a norms and values based perspective. In such perspective, leadership appears of significant importance, due to the leaders' potential in affecting employees' behaviour at a deeper level, for example by initiating and facilitating informal processes capable of involving the staff. Regarding this area, the past studies on brand leadership in a context different from HE, recognised the transformational characteristics of leaders as capable of affecting employees' behaviour towards the brand (eg. Burmann and Zeplin, 2005). However, the past studies highlighted different characteristics from the current study, suggesting that potentially the concept of brand leadership may be different in HE, due to the differences in setting and people. Consequently, the researcher suggest that more research is needed to clarify this point. For example, a quantitative study may be used in HEs to test the significance of the transformational leader characteristics. Furthermore, a qualitative study may explore the same dimensions of this study, but in a different setting, ideally service-based (eg. hospitality, healthcare, etc.). Furthermore, future research may focus not only on the people involved in the internal branding process (eg. leaders, managers, and staff) but also on the actual HE institutions. In the study it was suggested that universities are heading towards a low 'common denominator', where instead of pursuing differentiation and uniqueness, all the organisations lower their standards in order to result more attractive to students. Examples listed included lowering entry standards for students, reducing their number of failures in assessment and incentivising the provision of higher marks since those would increase student satisfaction. Although this was seen as a consequence of the increasing marketization of HE and competitions across HEIs, it still raises doubts about how those factor affect the perception of internal and external stakeholders. For example, the academic staff appeared disappointed by

the situation, since they felt this would lower the reputation of the organisation. Indeed, further research could explore the opinions of internal stakeholders towards the internal changes caused by the competitive environment. Similarly, it would be interesting to investigate the external stakeholders' perspective, such as the employers' one, in order to discern whether the changes in HE affected their perception towards graduates and the universities awarding their degrees.

Moreover, as previously discussed, this study focused on the specific setting of business schools within the context of HE. This opens several paths for future research. For example, future studies may explore the same topic in schools not specialised in business and management areas. From that, a comparison may be drawn between Business and non-business schools, in order to explore differences and similarities. Further to that, the same study may be conducted in business schools in different countries. Selecting a country with cultural indicators similar to the United Kingdom would reveal whether the findings of this study can be generalised to similar settings. On the other hand, selecting a country distant from the United Kingdom, in terms of cultural values, may reveal interesting trends and differences widening the amount of available knowledge in the area.

Further to propose the study in other HE settings, the actual dimensions explored could also be investigated in different settings. For example, internal branding in the general education setting could be explored, or even extended to non-educational contexts, such as services industries (eg. hospitality, healthcare, etc.) where the employees play a key role in the delivery of the brand.

The finding of this study highlighted the importance of brand architecture within HE, suggesting that the way in which the brand of university and its internal levels (eg. schools, departments) are built and delivered will affect the sense of identification of the staff with the brand. Consequently, future research may investigate deeply the topic of brand architecture, in order to further clarify the most adequate approach for brand building in HE, as well as the implications of the process.

Then, the findings also revealed that the categories of 'traditional universities' and 'new universities' may play a role in the stakeholders' perception towards the brand, representing an interesting point worth exploring further. For example, it could be investigated how the

'prejudices' towards the category affect the perception of HE brands and, following from that, what opportunities and limitations such perception offer for those in charge of defining the brand.

Finally, a framework for the potential obstacles was provided in the study, attempting to identify the different dimensions that may hinder internal branding implementation. Further research could apply, extend and critique the framework, to further clarify its adequateness in addressing the challenges behind internal branding implementation in HE.

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## List of Appendices

### Appendix 1: Information Sheet

#### INFORMATION SHEET FOR RESEARCH PROJECT

##### Academic Staff interview

**Research Project Title:** Branding universities: an exploration of internal branding in the Higher Education context

**02/08/17**

I am a PhD researcher investigating the concept of Branding in Higher Education at the University of Salford. The research is supported by the University of Salford, Business School.

**As a university academic staff or management member**, you are being invited to take part in my project and share with me your opinion toward the topic of Internal Branding in Higher Education. Every contribution is precious and no specific knowledge is required. The aim is creating a discussion with different points of view. The data collected will be kept anonymous and used only for the project analysis and publications. This project has been ethically approved by the University of Salford Business School ethics review procedure. Before you decide about your contribution, is important for you to understand why the research is being conducted and what will involve. Please, take time to read the following information carefully. Ask me if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information.

##### **What is the project's purpose?**

The purpose of this project is to do research Branding in Higher Education.

##### **Do I have to take part?**

It is your choice to decide whether or not to take part. If you decide to participate, you will be given this information sheet to keep and be asked to sign a consent form.

##### **What will happen to me if I take part?**

The interview will last between 30 minutes to 60 minutes.

##### **Will my taking part in this project be recorded and kept confidential?**

All the information that I collect about you during the research will be kept strictly confidential. The audio recordings during the interview will be used only for analysis and publications and will be subsequently erased. No other use will be made of the without your written permission, and no one outside the project will be allowed to access the original recordings.

Contact details of the researcher:

Mr

PhD Business and Management, University of Salford

Tel:       ; Email:

Please, note that you will be given a copy of the information sheet and a signed consent form to keep

**THANK YOU FOR YOUR TIME AND HELP!**

**Appendix 2: Consent form**

**Participant Interview Consent Form**

**Research Project Title:** Branding universities: an exploration of internal branding in the Higher Education context

**Name of Researcher:** Pietro Paolo Frigenti

Participant identification Number for this project:

Please tick the box

1. I confirm that I have read and understand the information sheet dated **02/08/2017** explaining the above research project and I have had the opportunity to ask questions about the project.

2. I understand that my responses will be kept strictly confidential and anonymous.

3. I give permission to the interviewer to record my responses for an easier transcription. I am also informed that the recordings will be kept in a safe place and deleted after the end of the project.

4. I agree to take part in the above research project.

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Name of Participant      Date

Signature  
(or legal representative)

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Researcher      Date

Signature

*To be signed and dated in presence of the participant*

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix 3. Ethical Approval



Research, Innovation and Academic  
Engagement Ethical Approval Panel

Research Centres Support Team  
G0.3 Joule House  
University of Salford  
M5 4WT

T +44(0)161 295 7012

[www.salford.ac.uk/](http://www.salford.ac.uk/)

9 January 2018

Dear Pietro,

**RE: ETHICS APPLICATION SBSR1718-07 - Branding Universities: An Exploration of Internal Branding in the Higher Education context**

Based on the information that you provided, I am pleased to inform you that your application SBSR1718-07 has been approved.

If there are any changes to the project or its methodology, please inform the Panel as soon as possible by contacting [SBS-ResearchEthics@salford.ac.uk](mailto:SBS-ResearchEthics@salford.ac.uk).

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'David Percy'.

Professor David F. Percy  
Chair of the Staff and Postgraduate Research Ethics Panel  
Salford Business School



**Appendix 4. Draft interview guide.**

Research Questions	Interview Questions
<p>1) <i>What does internal branding mean to academics in a Business School context?</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● What does internal branding mean to you?</li> <li>● Do you know what are the brand values of your institution?</li> <li>● How do you believe internal branding is applied in the business school? Why?</li> </ul>
<p>2) <i>How does the academic staff of a Business School support the internal branding strategy?</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● How would you describe the staff's support of the brand?</li> <li>● How do you support your organisation's brand?</li> <li>● How will the supporting behaviour of academic staff towards the brand influence their way of dealing with the students?</li> <li>● How are brand values included into daily operations? Why?</li> </ul>
<p>3) <i>How do Business School's academics perceive internal branding training and communications?</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● What kind of training activities does your school/department use to communicate and transmit the brand?</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● How do training activities organised by your school/department help academic staff's understanding of the brand values?</li><li>● How do training activities organised by your department allow the staff to acquire necessary skills to deliver the brand values?</li><li>● How do training activities organised by your school/department support the brand message?</li><li>● How do training activities influence your supporting behaviour towards the institutional brand?</li><li>● What kind of communication channels and tools does your school/department use to communicate the brand to you?</li><li>● How do these communication channels and tools influence your support towards the business school brand? Why?</li></ul>
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<p>4) <i>How do Business School's academics perceive the role of leadership in the internal branding strategy?</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Where do you get your information about the organisation's brand values?</li> <li>● In what ways have you been involved in the process of creation and delivery of the brand values?</li> <li>● How has leadership supported the internal branding strategy of the business school?</li> <li>● How has the leadership supported you in developing your understanding and commitment of internal branding strategy of the school?</li> <li>● How do you feel you contribute to the branding programme?</li> </ul>
<p>5) <i>What are the factors that may hinder the internal branding strategy of a Business School?</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Are there institutional factors that hinder the internal branding initiative in the school?</li> <li>● What other obstacles do internal branding initiatives face in your business school?</li> </ul>

## Appendix 5. Criteria for data analysis

Research Questions	Criteria for analysis (Management)	Criteria for analysis (Staff)
1) <i>What does internal branding mean to academics in a Business School context?</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Understanding of terms “internal branding”</li> <li>● Perception about the internal branding definition (provided by the researcher)</li> <li>● Awareness of own institution brand values</li> <li>● Perceived implementation of internal branding</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Understanding of terms “internal branding”</li> <li>● Perception about the internal branding definition (provided by the researcher)</li> <li>● Awareness of own institution brand values</li> <li>● Perceived implementation of internal branding</li> </ul>
2) <i>How does the academic staff of a Business School support the internal branding strategy?</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Perception towards staff’s support of the brand?</li> <li>● Perceived importance of brand support for staff when dealing the students</li> <li>● Perceived degree of brand values’ inclusion into daily operations.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Perception towards own involvement with organisations’ brand</li> <li>● Perceived importance of brand support for staff when dealing the students</li> <li>● Perceived degree of brand values’ inclusion into daily operations.</li> </ul>
3) <i>How do Business School’s academics perceive internal branding training</i>	<p>Perception towards internal branding training and communications.</p> <p>Activities classified as ‘Internal branding training and development activities’:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● training (Gotsi &amp; Wilson 2001);</li> <li>● orientation programmes (Punjaisri &amp; Wilson, 2011);</li> </ul>	

<p><i>and communications?</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● performance evaluation (Aurand <i>et al.</i>, 2005);</li> <li>● development courses (Punjaisri &amp; Wilson, 2011);</li> <li>● recruiting, motivating and rewarding (Bergstrom, Blumenthal and Crothers, 2002);</li> <li>● group meetings, briefings, training and orientation (Punjaisri and Wilson, 2011);</li> <li>● staff involvement in brand co-creation (Jacobs, 2003);</li> </ul> <p>Communications classified as 'Internal brand communications':</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● group meetings, internal publications, memos, e-mail messages, text messages, direct contact, brand books, newsletters, group meetings and intranet (Judson <i>et al.</i>, 2006; Punjaisri &amp; Wilson, 2011);</li> <li>● brand manuals (Karmark, 2005);</li> <li>● brand books (Ind, 2007);</li> <li>● brand value statements (Burmam and Zeplin, 2005);</li> <li>● brand mantras (Keller, 1999);</li> <li>● brand-based games, videos and performances (Kunde, 2000; Ind, 2007);</li> <li>● internal role models, communicating through programmes, stories, events, policies (Aaker and Joachimsthaler, 2000);</li> <li>● brand workshops (Burmam and Zeplin, 2005);</li> <li>● e-learning (Ind, 2007; Goodridge, 2001);</li> <li>● learning map (Burmam and Zeplin, 2005);</li> <li>● organisational storytelling (Schein, 1985);</li> </ul>	
<p>4) <i>How do Business School's academics perceive the role of leadership in the internal</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Would you say that exists a connection between leadership and branding?</li> <li>● How does leadership support the internal</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Where do you get your information about the organisation's brand values?</li> <li>● In what ways have you been involved in the process of</li> </ul>

<p><i>branding strategy?</i></p>	<p>branding strategy of the business school?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● How do leaders help staff developing understanding and commitment of the internal branding strategy of the school?</li> <li>● Is the academic staff involved in the branding efforts?</li> </ul>	<p>creation and delivery of the brand values?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● How has leadership supported the internal branding strategy of the business school?</li> <li>● How has the leadership supported you in developing your understanding and commitment of internal branding strategy of the school?</li> <li>● How do you believe you contribute to the branding programme?</li> </ul>
<p>5) <i>What are the factors that may hinder the internal branding strategy of a Business School?</i></p>	<p>Management and staff's perception towards existing and potential obstacles to the internal branding strategy will be explored and evaluated through the following criteria:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Organization</li> <li>● Information</li> <li>● Management</li> <li>● Communication</li> <li>● Strategy</li> <li>● Staff</li> <li>● Educations</li> </ul> <p>(Mahnert &amp; Torres, 2007, p. 56)</p>	

## Appendix 6. Full list of contributions.

**Contribution 1. Managers have a clear understanding of branding topics whilst academics are not fully familiar with branding, sometimes rejecting the discipline.**

Chapleo (2015) identified a lack of understanding of branding concepts among management and staff. When looking at the results, management perspectives contrast with Chapleo's (2015) findings, with the managers being in most cases clear about the fact that branding is a process that goes beyond the visual element, regarding it as a collective concept, embracing working culture, ways of learning and communicating. However, the same familiarity with branding was not shown by academic staff, supporting Chapleo's (2015) views. In fact, the results from the staff interviews showed different degrees of academics' understanding and opinions, with, in some cases, rejection of the topic of branding in HE as a whole, suggesting resistances in the staff in line with previous studies (Whisman, 2009; Wearaas and Solbakk, 2009, Chapleo, 2010).

**Contribution 2. Universities' heritage plays a role in internal branding.** The heritage of the organisations may play a role in internal branding. In line with previous research (Kok *et al.*, 2010), traditional universities appear focused on strengthening the historical heritage and project an image of research excellency, whilst the new ones focus more on emphasising their 'applied' nature and their graduates' employability. Such different positioning strategies appear capable of influencing the internal perception of academics, suggesting that further to representing an asset for external branding (Bulotaite, 2003), heritage could also play a role in internal branding processes.

**Contribution 3. A gap between brand image and identity may exist, due to different branding efforts towards internal and external stakeholders.** This may cause an issue in aligning the brand promise to the actual delivery, an essential step for 'successful' branding, as widely observed in the literature (eg. Punjaisri and Wilson, 2007, Whisman, 2009; Chapleo, 2015). In fact, external branding potential was widely recognised by both managers and academics, whilst internal branding usefulness was less clear for both groups of stakeholders. Due to financial reasons, universities may decide to invest the majority, or even

the totality, of resources on external branding efforts (ie. Student recruitment), neglecting the internal stakeholders.

**Contribution 4. Academics may perceive internal branding efforts as attempts to force identity upon them. Organisations should involve the academics in a natural way.**

Academics explained that, by working in the institutions, they would have their own perception about it and its brand, without requiring “identity claims by the marketing function”. The idea of being forced to support views appears to be one of the biggest reasons for staff to not trust internal branding processes, with freedom seeming to be a key topic to be considered when implementing any kind of action in HE, including internal branding. Such idea may be seen as consequence of the recent increased managerialism in HE, which limited academic freedom and autonomy (Kay *et al.*, 2010), with performance appraisal and administrative tasks given priority over traditional academic duties, such as teaching and research (Davies and Thomas, 2002). The findings of this study suggest that successful internal branding comes from not pressuring staff and rather promoting a certain degree of freedom by naturally involving them in the activities of the school. Such approach would allow the staff to *live the brand* (Ind, 2007) in a natural way.

**Contribution 5. University and schools’ brands often do not reflect the organisation, but rather the aspiration of those in charge of the branding and/or the requirements of accreditations.**

Often the ones initiating the branding process attempt to portray and create a brand that does not reflect what the organisations stands for, but rather what the person in charge wishes it to be. Furthermore, universities, and in some cases individual schools, tend to shape the brand in a way that is desirable for accreditation purposes. The activities of academic staff appears to be heavily regulated in order to have them reflect accreditations’ criteria, with staff being discouraged to undertake significant changes that are not aligned to such criteria. Such process will limit the uniqueness of the brands, with all institutions emphasising the same accreditations requirement, resulting in unclear positioning and differentiation. With unclear brands built upon aspirations, rather than reality, the already challenging process of “getting staff behind the brand” (Chapleo, 2010, p.180) will get even more complicated and difficult to achieve.



**Contribution 6. Brand architecture: internal stakeholders may show different levels of attachment to the brands of university and school.**

A recent study from Spry *et al.* (2018) has investigated the concept of brand architecture in university setting, noting that internal stakeholders may show different levels of attachment to the university brand and department brand. Spry *et al.* (2018) argues that further research in HE is necessary, suggesting schools as a potential unit of study in its recommendations. This research contributes to existing literature, finding out that the different levels of attachment to university and departments brand (Spry *et al.* 2018) can also be extended to schools.

**Contribution 7. Brand architecture can pose challenges for branding in higher education, since multiple levels can dilute the brands, leading to ambiguity. Brand harmonisation should be pursued to reduce contrasts across levels.**

Previous studies observed that departments may show sub-brands characteristics when targeting specific external audiences (Chapleo, 2015) and that the existence of sub-brands in services may pose obstacles to the brand (Rahman and Areni, 2014) as it may lead to brand dilution (Devlin, 2003; Hsu *et al.* 2015). This study identified the existence of multiple brands in HE, at university, school and department level. Some managers believe that having different brands may result in strength due to the dedicated positioning of each brand. However, whilst this may work for external branding, when it comes to internal branding the use of multiple brands may end up confusing the staff, who would struggle to identify with either level and inconsistent messages across the two, suggesting that the obstacles identified in services industry (Rahman and Areni, 2014) can be extended to higher education. The issue appears even more significant when university and school brands adopt contrasting positioning strategies, forcing the academics to ‘choose a side’. Brand harmonisation (Hemsley-Brown and Goonawardana, 2007) should be pursued to reduce contrasts across levels and align them to a coherent proposition.

**Contribution 8. Mixed subcultures may exist in HE, which may lead to inconsistencies in Communications.**

This study suggests the existence of mixed subcultures in HE, supporting what reviewed by Spry *et al.* (2018) who, in line with previous studies (eg. Sujchaphong, Nguyen & Melewar, 2015) observed that the identity of a HE institution equals the sum of mixed subcultures. However, further than confirming previous findings, this study suggests that the main issue in such multileveled structure lies within the resulting lack of consistency across the messages of the university central department, schools and different departments. Such situation would inevitably hinder the capacity of conveying a coherent message, with academics explaining the difficulty of supporting something that is not clear.

**Contribution 9. Schools may be competing against each other, pushing forward their own brand rather than cooperating to benefit the university. University may centralise branding efforts to reduce internal contrasts.**

This study identified a potential issue in the competition among the different schools pushing their own brand. Such competition was perceived as negative by managers, who explained that contrasts across schools should be avoided, and schools should be ultimately collaborating towards the success of their university. Managers explained that in some cases internal branding efforts were intentionally focused at university level, rather than school level, in order to centralise the outcomes towards a central cohesive brand, nonetheless respecting the individuality of schools. Such efforts suggest that, in line with Rahman and Areni (2014), from a brand architecture perspective, different brands may pose challenges internally and universities may acknowledge this acting accordingly.

**Contribution 10. Academics identify with their own role, seen as a vocation, which takes priority over any branding effort.**

One of the most interesting results identified in this research in the totality of interviews concerns the academics' identification with the profession, also seen as a vocation, which transcends any universities and schools' boundaries. Such findings support an existing argument in the larger education field that many teachers may regard their career as a vocational choice (Education and Training Foundation, 2015). Indeed, previous research (Middlehurst and Elton, 1992) recognised the existence of "divided loyalties in HE, where academic loyalties to the discipline are normally much stronger than those to the institution". Arguably, this may represent one of the key aspects to take in consideration when implementing any kind of internal branding activities with academics discussing their juggling between an almost lifelong commitment with their vocation and a temporary engagement with the temporary organisation. This study contributes to existing research suggesting that, considering the strong academics' identification with their role, HE institutions should involve academics for the co-creation of shared values (HE & Balmer, 2007) as values that reflect the staff views may help bridging the gap between brand and vocational role, supporting Dean *et al.* (2016) who suggests that brand meaning is generated as a result of co-creation processes.

**Contribution 11. A ‘bottom-up approach’ would be preferable, when creating the brand and conveying it internally. A ‘top-down approach’ appear the least preferable.**

This study explored the process of creation and delivery of the brand, with three main approaches identified as ‘Bottom-Up Approach’, ‘Top-Down Approach’, ‘Mixed Approach’.

The *Bottom-Up Approach* can be summarised in the belief that if the staff members are not involved from scratch in the creation and delivery of the brand, they would not feel connected to it. The *Top-Down Approach* can be summarised as belief is that the brand can be defined at the top and then delivered internally, and academics staff should automatically buy into it, without necessarily requiring to be involved in the process. The *Mixed Approach* seeks to involve key figures for each department rather than involving every single member of the organisation. The belief for the Mixed Approach is that departments’ representatives involved would speak for their members and consequently those would buy into the brand. This study suggests that a Bottom-Up approach would be preferable since it would allow the staff to be actively interested in the brand, potentially reducing cynicism and promoting involvement. The Top-Down approach may be the least preferable for internal branding implementation, since academics may feel excluded, resulting in distance between management and staff. Indeed, a Bottom-Up approach could be difficult to implement due to the challenges posed by the high number of staff, whilst a Top-Down approach may be easier to implement but fail in involving the staff. Considering these limitations, a ‘Mixed Approach’ may offer a more balanced alternative. The study contributes to the literature exploring the approaches in HE and clarifying the need of adopting an inclusive approach, supporting recent findings from Clark, Chapleo and Suomi (2019) who highlighted the importance of including the staff in the branding process.

**Contribution 12. Reasons for academic cynicism towards branding efforts may be linked to: lack of brand authenticity; misalignment of values; negative experiences with the organisation; previous superficial branding efforts.** This study found out that academics may struggle in recognising and identifying clearly the brand values due to some degree of cynicism towards the branding initiatives. These findings resonate with previous research (Whisman, 2009; Waeraas and Solbakk, 2009, Chapleo, 2010, Spry *et al.* 2018) that noted the existence of cynicism across the staff, although not exploring the reasons for such cynicism. This research contributes to existing literature by explaining the factors that could cause academic resistances towards branding efforts. The first reason identified is that if the university’s claims about the brand are not honest and not reflecting the reality staff may be reluctant in believing in the brand and its values. Then, another issue may be linked to the

fact that the values of the staff members do not align with those of the brand. Furthermore, in line with Manhert and Torres (2007) past experiences may affect the way in which staff respond to branding efforts. This may be at personal or branding level. For example, staff may have had negative experiences with the organisation, resulting in lack of interest in its initiatives, or may have experienced previous branding efforts which were not followed up, resulting in prejudices towards the discipline as a whole.

**Contribution 13. Academics want to contribute to the brand. If they are not involved in the branding processes, but only told how to behave, they will feel ‘not appreciated’ or even ‘insignificant’. Students appear capable of influencing the brand more than staff.** The degree of involvement seems to affect staff perceptions towards the brand (Whisman, 2009; Hemsley-Brown and Goonawardana, 2007). The study found out that decisions about the brand can affect the perceived degree of involvement of the staff, with positive outcomes when the staff is involved in the process. When this does not happen, the academics will feel that their views are not important and there are not expectations from them. So far, the findings seem to align to the previous studies. However, an interesting contribution of this study can be found in the fact that disappointment appear to increase in circumstances where students’ feedback is collected to shape the brand, whilst academics’ opinions are not sought, suggesting that in some instances students may have a stronger influence on the brand than academic staff. Academics perceive such process as unfair, since they will have to deliver a brand in which they are not reflected.

**Contribution 14. Academics are aware of their importance in the external delivery of the brand, suggesting a sense of responsibility towards the brand.** Previous research (Naude and Ivy, 1999; Ivy, 2001) recognised to university employees the capacity of influencing the brand when representing their institution in public contexts. This research extends the available knowledge, noting that the actual staff members appear aware that their actions could affect the brand in either positive or negative way, suggesting a sense of responsibility towards the brand. Such view also contrasts with the previously discussed assumptions that academics are cynical and not interested in the brand.

**Contribution 15. Academic ‘sense of responsibility’ towards the brand can be extended to internal activities, with academics seeing themselves as ‘brand ambassadors’ in teaching activities and overall contribution to the students’ brand experience.** Gotsi & Wilson (2001) noted that staff can assume the role of ‘brand ambassadors’ holding the potential or representing and deliver the brand. Confirming the views from Gotsi & Wilson (2001), some members of staff mentioned the same term regarding themselves as potential brand ambassadors, explaining their role in conveying the brand through their views, opinions and contributions in activities such as teaching, creation and delivery of the modules. Nguyen *et al.* (2016) and Dacin and Brown (2006) noted that the interactions with staff will affect the brand experience of student. This study contributes to existing one suggesting that academics are aware of their influence on the brand experience, trying to project a positive image of the organisations towards the students, suggesting that the sense of responsibility towards the brand can be extended to its internal delivery.

**Contribution 16. Managers may be undergoing training to ensure their professional development reviews’ criteria are aligned to the brand strategy.** Managers appear to be undergoing professional development days, events aimed at preparing managers for their professional development reviews (PDR), a process ultimately aimed at evaluating whether the staff accomplished the organisational goals by acting in line with the strategy. Such professional development reviews can be seen as what previous studies regarded as performance evaluation (Aurand *et al.*, 2005) and appraisal (Gotsi and Wilson, 2001), useful to evaluate how the employees are performing and, in a certain way, driving them to behave in a certain way when the importance of such evaluation is previously expressed (Aurand *et al.*, 2005). This study contributes to existing research suggesting that PDR may be aligned to branding values, attempting to align staff behaviour through ‘formal control’ activities Jaworski (1998) and that internal branding is gaining increasing attention, since dedicated training have been developed to ensure the brand alignment of the PDR.

**Contribution 17. Managers may intentionally avoid branding terms to respect academics’ preferences reduce resistances.** This study found out that management may deliberately avoid mentioning specific terms such as branding, asking the staff to behave in a way that aligns to strategy, instead. This may be seen as an example of ‘input control

activities' with management willingly deciding to promote the brand values indirectly through more general discussions of the strategy (Jaworski, 1988). Such approach seems to be linked to managers' belief that academics staff does not favour the inclusion of branding practices within HE, identifying management's efforts in respecting academic staff perspectives.

**Contribution 18. Recruitment can be useful to identify future staff whose values align to the brand. Nonetheless, there is a risk that the staff may show convenient behaviours and only pretend to embrace the brand values.** Recruitment appears as the first step for identifying potential staff with values aligned to the brand, which would facilitate consequent acceptance and support. Such view confirms the findings from Bergstrom, Blumenthal and Crothers, (2002) who regarded recruitment as an important step to ensure employees' readiness to internal branding programmes. Nonetheless, this study contributes to existing knowledge by identifying risks in the recruitment process. The findings suggest that job applicants may show convenient behaviours for the interviews, only pretending to embrace the brand values. Therefore, the researcher argues that, in order to reduce misalignment across staff and brand values, organisations should strive to reduce the risk by filtering the applicants with a genuine alignment to the brand values from those who are pretending, only to improve their chances of getting the job.

**Contribution 19. Orientation days can initiate the brand experience and facilitate a sense of belonging, but need to be followed-up.** Punjaisri and Wilson (2011) noted that orientation days are useful activities for conveying information about the brand. This study confirms such views, contributing to existing research by identifying limitations in the current practices. This research suggest that orientation days are useful in meeting interesting people and providing an initial experience of the organisation and, by extension, of its brand. Nonetheless, such events often lack a follow-up approach, resulting in staff meeting interesting people but not being able to have further interactions with the attendees. Such idea suggests that organisations may need to look at orientation activities as starting points for a long-term identity building process, rather than events standing on their own, supporting previous studies outside academia (Berry and Parasuraman, 1992; Ind, 2007;

Mortimer, 2002) who noted that brand initiatives will achieve the expected outcomes only if the initial steps are followed-up in a consistent effort.

**Contribution 20. Away days are useful for conveying the brand, but only when the academics are involved and capable of contributing to the discussions.** Previous research (Punjaisri and Wilson, 2011) noted that away days are useful to convey the brand. Whilst the interviewed managers and academics confirmed such idea, the findings from this study contribute to existing research by clarifying the scenario in which the brand can be effectively conveyed. In fact, academics identified limitations, suggesting that away days may not be necessarily enjoyable and meaningful when the staff is not able to participate and have a say in important matters, implying the importance of involving academic staff into brand discussions.

**Contribution 21. E-learning, intranet and VLEs can help conveying the brand, suggesting the potential of online tools and platforms for internal branding.** Online courses about university practices were identified as potentially useful to enrich the familiarity with the brand, in line with Ind (2007) and Goodridge (2001) who recognised the potential of e-learning to support the internal branding strategy. Nonetheless, academics noted that no online courses about the brand are available, identifying a missed opportunity for organisations. The intranet was also seen by managers as a suitable channel to communicate internally, in line with the findings from Judson *et al.* (2006) and Punjaisri & Wilson (2011). The Virtual Learning Environment was the channel identified where the staff could access brand-related documents, adding a new channel to the extensive list identified in the review of the literature. This may be particularly relevant since the use of VLEs would allow the staff members to access the information on a platform that is already widely used for teaching purposes, resulting in a direct access more likely to happen naturally.

**Contribution 22. Most of the internal trainings are aimed at new members of staff, and not necessarily focused on branding. The focus may be on accreditations criteria and affect negatively academics perception.** Interviews suggest that universities can facilitate brand acceptance and support through workshops, making the brand easy to understand and use at a visual level, confirming what previously suggested by Burmann and Zeplin (2005)

and Kaewsurin (2012). Academics explained that such events and training may be more likely to happen with new members of staff within the school, with less efforts on senior academics whose alignment may be taken for granted as consequence of their experiencing the brand (Ind, 2007). However, the focus of such workshops may not be brand values, but rather accreditations criteria. Although Aaker and Joachimsthaler (2000) observed that organisational policies may help conveying the brand, findings suggest that such link between policies and brand in HE may also result in negative outcomes, since academics may not perceive such events as meaningful and/or useful taking time that could have been otherwise invested in experiencing the institution (Ind, 2007) and developing sense of belonging.

**Contribution 23. Although there are limited efforts to convey the brand to the staff, organisations appear to make significant efforts to ensure a smooth delivery of the brand to external stakeholders.** In most cases the ones in charge of communications seems to be aware of the importance of aligning the shared contents to the brand guidelines, suggesting high levels of control over the communications. Brand manuals are created to guide the staff actions when interacting with external stakeholders, and the complexity and comprehensiveness of some brand manuals suggest that, although there limited efforts to deliver the brand internally, there may still be a significant interest in influencing the external delivery of the brand. This may represent an internal marketing effort, as discussed in the section 2.2.1 of the literature review, with attempts to tell staff ‘what to do’ rather than involving them in the branding process.

**Contribution 24. Informality, authenticity and continuity are essential for internal branding implementation.** Events involving personal interaction are seen by some managers as potential ways to convey the brand, although those appear to be mostly carried out through a formal top-down process. In some cases, the processes in place to convey the strategy and ensure alignment with the actions of the staff was outlined through a governance structure where the information is cascaded across the school through recurring formal events. However academics do not seem to appreciate formal activities. Instead, genuine and informal meetings are regarded by both academic staff and managers as capable of developing a community feeling and, consequently, a sense of attachment to the organisation



and ultimately to the brand. Since there may be forms of cynicism or detachment from the brand and the organisational initiatives, regardless of the channel adopted, organisations should start by ensuring that honesty and reality are reflected in the brand messages conveyed, as the words of academics suggest authenticity as a determinant of success. Continuity was also identified as a key factor. Findings suggest that regardless of how effective a specific communication effort may be, it will be meaningless if it's not part of a continuous and coherent long-term process. Lack of continuity will potentially lead to academics seeing the branding efforts as a rhetorical exercise lacking consistency, confirming Mitchell's (2004) views, who suggests that, once the initial excitement vanishes, the final outcome of branding ends up being null.

**Contribution 25. Branded environments are useful to convey the brand internally to members of staff.** The importance of having a branded environment was noted in the study. Without it, the rooms and the offices may appear as any other university, with no physical evidence defining the place and a consequent missed opportunity to create sense of belonging. Although studies indirectly discussed the usefulness of visual environments for external branding (eg. Mampaey and Huisman, 2016), up to date no existing study in HE outlined the importance of integrating the several tools at visual level within a comprehensive branded environment for internal stakeholders, outlining a new addition to the existing literature.

**Contribution 26. Internal branding communications need to respect the freedom of the staff and not overwhelm them, whilst ensuring clarity of information.** This study suggest that forcing activities and communications on staff will have a negative effect, highlighting freedom of choice as prerogative for internal branding success in HE. The findings resonate with Clark, Chapleo and Suomi (2019) who noted the importance of providing to staff members information about the branding process in order to allow them to willingly decide to support the process, and respect their freedom (Wearaas and Solbakk, 2009). Furthermore, although having a comprehensive and integrated number of visual tools may help building a sense of belonging within the staff, at the same time the individual tools should be selected carefully, with each tools benefits and limitations taken in account. Organisation should avoid overwhelming communications, prioritising richness of

communications over quantity. Furthermore, any kind of communications would be pointless if a lack of conceptualisation of the brand subsists. Without clarity about what to communicate, the efforts will result in ambiguity (Zeithaml *et al.*, 1996) ending up confusing the staff about what is expected from them.

**Contribution 27. Brand leadership in HE is associated to influence and positivity of individuals.** Managers overall agreed that a concept of brand leadership is possible, explaining that some factors and actions can have positive effects on the staff. HE brand leaders are identified in those people having an influential role whilst showing satisfaction with their job and organisation, since their positive behaviour will be likely to convey their positive feelings towards the brand.

**Contribution 28. An organisation and its brand do not necessarily overlap. Staff may be loyal to the organisation but not necessarily to its brand.** The relationship between an organisation and its brand was discussed and managers and academics recognised the challenges behind separating the two concepts. Some academics clarified that an organisation and its brand do not necessarily overlap, with staff possibly feeling loyal to the organisation but not necessarily to the brand. Such gap may be due to the fact that, although being attached to the organisation, the academic staff may struggle to understand what the brand stands for and what is the direction taken, with consequent difficulties in buying into such brand. Such view suggests that, in order to gain support and attachment of the staff, organisations should ensure clarity of the brand and its future direction.

**Contribution 29. The role of individuals together with formal recognitions and titles are important factors to build credibility and influence, prerequisite for brand leadership.** When discussing brand leadership, the findings suggest that the roles of individuals can affect their credibility and degree of impact on other people, with “titles, capacity of attracting funding, charisma and networking skills” identified as features useful and important in influencing both students and staff members. In line with that, having some kind of formal recognitions and titles at senior level was indicated as a desirable, and sometimes essential, requirement to build trust. Titles were seen as particularly beneficial when representing evidence of senior staff’s expertise in processes that the staff is

undertaking, and when the same titles are expected by the job applicants during recruitment processes. In fact, academics appear to perceive negatively an organisation which, for a junior role, demands requirements that not even the senior members of the staff fulfil.

**Contribution 30. Brand leadership shares with branding the need of authenticity, benefitting from academics' involvement. Academics may struggle to buy into a brand that does not reflect reality.** 'Formal leaders' (eg. Top executives) appear to be often deciding the brand through a top-down approach, without input from the staff. Such approach was not seen as the most adequate, with the idea that instead the brand should truly represent the organisation in order to be embraced by its members, confirming the recent results from Clark, Chapleo and Suomi (2019). Following from this, managers explained that if a brand reflects the formal leadership views, rather than the organisation, it may incur in a lack of authenticity and may be consequently difficult to trust and buy into for the staff. Thus, the views of the formal leadership may pose an issue to the creation and delivery of a successful internal branding process, since the brand itself at the root may not be suitable for such process.

In line with Dearlove (1995), who regarded academics as individuals who prefer to be left alone to focus on their work (eg. teaching in universities and researching), managers suggested that even if the members of staff may not like the way the brand is defined, they will most likely accept the decision of the formal leaders and follow it, due to the need of prioritising their job role commitments. Nonetheless, the academics' words suggest that acceptance of the formal leadership decisions will not necessarily translate into acceptance of the brand since the staff will find it difficult to put their confidence in leadership whose objectives are built upon aspiration, rather than a solid background. Contrasting with Dearlove (1995) academics may show interest in the brand, disagreeing with leadership decisions that not reflect reality, believing that they may not necessarily benefit the university/school. Such idea further suggests that, as discussed previously, academics' resistances towards branding may be due to their commitment towards the organisation and willingness to improve its brand.

**Contribution 31. Brand leaders should embody the brand naturally, in their daily activities, rather than showing brand supporting behaviour only in specific events. Brand leaders should inspire, rather than just instruct, interacting informally with the staff.** Findings suggest that brand leaders should support the internal branding process by embodying the brand and its values naturally during the normal activities, rather than as a separate process in specific events. Brand leaders are seen as people in senior roles and/or

executives who should show efforts in interacting socially with the staff on daily basis, with attempts to motivate the staff and inform them about news, opportunities and events. The interactions should happen informally and spontaneously. The concept of 'interaction' was identified as a major requirement to classify someone as a brand leader. Interesting to note, whilst managers listed official events, such as graduation days and open days, as the ones they believed having a huge impact upon the success of the branding strategy, academics' views suggested that formal interactions may not be the most adequate for conveying the brand, regarding personal, face-to-face exchanges as important and explaining that brand leaders should visit the offices, chat with the staff and inspire, rather than just instruct. Such view links back to the previously discussed idea that informal chats may be more useful than formal events and workshops, when trying to convey the brand.

**Contribution 32. Brand leadership should not be fixed, but flexible and capable of adjusting to the context. Staff involvement can help adjusting to staff preferences and reduce potential gaps in perspectives, cultures and beliefs.** Academics seem to believe that brand leadership is context and process specific and it should be tailored to the specific case, suggesting a flexible mind-set and willingness to compromise, as long as the context and the organisational culture justifies the adopted style. Such view seem to confirm Fiedler's (1967) views, who noted that there is not just one approach of leadership available, and leaders may need to choose the right style of leadership according to context and situation in order to exert a successful influence over the members of the organisation. In line with that, academics seem to believe that successful brand leadership should not be fixed and predefined and not imposed on people but rather flexible and capable of adjusting to the context. The importance of a social context can be found in both managers and academics opinions. Managers identified social interactions between leaders and employees as the main channels to promote the brand and endorse it. Academics suggested that potential leaders should interact with their subordinates and learning from them, in order to adjust to them and identify the most suitable brand leadership style. Such idea can be linked to the transformational dimension of 'individualised consideration' (Bass, 1990, 1997), suggesting that brand leaders should interact with potential followers in a dedicated way, in order to learn from them and adjust their activities accordingly. The effectiveness of brand leadership

may also be affected by academics' ideas, culture and beliefs, and whether those match the brand leaders'. The same ideas may be perceived in different ways due to the potential gaps in perspectives, culture and beliefs, and the context itself may give different meaning to specific actions. Such challenges seem to confirm once again the usefulness of 'individualised consideration' (Bass, 1990, 1997) in interactions between brand leaders and 'followers', which may act as a bridge to reduce such gap and facilitate mutual understanding.

**Contribution 33. Transformational leadership theory's dimensions of 'charisma', 'inspirational motivation' are important for brand leadership, in line with previous studies. 'Individualised consideration' appears essential and 'intellectual stimulation' useful.** Previous studies in commercial settings (Burmenn & Zeplin, 2005) and academia (Kaewsurin, 2012) identified a potential link between transformational leadership and employee brand support. Burmann and Zeplin (2005) found out that the transformational characteristics (Burns, 1978; Bass 1985) of 'inspirational motivation' and 'charisma'- are likely to drive brand supporting behavior, whilst not recognizing any significant role to the other two characteristics of 'individualized consideration' and 'intellectual stimulation'. Then, a study from Kaewsurin (2012) tested the applicability of such dimensions to in the Thai HE context, finding out that further to 'inspirational motivation' and 'charisma', 'individualized consideration' can play a role in brand leadership processes, although not significant as the previous two dimensions, and not recognising any specific potential to 'intellectual stimulation'. However, when exploring the concept of brand leadership in the UK Higher Education, the current study recognized the most influential role to the dimension of 'individualised consideration', with the characteristics of 'idealised influence' and 'charisma' appearing influential, and the dimension of 'intellectual stimulation' recognized as useful, providing a different results from the previous studies and adding a new piece of information to the existing literature. Indeed, the idea of academics benefitting from 'individualized consideration' may be directly linked to the nature of academics' roles. In fact, this study explored in-depth academics' perception, finding out that faculties seem to be individuals with interest in contributing to the brand and organizational development, consequently willing to share their opinions and wishing to be listened, disagreeing with

Dearlove (1995), who regarded academics as individuals who prefer to be left alone to focus on their work.

Following from that, leaders capable of ‘individualized consideration’ within academia would be arguably able to listen to the staffs’ opinions, allowing them to feel considered and playing an active role on the ongoing processes. This research consequently suggest that a brand leadership concept in HE can be exemplified in the characteristics of ‘individualized consideration’, ‘charisma’ and ‘idealized influence’. Finally, although not as crucial as the other three, the last dimension of transformational leadership, ‘intellectual stimulation’ appeared useful to brand leadership by facilitating the creation of an environment where the staff feels stimulated and actively involved. In fact, findings suggest the existence of a degree of co-inspiration among staff members, where the brand leaders’ role would consist in initiating and facilitating such process, showing ‘intellectual stimulation’ traits.

**Contribution 34. If top executives decide willingly to support and embody the brand, they will be more influential than anyone else within the organization, since it will be perceived by academics as a conscious decision rather than an imposition from the top.** Academics see formal leaders (eg. Top executives) as the ones creating the regulations and consequently free to choose to what degree follow such regulations. Consequently, if formal leaders decide to believe in the brand and are consciously willing to embrace and embody it, this will have a positive effect on the staff. On the other hand, if the staff perceive that the formal leaders are not committed to the brand, it will result in staff questioning a brand that

not even the formal leaders believe in. Being formal leaders perceived as free to choose their actions, their decision of supporting the brand may be even more impactful than any other member of the organisation, since it will be a conscious decision, rather than a directive from the top.

**Contribution 35. Middle management and unit heads can reflect brand leadership characteristics, and are often the first point of contact for staff members.** Staff members explained that often academic unit heads are the only point of contacts that they have outside of job roles and colleagues, and therefore see them as the eventual key figure in getting information about the brand. Such view, recognise the importance of mid-management and academics with management duties in the branding process, suggesting that middle level managers, who interact closely with academic members of staff, may have a strong influence in conveying the brand and, eventually, carry brand leaders traits. These findings align to the study from Kaewsurin (2012) who investigated the immediate leaders' characteristics in HE.

**Contribution 36. Brand leadership is not limited to top executives and senior roles with every member of the organisation capable of carrying brand leadership traits.** Findings suggest that, in business schools, the individuals who have the formal power to influence decisions, the formal leaders, are not necessarily the ones advocating and supporting the brand. Academics noted that that the individuals who embrace and embody the brand are often not associated with senior managerial roles, but rather outstanding individuals such as successful researchers or head of groups who end up symbolising the organisation. This view suggest that middle-managers, head of departments and even staff without any management duty may have a key role in conveying the brand, due to their direct influence and achievements. More than the role of a specific individual, what would really affect someone's capacity of influencing others appears linked to whether the specific individuals are naturally disposed, their behaviour, ethics and morals.

**Contribution 37. Staff whose values align to the brand may already exist within an organisation. Such members should be involved in the branding efforts as they would naturally endorse it.** Previous research outside HE (Ind, 2007) noted that eventual employees, whose values naturally align to the brand, may already exist within an

organisation, and involving them within the branding processes would facilitate a genuine input from staff. The finding suggest that Ind (2007)'s views may be extended to HE, with some members of staff explaining that during their normal duties they may be indirectly influencing the brands by advocating it with their colleagues. This may represent an opportunity for organisations, since involving predisposed members of staff within the branding activities would result in staff naturally endorsing the brand.

**Contribution 38. Academic staff may endorse or oppose the branding strategy, according to the feeling towards the organisation. Positivity should be projected towards the staff, to naturally encourage endorsing behaviour.** Academics appear to be likely to engage in endorsing or opposing behaviours towards the brand when strong feelings are associated to the organisation, in a positive or negative way. For example, academic staff members that are happy to be working in their organisation may be likely to share their positive views naturally with their colleagues. On the other hand, members of staff disappointed with the organisation and/or the brand may end up negatively influencing the perception of their colleagues, suggesting once again the importance projecting positivity towards the staff.

**Contribution 39. Brand champions and endorsers are being increasingly adopted by universities to develop brand supporting behaviour in the staff. However, the opportunity to endorse the brand should be available for all the academics, otherwise some may feel left out.** Previous research outside academia noted that brand champions are individuals who have formal or informal roles in stimulating brand supporting behaviour in employees, with the informal roles seen as volunteering activities whilst the formal position as ad-hoc created roles (Ind, 2007, Yakimova *et al.*, 2017). Some organisations seem to recognise the importance of involving the staff in brand-related activities, with the creation of 'brand champion' roles, to foster involvement with the brand. Participants explained that members of staff have the opportunity of volunteering as brand champions and including such activities within their performance review. Indeed, since there may be ulterior motives involved (ie. performance review), the role cannot be fully considered a volunteering activity, placing it in between the previously mentioned formal and informal conceptualisation of the role. Brand champions' activities may consist of providing feedback



on organisational decisions and suggesting future directions in order to help the organisation understand how such decisions will impact on the internal perception of the brand. Similarly, organisations seem to be trying to positively influence internal and external stakeholders' perception of the brand adopting influential individuals as endorsers giving them visibility in press releases, conferences and media. Academics may recognise influence of these illustrious individuals, although not being necessarily happy to see always the same people appearing on the media, believing that the efforts of other members should be acknowledged since this would enhance diversity within the branding efforts. Findings suggest once again that academics want to be considered, provide their opinion and eventually contribute to the achievement of a successful brand.

**Contribution 40. The academic context itself may pose obstacles to internal branding implementations. Differentiation is difficult due to external pressures (eg. students expectations and accreditation requirements) and the heavy competitions is leading to organisations lowering their standards resulting in disappointment of the staff. University brands are perceived as labels creating prejudices on graduates according to their university rank, a process perceived negatively especially in academia.** This study suggest that universities find themselves in a time of high competition where differentiating is challenging, and the possibilities are limited. In fact, universities seem to be attempting to differentiate their offering, whilst still being bound to expectations of both prospective students and accrediting bodies, in line with finding from previous studies (DImaggio and Powell, 1983; Hemsley-Brown and Oplatka, 2006; Mampaey, Huisman and Seeber, 2016). Differentiation issues naturally link to positioning. Building upon Kok *et al.* (2010), who discussed the difference between traditional and new universities, an issue identified concerns distinction between applied and research universities with the findings indicating that some organisations may stand in between the two sides without taking a clear position, eventually affecting their positioning in the market. Furthermore, branding was not seen as necessarily useful for the HE context, and, together with the heavy competition in the market, perceived as a negative discipline. The reason suggested is that the increasing struggle over students is resulting in universities moving away to their identity in order to portray a more appealing image and increase the numbers of students' applications. Such

process may result in organisations that end up lowering their standards and offering the same basic propositions, rather than committing to differentiate and ensure a unique value proposition, resulting in the delivery of devalued degrees. Academics may disagree with such changes, due to their strong beliefs and passion towards the profession, which they may see as a vocation (see section 6.2.3.2), resulting in a mind-set potentially harder to influence when compared to traditional businesses' employees. Academics perceive the concept of university itself in jeopardy, with the focus switching from enhancing the educational aspects to a pure focus on improving the brand name, supporting Molesworth *et al.* (2009) views that not all academics may accept the shift towards marketisation. Arguably, when such detachment to the modern marketisation of HE arises within faculties, the desired achievement of "getting staff behind the brand" (Chapleo, 2010, p.180) appears an even more challenging task. Further detachment may be caused by the fact that university brands may be seen negatively due to being perceived as a 'labels' affixed the graduates, which may influence the job seeking process affecting the employers' perception of graduates and leading to prejudices and bias. In such process, the applicants may feel uncomfortable in applying to job positions, questioning their own worth according to the institution that awarded their degree. Such process appears even more dramatic in the HE context, with academics feeling uncertain about applying to universities ranking higher than the one where they have obtained their degree. Consequently, lower ranked universities may struggle even more to build internal brand acceptance, since the rank of the brand may influence not only the external, but also its external perception.

**Contribution 41. Internal branding should address the information flow towards staff members, ensuring clarity, accessibility and consistency.** This study looked at the dimension of 'information', which Mahnert & Torres (2007) discuss in their model as the process of gathering information and feedback from the organizational point of view. This study has shown that the actions undertaken by leadership and management to develop brand acceptance and support may not always be the most adequate, suggesting the need of learning from staff's views and adjusting to them, in line with Manhert & Torres (2007). However, possibly due to the fact that is not intended specifically for the HE context, in their model the authors emphasize the importance gathering feedback and evaluate the activities, which

could be seen an information exchange *from* staff (and external sources) *towards* organization, with less focus on the information exchanged *from* the organization *towards* the staff. This study contributes to the dimension of ‘information’, proposing an updated version of Manhart & Torres’ (2007) model for HE (see section 6.5.2.2) that addresses the flow of information towards the staff. The three key sub-dimensions proposed are *clarity*, *accessibility* and *consistency*. The researcher proposes that lack of *clarity* in information, such as conceptualization of the brand, will result in poor branding implementation where the core message is not clear. *Accessibility* concerns the need to ensure that the staff is able to access the information about the brand. *Consistency* is seen as the need of coherence between an organisation and its brand, since, as previously discussed, staff may feel loyal to the organisation but not necessarily to the brand.

**Contribution 42. Further factors that can pose obstacles to internal branding are the size of the organisation, which can affect the consistency of communications, and the strategy, which may not be realistic, static and failing in promoting involvement and motivation.** This study found out that the size of the organisation may be an issue, since coherency and consistency of may be lost when delivering messages across big organisations, due to the multiple departments and teams involved in the branding efforts. Lack of consistency across the different levels of the organisation may hinder the communications of the brand message since, in case of multiple teams involved in brand-related communications, the brand messages may present a different interpretation and consequently delivery of an altered message. Then, Mahnert & Torres (2007) explain that the size of the organisation can generate insular thinking and internal competition, suggesting the possible application of their findings to the previously identified competition across the schools within the same university. Further to the organisation, the strategy set also plays an important role in the internal branding strategy, since organizations should have a strategy coherent with brand and organizational objectives (Jacobs, 2003). This study suggest that an unrealistic and overambitious strategy will create an issue to the staff, due to the impossibility of achieving it. Furthermore, if the organisation defines the internal branding strategy without input from the staff, it may lead to failures and poor response. The brand strategy should not be static but rather short-term oriented and flexible, considering the high

staff turnover, constantly updated to reflect the new members' opinions and inputs. Failure in doing so would result in a brand outdated that will not be relevant for the new staff members. Furthermore, organisations may not see the value of investing in internal branding, identifying a lack of motivation for those in charge. Motivation is important for both initiators of the process and staff members. The use of formal control may be seen as imposed behaviour and only result in academic staff feeling forced to carry out some actions, without a genuine motivation to do so, defying the purpose of internal branding as a natural approach. Trying to develop motivation and facilitate changes by offering rewards may not be easy, due to the fact that members of staff may be happy to retain their current position, and enjoy higher levels of freedom, without being necessarily interested in career progression. Even when interested, academic staff may behave in the desired way only to fulfil the promotions requirements without necessarily buying into the brand. Overall, this study suggests that the trend in HE is too oriented towards control with limited focus on empowering, involving and developing the staff.