

Exploring Employee-Based Brand Equity in Company X

Saara Sevon

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Author(s) Saara Sevon	
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<p>In recent years, the importance of branding has increased in the B2B environment. This thesis was conducted to create a mutual understanding internally about the commissioning company's brand. There was a need to gain a better understanding of the brand to be able to communicate it externally more effectively.</p> <p>The theoretical framework consists of literature and research on the brand, organizational culture, and internalizing the brand, as well as other literature related to these topics. The most significant theoretical sources were Kapferer's brand identity prism (2008) and King & Grace's Employee-based Brand Equity (2009). The interviews were conducted based on the learnings from various sources, such as semi-structured interview and brand literature.</p> <p>This thesis is reported by using a zipper model that combines a theoretical framework with methodology. Also, the interview results are presented among them. A case study approach is used to give the framework for the study.</p> <p>The study was conducted as interviews during the years 2020 and 2022. The first interview conducted in 2020 was with the CEO and a current state analysis was made based on it. Other interviews were with the company employees separately in 2022 and a content analysis was executed based on them.</p> <p>The findings from the interviews are encouraging. Brand awareness is at a good level for the company in question. However, the employees required something tangible to rely on with the brand-related questions. The brand book answers this need. Also, brand management is now at a better level than in 2020. A lot of work has been done with the brand, but there are challenges related to internal branding. Employee education regarding the brand and aligning promises to the employees with the truth are critical to succeeding in internal branding.</p>	
Keywords Brand management, Employee-based brand equity, Internal brand management, Internalization.	

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Abbreviations

B2B	Business-to-Business
B2C	Business-to-Customer
SaaS	Software as a Service
EBE	Employee Brand Equity
EBBE	Employee-based Brand Equity
CBBE	Customer-based Brand Equity
IB	Internal Brand
HR	Human Resources
SEO	Search Engine Optimization

1 Introduction

In recent years, branding has become an increasingly important matter for B2B operators. In the B2C field branding has been an important part of everyday business for a long time but for B2B it is a relatively new way of thinking. (Keller et al. 2020, 40–42.)

By reading this thesis the reader gains an understanding on branding in a B2B environment, internal brand management, and brand internalization within an organization. Also, they learn about organizational culture and employee-based brand equity.

This thesis is commissioned by Company X. For the commissioning company, the main objective of this project is to create mutual understanding internally about the brand. The author's role is to interview the company's employees and write the analysis based on each interview. This thesis focuses on internal brand management and employee brand equity. Also, one output is to create a brand book for the commissioning company. The brand book includes brand description, culture, values, tone of voice, and graphic guidelines. It is found in appendix 4.

This chapter introduces the commissioning company and discusses the objectives of the thesis. Also, the research questions are set, and the scope and limitations of the project are discussed. Finally, the structure of the thesis is presented.

1.1 Commissioning company

Company X is a small B2B SaaS company that sells a digital communications platform to public and private sector organizations. It is located in Southern Finland; however, it markets throughout the country. It also does some business abroad, but the major market is in Finland.

Most of Company X's business is done in one certain area of business. In this area, the operators are few but large with specified needs. Additionally, other smaller customer segments have other kinds of needs. Like in many B2B organizations, also Company X has long selling times that usually range from 6 months to 2 years. Regardless of this, it is an agile operator and can deliver very fast.

Security is one of Company X's top priorities. Customers demand secure and steady services with minimum downtime because they need to make sure that their customers' data is safe and handled correctly.

In Company X, every employee works with customers one way or another. For example, they answer to customers' questions on the customer care channel which makes helping the customers fast and efficient. Also, events where customers are invited, are possibilities for everyone to engage in customer work.

1.2 Objectives and research questions

The commissioning company has defined a need for a brand book. It has been thought about before but there are not enough resources to deliver it. The brand book is created on basis of the interviews. The author's personal interest is internal branding and the employee point of view. Organizational culture emerges from the interviews and is included afterward to complement the study.

The purpose of this thesis is to increase internal understanding and awareness on the brand. Interviews are conducted to examine the employees' points of view on the Company X brand.

Everyone in the organization needs to be aware of what the brand stands for. Otherwise, there is a great danger to lose focus by carrying out separate acts that are not in line with the brand. (De Chernatony 2012, 16.)

The purpose of the brand book is to make brand guidelines clear and visible to all employees. It also aims to make sure that the brand message is communicated clearly externally, and the company tone of voice is always recognizable regardless of who sends the message. Also, the organizational culture and values are defined in the brand book. It also helps the employees, especially the newcomers, to enter the organizational culture and to learn the values, so they can succeed in their work.

Brand guidelines include important brand properties like values, identity, and design. Their purpose is to explain how the organization wants its brand to be seen by employees, customers, and other stakeholders. Also, they offer information for revising the brand identity and a source for employees to check the brand attributes when needed. (Mogaji 2019, 2–6.)

The brand is a much-researched field that has changed a lot in the long run from tangible goods to intangible services. Brands are built and managed by organizations, but instead of the organizations it is stakeholders who own the brand. Because, in the end, the brand is built in the stakeholders' minds, be they a customer or an employee of the organization. (Beverland 2018, 5; Keller et al. 2020, 32; Aaker 1991, 7; Kapferer 2012, 8–12.)

In the future, the deliverables of this thesis benefit the building of the Company X's brand and marketing strategy.

There are one main research question and three sub questions:

RQ: How to support brand internalization in Company X?

SQ1: How to ensure the employees to have appropriate brand knowledge and an ability to communicate it?

SQ2: What is the current state of brand management in Company X?

SQ3: What is the current state of brand awareness among Company X employees?

1.3 Scope and limitations

This thesis is a development project that is conducted for a specific organization.

Certain subjects are related to branding, but they are not covered in this thesis. Such subjects are marketing and marketing communication, marketing measurement, and search engine optimization (SEO). Marketing and communication are closely related to branding, but due to them being very large entities, it is impossible to cover them in this work. Marketing is very important to Company X but first, the brand challenges must be solved. This is why branding is the main topic and marketing is excluded. Further, marketing measurement is an important part of successful marketing, but is also excluded from this work because it is related to marketing, not branding. Lastly, search engine optimization is related to both branding and marketing and is crucial when writing any piece of content for it to get noticed, but again, it is excluded from this thesis because the brand and employees are in focus.

The author's role in this project is to make sure that all the information needed is available and the right questions are asked so that the author is able to answer the research questions and to create the brand book. The brand description is written from the outset, and most of the other parts, as well. However, the company employees are the ones who create the content in the interviews. The graphic guidelines already exist and are created by a Company X employee who is in charge of the brand. The author's assignment is to make them easily available within the brand book. She collects the information in one place since at the moment it is hard to find for example the font that should be used.

1.4 Structure of the thesis

This thesis is reported using the zipper model. It begins with introducing the commissioning organization, Company X. It is followed by the objectives and research questions, and finally, the scope and limitations of the study before landing into this section of the thesis.

Next, the research approach and processes are presented. This thesis is conducted as a case study. Interviews are used as a method of collecting data and the current state analysis and content analysis are used to analyze them.

Later, the literature review and description of the interviews and the results are discussed. Several theories are linked to the study in three different chapters forming modules that present theories, interview questions and answers, as well as results from them in the same package. This is called the zipper model.

The zipper model is used as a structure of this thesis. It differs from the traditional thesis structure by combining a theoretical framework with the target of the study. This results in several chapters that discuss theory and practice in the same chapter. It also presents results and development suggestions.

Finally, the results and conclusions are presented and discussed. Also, the research questions are answered. Based on the interviews, brand understanding is already at a good level in Company X, but employees require tools to be able to implement the brand in their everyday work better. The brand book helps them to do this.

Table 1 presents cover matrix. It shows the relation of the research questions and theoretical framework, what data collecting methods are used, and the type of analysis used to reach the results.

Table 1. Cover matrix

Research questions	Theoretical framework	Data collection	Type of analysis
How to support brand internalization in Company X?	Brand internalization, organizational culture	Interviews	Content analysis
How to ensure the employees to have appropriate brand knowledge and an ability to communicate it?	Brand internalization, organizational culture	Interview	Content analysis
What is the current state of brand management in Company X?	Brand internalization	Interviews	Current state analysis
What is the current state of brand awareness among Company X employees?	Brand	Interviews	Content analysis

2 Research approach, methods, and process

Because the thesis is reported as the zipper model, this chapter presents the research approach, methods, and process together. Findings and results are presented in the following chapters together with theoretical framework. First, the case study as a research approach is discussed. Then, the research methods are presented; how the data is collected by interviewing Company X employees and how the research process is executed.

Semi-structured themed interviews are conducted with six employees. They are chosen to represent the different operations of the company in order to have reliable results.

2.1 Case study as a research approach

The case study examines one or more cases thoroughly using different methods like interviews, observation, and field study. (Hamel et. al. 1993, 2.) The objective of the case study is to define, analyze and solve a phenomenon. This phenomenon may be for example an event, a function, a person, or a group. In addition, empirical data is used to enrich the collected information. Case study translates into situations where questions like what and why are significant, the researcher holds little control over the situation, there is only a small amount of research on the subject, or the subject is a real-life phenomenon. (Eriksson et. al. 2014, 4–5.)

Eriksson et. al. (2014, 7–8) adds that the complexity of the case study is because its milieu can be defined in several ways, and it can be broad or narrow depending on the case. Also, the industry, political situation, or other factors may affect how the phenomenon is seen at a particular time.

Moilanen et al. (2022, 42) present case study phases that are illustrated in Figure 1. It has four phases that do not necessarily follow each other canonically but can be adapted in a different order. In this model, the phases are: 1) setting up the development task or problem that needs to be answered. 2) familiarizing oneself with the existing theories on the subject and define the development task or problem. 3) collecting the data and analyzing it. And finally, 4) the researcher making suggestions or models for development processes.

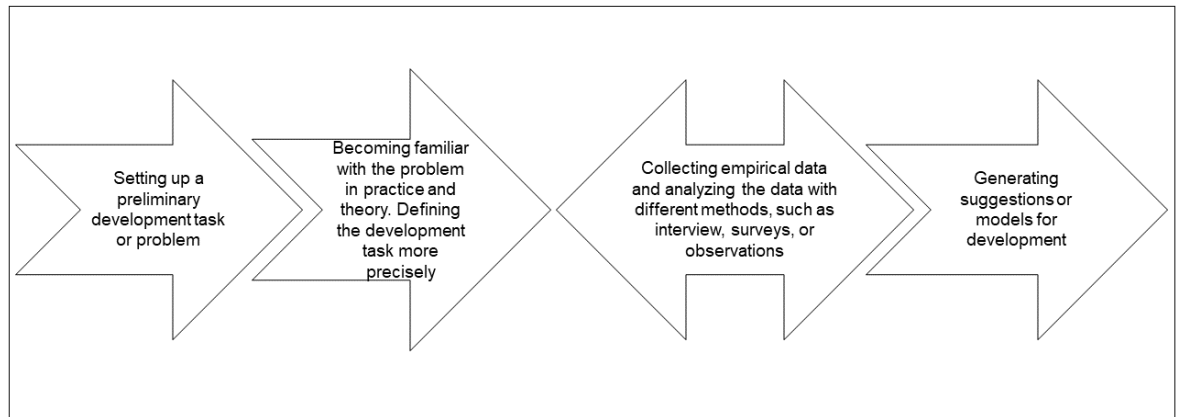


Figure 1. Case study phases. Adapted from Moilanen et al. (2022, 42.)

In the case study, the research problem is usually very specific, and is based on previous studies and theories on the subject. Being familiar with the previous research can lead to asking better questions and allow making exceptions to past practices. (Moilanen et al. 2022, 42.)

Typically, a case study uses qualitative research methods, like interviews for data collection. In interviews, such as theme interviews, the interviewees often describe their behavior in the situation making it easier for the researcher to understand it. (Moilanen et al. 2022, 42.)

Eriksson et al. (2014, 34.) add that other methods of analysis in qualitative research are different classifications, categorizing, and sorting. It is also possible to use more than one method of analysis at the same time.

2.2 Collecting and analyzing data

Qualitative methods were used to collect the data for this research. Most of the data came from the interviews that took place in 2020 and 2022 when the Company X CEO and employees were interviewed by individual interviews. Table 2 presents the data collection methods.

Table 2. Data collection methods.

Method	Objective	Participants	Schedule
Interview, current state analysis	Creating an insight into Company X's current state.	CEO, Author	October 2020, March 2022
Interviews, content analysis	Creating an internal understanding of the Company X brand.	Personnel, Author	November 2022
Interviews, content analysis	Creating an understanding of the Company X current brand management	Personnel, Author	November 2022

Originally, the plan was to have a workshop to collect data and create something new. However, there were changes in Company X operations and it became impossible for the employees to engage in an event that would have taken a lot of time. This is why a plan B was created to be able to collect the data and not to strain the employees too much.

2.2.1 Semi-structured interviews

Six employees from Company X were interviewed, who make up half of the whole personnel of the company. According to Moilanen et al. (2022, 78–79), it is important to connect the subject of the interview to the immediate working space, so the interviews were held at the office where the employees usually work. To make sure to get as versatile point of views as possible, the interviewees were chosen in various positions and with different backgrounds. The employees were interviewed in Finnish because speaking their native language would produce better-quality answers. The questionnaire is found in appendix 2.

The interview questions are derived from the literature related to each theme. Table 3. presents the relationship between them. The findings are presented in chapter 6. Only the questions that are used in this thesis are enclosed and the excluded ones are presented in table 4.

The brand has so many different definitions that the author thought it would be important to know how the interviewees understand the concept. After that, she would be able to ask about the Company X brand. This way should there have been any issues with the answers, she would have known the reason. Purpose answers the question of why an organization exists. Brand values, on the other hand, need to be defined in cooperation

with the employees, and their views should be considered. Two questions are related to organizational culture. They consider working routines and cooperation inside Company X. The brand as a person question is derived from brand identity literature and is related to brand associations that people have about brands. The last three questions are related to internal brand management and brand internalization. They are about engaging the employees.

Table 3. Relationship between theory and interview questions.

Theory	Interview questions
Brand	1. What does the word brand mean to you? 2. How would you describe the Company X brand?
Purpose	3. Why does Company X exist? What is the reason for its being?
Brand values	5. What is important to you about Company X?
Organizational culture	6. What kind of working routines are there in Company X? 7. How would you describe the Company X employees' cooperation?
Brand identity	8. If Company X was a person, what kind of person would it be?
Brand internalization	11. What does Company X brand mean to you?
Internal brand management	12. How does the Company X brand show in your work?
Brand internalization	13. How could you bring the brand into your daily work?

Time is spent modifying the questions to be such that anyone can answer them. This is important because the questions are related to the brand and the interviewees may not be familiar with the field. Moilanen et al. (2022, 81) explain that from the reliability point of view, it is important that the interviewer and the interviewee understand each other. This is why the person's background must be taken into consideration. There are 13 open-ended questions on the questionnaire. The questions are chosen based on the research questions to get answers to all of them. Additionally, the brand book is considered in order to get material for it.

To make sure all interviewees have the same information before the interviews, a briefing is written on how the interview is conducted. It is read to every interviewee before starting

to ask questions. This way the author can also make sure that everyone has an opportunity to ask about the study.

The planned length for each interview was 45 minutes based on the number and structure of the questions. The actual time spent was from 15 to 45 minutes. All interviews were recorded and transcribed. Five of them were held in person and one interview was held online via video call.

Interviews were carried out during 22. – 25.11.2022. The Company X personnel was contacted via the company's internal communication channel to ask for permission and to suggest a date and time for the interview. After agreeing on the interview, an information letter was sent to the interviewees via email. The letter contained information on the research and data handling. It is found in appendix 3. All employees who were asked to participate agreed to the interview. The author was prepared to ask more people to be interviewed, if necessary, but it appeared that six interviews was enough. The first three interviews were held on the same day, and they were transcribed shortly afterward. All interviews were executed and transcribed within the same week.

After the sixth interview, saturation was reached, and the data processing was started. In this thesis, it meant that no more different aspects were presented. Based on the existing answers to the interview questions, there was a certainty that the research questions can be answered. Moilanen et al. (2022, 82) state that the saturation point is reached when the interviewees are not providing additional information any longer.

2.2.2 Content analysis

Content analysis is a basic means of analysis that can be adapted into any research inside qualitative research. (Tuomi et al. 2018, 103.)

Tuomi et al. have created a model for qualitative analysis which is used in this study. The idea of the qualitative analysis model (presented in figure 2) is to make sense of a subject at hand, be it an interview as in this research, or some other form of text. (Tuomi et al. 2018, 104.)

Four phases in the qualitative analysis are presented in figure 2. First, the researcher must decide on their interest in the subject. Then, they must find and mark all the themes that are related to the subject and move them to another file. Everything else is excluded from the research. Then the researcher must group, theme, or categorize the material, and finally, make a summary of it. (Tuomi et al. 2018, 104.)

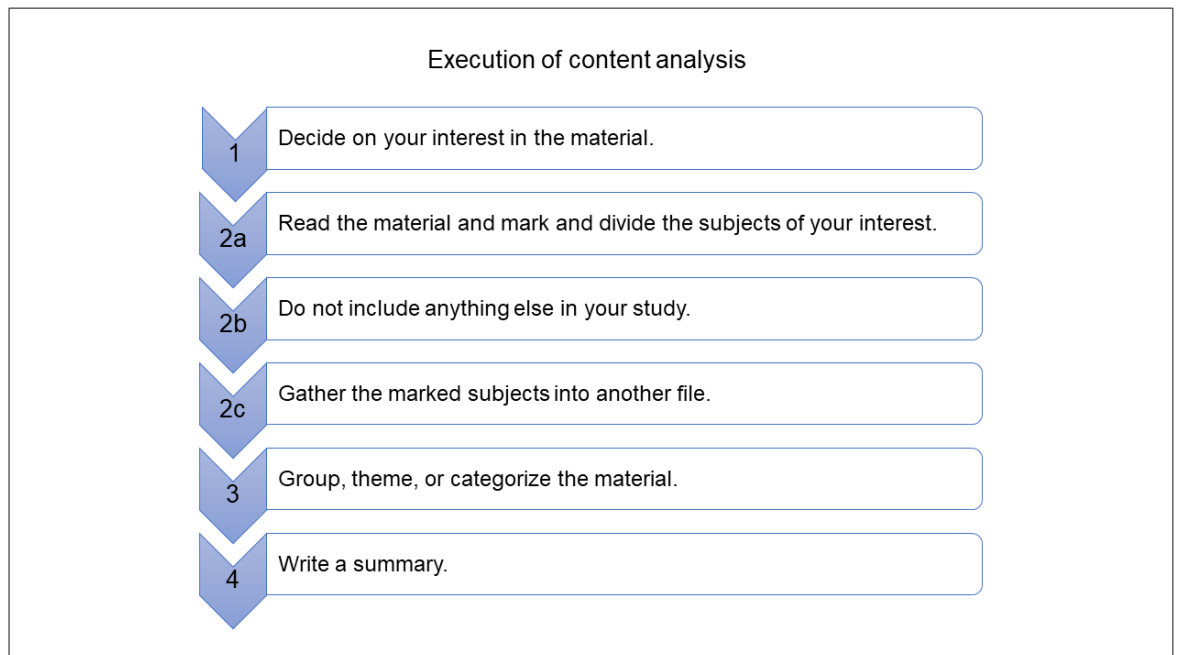


Figure 2. Execution of qualitative analysis. Adapted from Tuomi et al. (2018, 104).

After conducting the interviews, they were transcribed and saved into separate files. Then the transcribed interviews were read several times. At this point, the interesting topics were already decided on, because they came from the thematized semi-structured interviews. There were nine themes that were searched for from the interviews. While reading the files one by one, the views of the interviewees were collected into nine new files by theme so that in the end all the interesting point of views were moved under the theme they belonged to. By this time, the files were read several times. Hirsjärvi and Hurme (2022, 180) define theme as an element that recurs in most interviews.

When the themes were in their files, some of them were excluded from the final report because the insights on them were so similar that it did not produce much material. In the end there were seven themes. Then, under every theme, the existing notes were themed again to see how much the interviewees had talked about one topic. After this, a summary was written of each new theme inside the file until all nine themes and their sub themes were handled. The summaries are presented in this thesis under chapters 3, 4, and 5. They are presented together with related theories because of the zipper model reporting.

2.2.3 Analyzing data

As stated in the previous sub-chapter, the findings were analyzed from the interviews by searching for certain themes within every question. The 13 open-ended questions are presented in appendix 2. The answers were color-coded to be able to find the themes and arrange them under the right category. In the end, there were seven categories, and they

all had different colors. The categories were brand understanding, purpose, values, culture, personality, engagement, and internalization. The categories called vision and tone of voice were excluded because the data from them was so similar that they did not bring anything new to the study. However, the tone of voice was included in the brand book.

Table 4 presents the categories and interview questions related to them. Also, the research questions that the interviews answered are presented in the table. The color codes here are different from the work done with the interview transcriptions and have nothing to do with them. Here they mark the categories and interview questions processed together. In the following chapters they are also combined with the applicable theories with the same color codes.

Table 4. Categorization.

Category	Interview questions
Brand understanding	1. What does the word brand mean to you? 2. How would you describe the Company X brand?
Purpose	3. Why does Company X exist? What is the reason for its being?
Values	5. What is important to you about Company X?
Culture	6. What kind of working routines are there in Company X? 7. How would you describe the Company X employees' cooperation?
Personality	8. If Company X was a person, what kind of person would it be?
Engagement	11. What does Company X brand mean to you?
Internalization	12. How does the Company X brand show in your work? 13. How could you bring the brand into your daily work?
Excluded categories	
Excluded questions	
Vision	4. How would you describe Company X's future?
Tone of voice	9. What kind of tone of voice does Company X have? 10. In your opinion, what kind of tone of voice should Company X have?

3 Brand

This chapter describes concepts and sub concepts related to brand. Additionally, findings and development suggestions are discussed in this chapter because the thesis is reported using the zipper model. Same structure of principals applies in chapters 4 and 5.

The brand definition is discussed first; how it is defined by different researchers over a long period of time. And how the definition of a brand has changed from being a physical branded mark on cattle to a value-based intangible image in stakeholders' minds. Also, Philip Kotler's views about the role of B2B brands are presented.

Brand building is about making and seeing the difference between brands. Emotions are in an important role when trying to differentiate a brand from competitors. The brand must be relevant and create value for the stakeholders.

The difference between brand identity and brand image is discussed in the Brand identity sub-chapter. Also, the brand identity prism by Kapferer is presented.

Finally, the brand related interview findings and development suggestions are presented.

3.1 Brand definition

The brand is the way how a company, product, or service is seen by customers, potential customers, competitors, investors, and other stakeholders (Keller et al. 2020, 38.) On the other hand, the brand also reflects the company's philosophy and personality which, through its values, helps the whole organization to perform as one (Hackselius-Fonsén 2018, 102). Brand values are discussed in chapter 4.

Originally, the brand was a mark that was mostly burned into the products or animals for recognition and to avoid them getting stolen or replaced. (Beverland 2018, 5; Keller et al. 2020, 32.) Then, it was long defined as a name or a logo that was associated with a product or service to differentiate it from other products or services (Aaker 1991, 7).

However, Keller et al. (2020, 33–36) today point out that a brand can differentiate from a product by having qualities that make it stand out from other similar offerings. The brand needs to provide either functional or psychological value to the customer. A strong brand identifies the producer of the product or service. It makes the customer choice-making process effortless because the customer does not have to search for information on the familiar brand. Also, a brand can have self-projecting functions from the customer's point of view, and they might use the brand as a device of self-expression. In addition, the

brand reduces risks in the buying process. The potential risks can be, for example, functional, financial, or time-bound.

To a company, the brand offers legal protection against copycats. Also, brand loyalty provides financial security and long-term profitability since satisfied customers will buy again. (Keller et al. 2020, 37–38.)

Kapferer (2012, 7) states that there has been arguing among experts about how the brand should be defined, and each of them has a definition to offer that slightly differs from others. He (2012, 8–12) defines the brand as a name that is associated with trust, engagement, and excitement among its stakeholders. The brand can stand out and influence people through its values.

Beverland (2018, 9–10) defines seven aspects of a strong brand; the brand needs to be identifiable to the customers. There must be something in its story and being that makes the customer proud of using that particular brand. Second, building a unique and valuable relationship between the brand and customers is based on the benefits that the customers are receiving from using the brand. Related to uniqueness, people like to differentiate themselves using brands as instruments in doing so. Therefore, brands need to have something that differentiates them from other similar offerors.

People associate many different meanings with brands. This helps the brands to stand out within certain customer segments. Brand value, on the other hand, is important to both the owner and the customer. The gained value can be different for different individuals, like emotional, functional, or monetary value. Be the value of any of the aforementioned or something else, there must be a sense of getting value from purchasing and using the brand. The value grows partly from the experience of using the brand, which is the sixth aspect of a strong brand. The user experience is the ultimate test of the brand promise and defines the customer's satisfaction with the brand. Finally, the brand needs to be authored by the company that owns it to signal to the audience what the brand is about. The brand is built together with the company and the people who get in contact with it. (Beverland 2018, 10.)

On the other hand, Kotler et al. (2010, 52–54) discuss the role of the brand in B2B markets. They define eight different roles of the B2B brand which are presented in Figure 4. Brand loyalty is created through promises to the customers that are kept. A strong brand also enhances the marketing efforts' effectiveness because customers are more willing to listen to its message than one from a non-brand. In addition, it can create a competitive advantage by becoming a brand preference among customers. Or build up a

price premium that will also protect the brand from competition. Further, a positive brand image creates value for the company by reflecting feelings and emotions to the customers. B2B customers are by no means immune to this kind of communication. And, of course, a strong brand can make more money for the company through higher margins and more sales, which affects all the previous points. Additionally, differentiation makes the brand stand out from the gray mass, and it will secure the future business by protecting the product or service against turbulence in the markets or other possible crises.

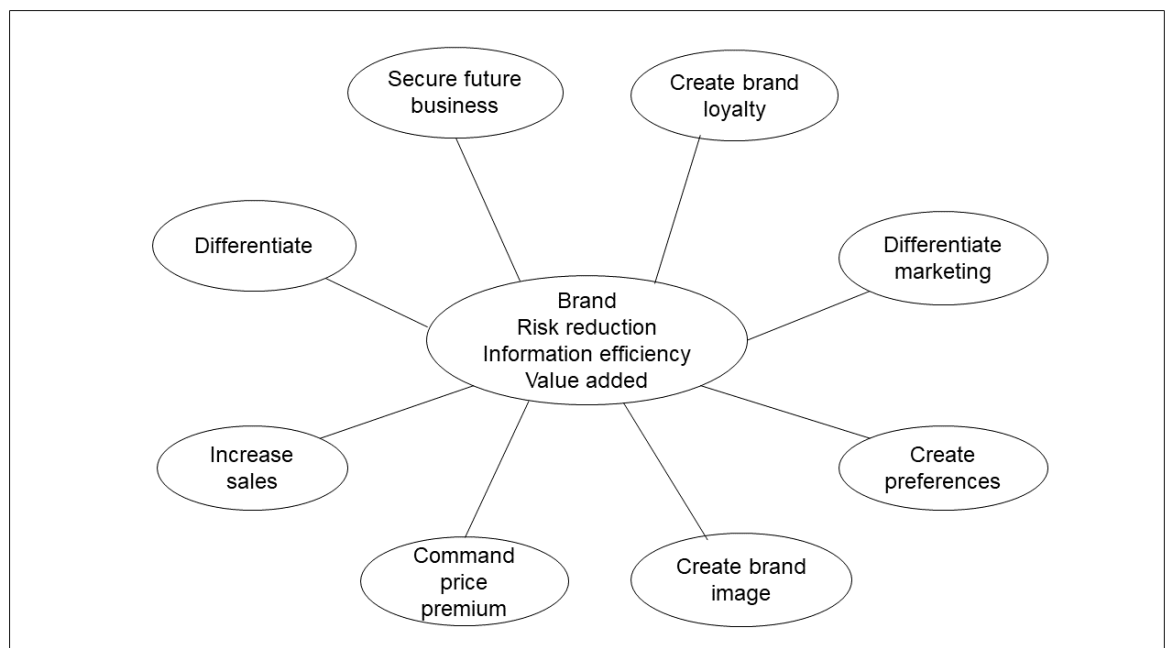


Figure 4. The role of B2B brands adapted from Kotler et al. (2010, 52).

Kapferer (2008, 171) sees a brand as a vision that affects everything related to a product or service from production to values. This vision is called identity and it is discussed in detail in sub-chapter 3.3.

3.2 Brand building

David Aaker (2009, 14) sees brand building as a means of creating success and assets for a company that will lead to competitive advantage. Brand building is not only marketing, although high-class marketing is one of the means to build a strong brand. Also, emotions are essential in building strong brands. Connecting with the customer on an emotional level can lead to customer satisfaction. (Aaker 2009, 194–195.)

Kevin Keller and Vanitha Swaminathan (2020, 39) emphasize the psychological aspects of brand building. The customer's perceived value of the brand is at the center when talking about product differences. If the customer sees the difference between the two

brands, they will buy the one that feels better for them. The difference can be either a feature or a brand image created by the company.

In the business-to-business segment, the purchase processes are often long and complex and involve many people from the customer's side. Thus, the risks are high, and building strong brands can help to tackle them. The company needs to demonstrate to the customers the value they can receive by using its brands. And to make sure they truly understand the perceived value. This is necessary because of the diverse nature of the customer's buying processes. In B2B particular, there is often a situation in which the product qualities are not at the center of the customer experience. But other characteristics, such as high-quality customer service or company references, might become even more important than the product itself. Again, emotional aspects equaling the sense of security or nobility, are a high priority in B2B, too. This is often forgotten by marketers. Eventually, digital marketing and social media presence are crucial to any B2B company nowadays. Engaging with the customers and other prospects where they naturally are spending their time helps with segmenting and getting the company's offering onto the stage. (Keller et al. 2020, 40–42.)

Keller (2020, 996–997) also prompts that the brand needs to have some unique elements or qualities compared to others. It must be relevant and create value for the customers. Because nowadays, customers evaluate personalized offerings that can solve their problems.

3.3 Brand identity

"Brand identity is a unique set of brand associations (...) These associations represent what the brand stands for and imply a promise to customers from the organization members." –David Aaker (2010, 68.)

The above citation from Aaker captures the core of brand identity. According to him (2010, 68), brand identity is similar to human identity; It has a meaning, purpose, and direction. It is also a driver of brand equity which is discussed later in this thesis.

Brand identity and brand image are not the same. The brand identity is internal, and the brand image is an external point of view. Brand identity specifies a brand's meaning, aim, and self-image. It affects the messages that a company sends and therefore, has an impact on the image on the receiver's side. Brand image, on the other hand, is how the stakeholder outside of the company sees the brands. (Kapferer 2008, 174.) Figure 5 presents the difference between brand identity and brand image.

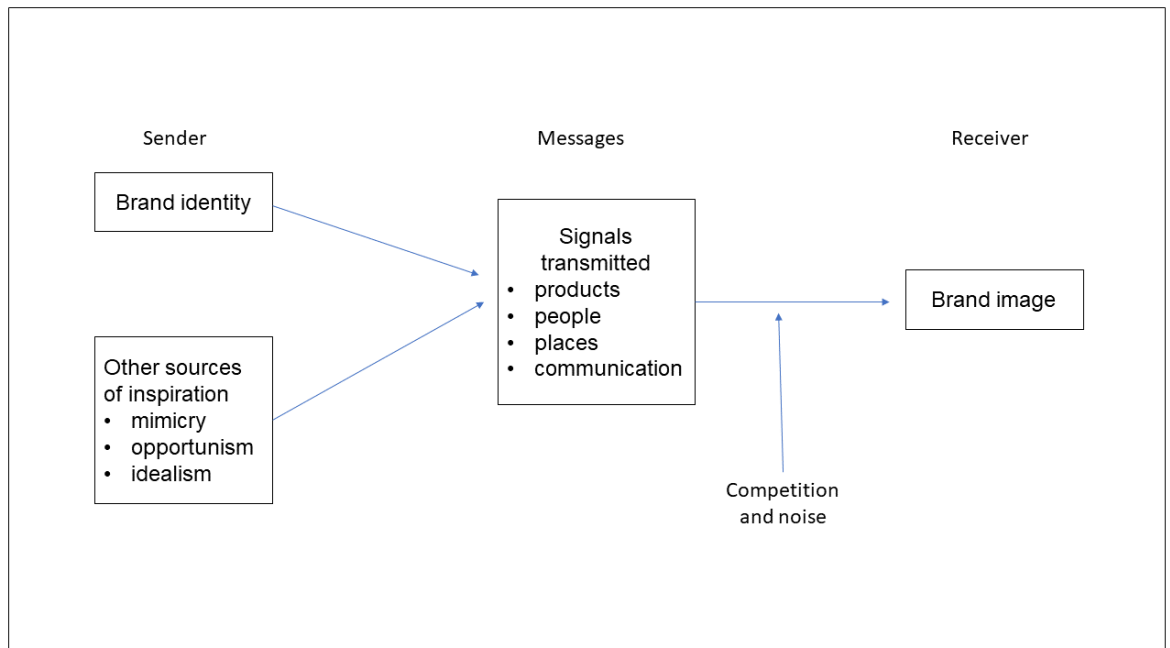


Figure 5. Identity and image. Adapted from Kapferer (2008,174).

Kapferer (2008, 187) created the brand identity prism to define brand identity and its aspects. He divides brand identity into six aspects: physique, relationship, reflection and personality, culture, and self-image. Further, he divides these aspects into two categories so that the first three fall into externalization and the last three into internalization. The brand identity prism is presented in Figure 6. In this thesis, personality and cultural aspects are discussed in more detail.

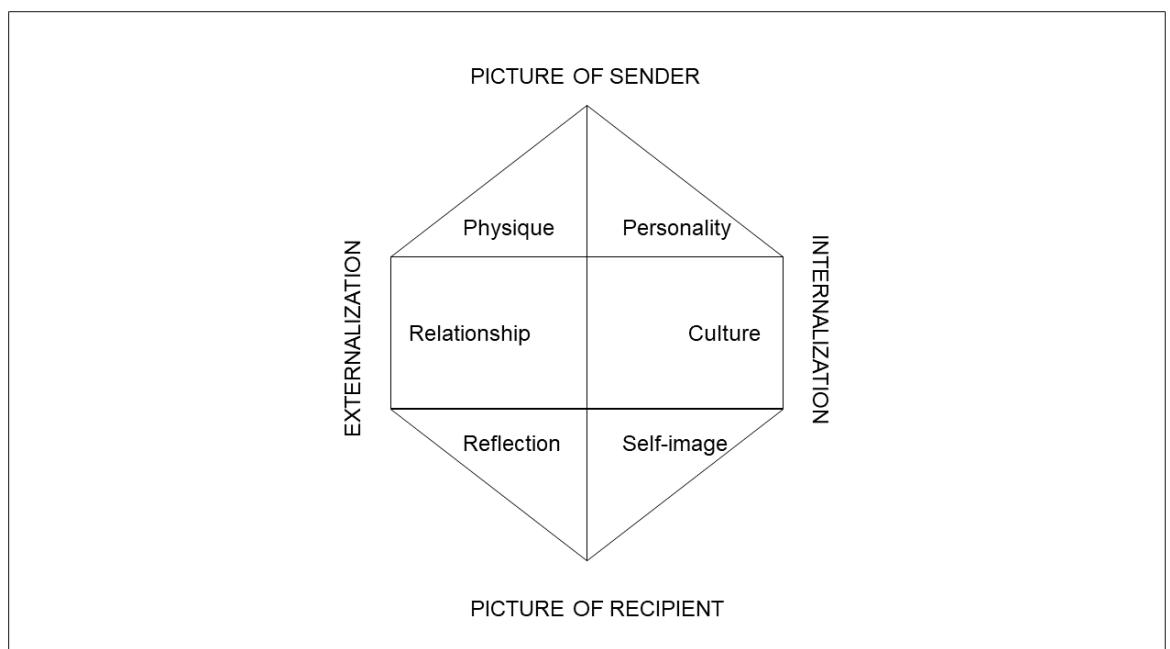


Figure 6. The brand identity prism. Adapted from Kapferer (2008, 183).

Physique is the brand’s physical features that customers immediately recall when a brand is mentioned in a survey. Additionally, physique can be described as the added value of the brand. It represents the brand’s physical qualities. (Kapferer 2008, 182–183.)

Relationships are highlighted especially in the service sector. A brand lies in contact between sales personnel and customers, and it is crucial that the brand message is delivered to all stakeholders. (Kapferer 2008, 185.)

Customer **reflection** is understanding customers’ needs and wants and reflecting them in brand messaging. The most important aspect is to understand the way the customer wants to be seen when using the brand. Understanding and communicating this aspect will increase sales. (Kapferer 2008, 186.)

Brand **personality** uses many human traits to describe how the brand is. This makes it more approachable and human-like, and customers can easily identify with the brand. However, personality differs from the customer-reflected image which describes the ideal receiver. (Kapferer 2008, 183–184.)

Culture is the set of values that inspires the brand and is the source of the brand’s power. Successful brands are driven by culture, and it is a matter of choice for some customers. (Kapferer 2008, 184–185.)

Self-image depicts our relationship with our inner self. We use brands to form and maintain this relationship. (Kapferer 2008, 186.)

3.4 Brand related findings

This sub-chapter discusses the findings and results of the interviews that concern brand understanding and brand as a person. First, the interviews are discussed; what were the employees’ insights on the topics. Then, the results and development suggestions based on the interviews are presented. Table 5 demonstrates how the brand theory is related to the categories and interview questions presented in table 4 in the previous chapter. The green color on both tables marks the interview questions discussed. The list of interview questions is found in appendix 2.

Table 5. Relationship of category, interview questions, and brand theory.

Category	Interview questions	Related theory
Brand understanding	1–2	Brand
Personality	8	Brand identity

The interviewees' insights on questions 1, 2, and 8 that are related to brand theories are presented next. They discuss the meaning of the brand, Company X brand, and brand as a person during individual interviews. Also, some interesting citations from the interviewees are included.

First, the interviewees were asked about **the meaning of the brand**. It was interesting and important to see the interviewees' take on the brand as a concept. The assumption was that there would be differences in their answers since they work in very different operations and are not brand professionals. On the contrary, their answers were very similar, and both the company-led image and customer-created image were presented in most of the answers.

One take on the brand was:

[Brand is] "an image that customers and markets have about the company, its services or products."

Then the interviewees were asked to **describe Company X brand**. They see it as open, agile, very customer friendly, and customer-centric. A secure operational model in its operations is the competitive advantage that separates Company X from its competitors. In addition, it is playful but professional. The feeling is very positive, and the brand is seen as clear and good.

Company X's brand communication is human-centric and humane both internally and externally. It is also natural and transparent. Company X's brand is well known in a small niche segment. Otherwise, it is not very familiar to the public. Company X's core people have created very good relationships with stakeholders and that has been the main source of PR. Brand building has not been continuous, which shows in Company X's overall brand awareness.

The look of the Company X brand, especially the logo, is seen as genius by the interviewees. The playful idea behind it is fun and insightful; the name of Company X reflects agile operations in everything the company does and its original purpose.

This sentence summarizes the interviewees' insights on the Company X brand:

"We got feedback saying that let's take Company X to this project because they will get it done."

As a person, Company X would be a little bit eccentric but extremely reliable. S/he would be full of ideas and able to communicate them to customers and colleagues clearly. S/he

is constantly thinking of the best solution for the customer, is extremely customer-centric, and cares deeply for the customer. Security is an important matter for Company X, and s/he constantly keeps it in mind when working for the customer.

Personality is one of the six aspects of Kapferer's Brand identity prism. It is used to describe the brand by terms related to human behavior to allow the stakeholders, in this case, employees to identify with the brand. (Kapferer 2008, 183–184.) Figure 7 highlights personality which is one of the three aspects of the internalization side of the Brand identity prism. The question about the brand as a person amused the interviewees. It immediately provoked feelings as intended. It was rather easy for them to come up with ideas for Company X as a person and what they would be like.

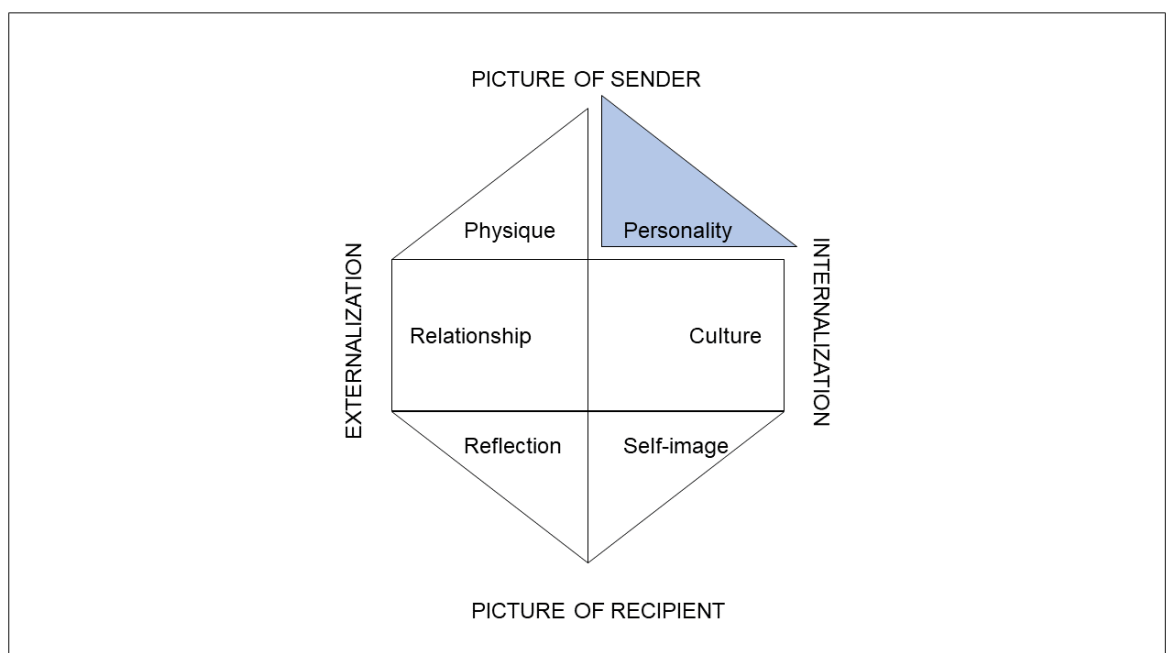


Figure 7. Personality highlighted on Kapferer's (2008, 183) Brand Identity Prism.

Following is what the interviewees said about Company X as a person:

"Company X is a grown-up who takes care of their own business but hasn't forgotten the certain playfulness and youthfulness."

"Company X is customer-centric, productive, and helpful. A nice guy."

3.5 Brand related results and development suggestions

The Company X brand, internally, is playful but reliable and professional at the same time. It is well known among the niche segment but otherwise, it is not very familiar to the markets. Professionalism and security are at the core of the brand. If Company X was a person, it would be a customer-centric reliable professional who provides a secure and sustainable solution to the customer.

Following development suggestions occurred during the interviews:

The company mascot could show more in the brand. Now it only shows in images, but it could be adapted to the service, too. The qualities that are related to this character could also be used in marketing communication.

The company mascot expresses the same characteristics, playfulness, and agility, that Company X wants to articulate in all its business. Playfulness means that working should be fun, and it can show to the customer. Agility shows in fast delivery times and in the ability to make the customers' wishes come true. These matters could be made more visible in all Company X's communication. Also, the mascot itself could be shown more in illustrations.

4 Organizational culture

“He who has a why to live, can bear almost any how.” –Nietzsche. (Fischer et al. 2014, 17.)

This chapter describes concepts and sub concepts related to organizational culture. As stated previously, also in this chapter the findings and development suggestions are discussed due to using of the zipper model in reporting the thesis.

First, the definition of organizational culture is introduced. Then, the meaning of it to employees is discussed. Further, brand values are bound to organizational culture, and the effects are discussed.

Brand value is closely related to organizational culture. When they are matched with the employees' values, it results strong engagement. That is why it is discussed here instead of the previous chapter. The definition of brand values and the meaning they have from the employee's point of view is also discussed. Purpose is why an organization exists. The purpose is presented from the employees' point of view because ultimately, they are the ones who create the sense of purpose.

Next, the culture, values, and purpose-related themes of the thesis are discussed. The findings stand out from the interviews are presented and citations from the interviewees are introduced.

4.1 Organizational culture

One of the best-known definitions of organizational culture is by Schein 1984. According to him, an organization's culture consists of assumptions that the employees have come up with to undertake internal and external problems together. Over time, these assumptions have turned into best practices that are taught to new employees. A successful brand needs a supportive organizational culture behind it to bloom. (de Chernatony 2012, 165, 187.)

It is known that people enjoy the company of similarly thinking and behaving individuals. Similar values play an important role in employees reaching a common understanding and forming a strong organizational culture. Shared values allow employees to be proud of the organization they work for, and to be more motivated and committed to it. (de Chernatony 2012, 166, 184.)

4.2 Brand values

Brand values are recognized to be a part of an organization's culture. Especially for the B2B brands, it is necessary to link the brand values to the organization's values and to match them with employees' values. Also, the values that characterize the brand can be evaluated by organizational culture. (de Chernatony 2012, 157–158.)

A strong culture combined with strong brand values results in motivated and engaged employees. When shared values are understood as expectations of behavior, there can be less supervision which motivates the employees. (de Chernatony 2012, 184.)

De Chernatony (2012, 135–137) defines value as a set of beliefs that control a person's behavior. Having a clear set of values enables a company to differentiate itself from its competitors and communicate its values efficiently. This shows for example in potential employees' behavior as they tend to be more attracted to a company with similar values to their own.

The number of values should be limited to only a few so that employees can remember them and use them when creating brand promises. Values drive certain kinds of behavior and there will be less confusion among employees when there is a manageable number of values. Also, the desirable behavior will be more consistent. (de Chernatony 2012, 137-138.)

When defining brand values, it is crucial to consult the staff widely and listen to what they think are the company brand values. Otherwise, the work with values may end up producing a set of values the managers think are the ones to adopt but the employees are not adopting them. (de Chernatony 2012, 137–138.)

Kotler et al (2010, 71–75) state that values and organizational culture are the most relevant building blocks of internal brand management. Employees need authentic values, and they need to be able to trust them. After all, they are the experts on what is happening inside the organization. The most useful values are the ones related to work. Kotler et al. divide them into three categories: creativity, cultural values, and collaboration. Creativity means that the employees are encouraged to develop and share their innovative ideas. Cultural values are about changing the way the employees relate to matters that are important to the organization. It may be family time on Friday afternoons or education on food depending on the industry. The value of collaboration is about employees working together and creating value for customers by doing so.

Having strong core values in place will produce competitive advantages such as attracting new talent and retaining the existing ones. The productivity of the employees is better, and they are better brand ambassadors than within an organization that does not have strong values. (Kotler et al 2010, 75–78.)

4.3 Purpose

Cardona et al. (2022, 51, 60) define purpose as meaning to a company's existence and find purpose a high added value element. The sense of purpose originates from the company's employees and their everyday work and behavior. In other words, the employees must know, accept, and practice the company's purpose.

There are three dimensions of purpose: knowledge, motivation, and action. Knowledge is what the company represents to the audience. Motivation is an internal means to make purpose truly felt and wanted by the employees. And finally, the action that the employees take in their everyday work. The three dimensions are presented in figure 8. (Cardona et al. 2022, 60–61.)

Additionally, some conditions relate to the dimensions. Figure 8 shows the relations that are coherence, authenticity, and integrity. Coherence is related to action, and it is the reason why employees do their daily tasks. Coherence helps people to understand the company's purpose and raise awareness of it. Authenticity reflects employees' feelings and motivations. It is important to find and align one's purpose to the company's because this creates well-being and affects the customer experience. Integrity is linked to everyday work and organizational culture. It creates internal and external unity by integrating purpose into culture and values. (Cardona et al. 2022, 61–63.)

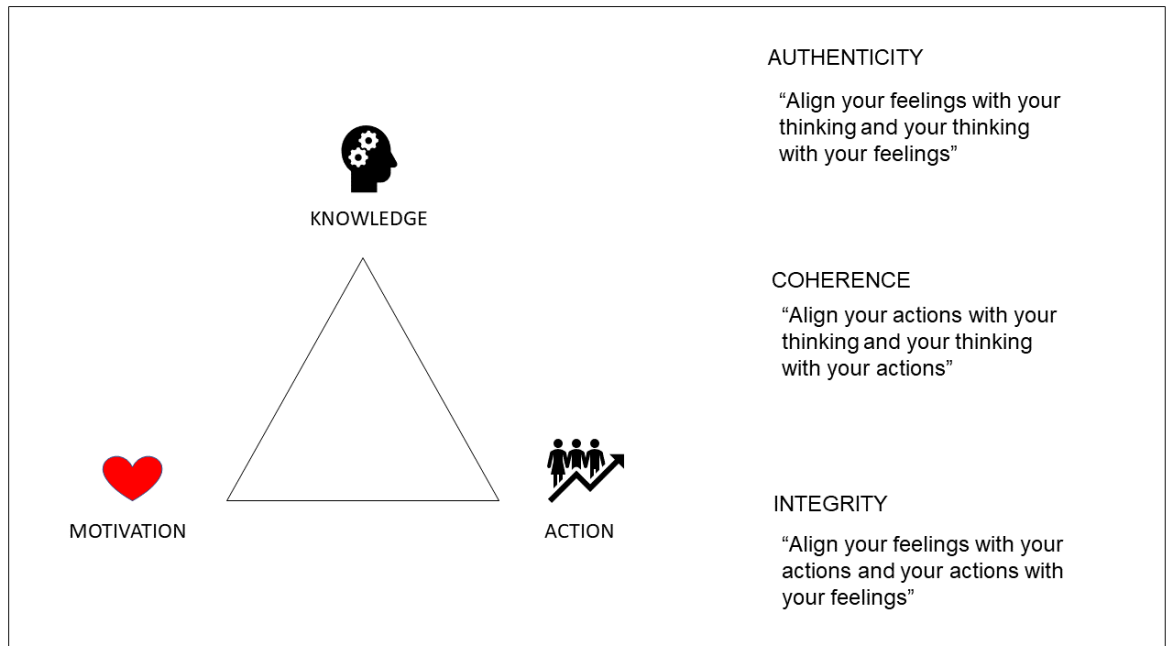


Figure 8. Dimensions of purpose. Adapted from Cardona et al. (2022, 61).

4.4 Organizational culture related findings

In this section, the Company X employees' insights on purpose, brand values, and organizational culture themes are discussed. Then, the results and development suggestions standing out from the interviews are presented. Table 6 displays how categories and interview questions 3 and 5–7 are related to the organizational culture related theories. The full table is found in Table 4. The blue color in both tables marks the interview questions discussed.

Table 6. Relationship of category, interview questions, and theory.

Category	Interview questions	Related theory
Purpose	3	Purpose
Values	5	Brand values
Culture	6–7	Organizational culture

The interviewees' insights on questions 3 and 5–7 that are related to organizational culture brand theories are discussed next. They explained why Company X exists, what is important to them in the company, their working routines, and cooperation among the employees. Some interesting citations from the interviewees are also included after every question.

When asked for **the Company X purpose**, the interviewees explained that in the beginning some 10–15 years ago, there was a demand for a messaging solution and the founders saw the opportunity. At that time, the purpose was quite different from what it is now because originally Company X's purpose was to be a new way of messaging among friends, and organizations. Nowadays the purpose has changed to making it possible for as many Finnish people as possible to communicate digitally securely and easily without having to leave home. This is the end customer's point of view. From the customer's point of view, the purpose is to enhance customers' messaging that needs a specified messaging channel. Mostly these customers are not able to create the service on their own.

Following are some of the interviewees' insights on Company X's purpose:

“Company X's purpose is to enable people to meet when it's not physically possible.”

“Company X is needed to make taking care of health matters more effortless and accessible.”

“As many people as possible could run their errands digitally.”

The interviewees were asked **what is important to them about Company X**. Many have been building the company from the beginning and it shows in their answers. The employees are very proud of Company X, and they want to give excellent customer service and experience, and really be there for the customer. The quality of the product itself and the service the employees offer is very important and a matter of the heart for everyone. This shows to customers and is a competitive advantage.

Helping others is very important for Company X employees. They brought up that it is great to be able to help the youth and other groups in need via Company X's NGO customers, which are many.

Also, the internal atmosphere is very important to the employees. And they stated that it is warm, and they feel welcome. Some stated that the atmosphere is relaxed and non-corporate-like, which is seen only as a positive element. The possibility of remote work was also an important thing to some. It has been possible to work remotely even before Covid-19.

This is what the interviewees thought about the reasons why Company X is important to them:

"We are genuinely looking to solve the customers' problems. Not just trying to sell and then make excuses afterward when things don't go as promised."

"One of our customers told me that they would work for us immediately if there would be an open position. There is a sense of genuine doing and caring for the customers."

"You can be proud of your work because it's helping people in important matters."

Next, the employees were asked about **working routines in Company X**. Working at Company X is agile. The organization is flat and there is no traditional hierarchy. Internal meetings are kept to a minimum but there are daily meetings for the teams and a weekly meeting for the whole staff. Daily meetings have increased the sense of community. Communication works well, even though many are working remotely.

There is almost no monitoring, and everyone is responsible for their work. People work mostly on their own but it's always possible to ask for help and discuss the work at hand with others. Also, working methods are solution-based and customer cases are kept confidential.

This citation summarizes the interviewees' thoughts on working routines in Company X:

"We are all individuals working in different jobs, but we all pull in the same direction."

Cooperation in Company X is agile, open, dialogical, and solution-based. Even though employees work a lot on their own, and even remotely, there is still a lot of cooperation between different teams and individuals. One can always ask if they do not know something and asking is encouraged. Their ways of working are informal and self-administered. Everyone has an equal possibility to influence their work.

Cooperation between employees is seamless and it shows in this answer:

"We don't need months-long processes or projects to get things done. Rather we can execute them very fast and flexibly."

4.5 Organizational culture related results and development suggestions

When Company X was founded, the founders saw that there was a demand for the solution they had to offer. Company X's purpose is to help people to take care of their daily business digitally without having to leave their homes.

When the Covid-19 pandemic started, Company X was on the frontline enabling the digital leap in Finland.

There are certain qualities in Company X brand that are the most important to its employees. These brand values are quality, security, and caring for the customers. The company values align with the employee values well and that creates a good, welcoming atmosphere inside the company. This also shows to customers and other stakeholders.

Culture is strong in Company X. The employees' work is self-administrative and agile, it also fits in everyone's situation, and everyone can have an impact on their work. On the other hand, everyone is responsible for their work, too.

The organization model is flat, and the hierarchy is at a minimum. Communication works well via short daily meetings where everyone can update their current doings and mingle. Many are working remotely, so it is important to meet the team regularly.

Cooperation is easy and there is a lot of it, although the work itself is very independent. The working atmosphere is good and safe at Company X. Everyone can express themselves freely and ask for help when needed. Cooperation in Company X is agile, brainstorming, and problem-solving.

Internal communication was experienced as insufficient in some cases where information did not reach everybody equally. Also, some HR related matters could be handled more properly. This is due to having no platform or resource for this kind of communication. This is something that the company aims to correct in the future.

The following development suggestions are based on the Company X employees' interviews:

Internal communication needs to reach everybody. To develop this, internal channels could be put into use to share all important matters immediately with everyone and not just to those who are at the office. The channels are already there, they just need to be used for all communication. Entitling one person to make sure that all communication is available on the internal channels could help to resolve the communication problem.

The HR-related matters are due to a lack of personnel who would be able to take care of all these matters. Entitling one person to take care of the HR related matters would solve this problem. All in all, there is a need for one extra person in the team who would be able to make sure that the HR related matters and communication are available.

5 Brand internalization

This chapter describes concepts and sub concepts related to brand internalization. As mentioned in previous chapters, the zipper model also applies in this one, and the findings and development suggestions are discussed together with the related theories.

First, the internal brand management and its influence on employees and other stakeholders through their actions is discussed. Differences between internal branding and employer branding are also illustrated alongside the fact that defining internal branding is not easy and the using of the terminology sometimes causes confusion.

Next, employee-based brand equity is discussed; what it is and why is it important to an organization even though the organization cannot influence it.

Finally, the brand internalization related interview findings and development suggestions are presented alongside the citations from the interviewees.

5.1 Internal brand management and brand internalization

“Internal Branding is a corporate strategy measure to enable and motivate employees to not only keep the brand promise but to “live” it.” –Brand trust (brand-trust.de.)

According to Beverland (2018, 173–174), internal brand management regards brand identity. It is important to make sure that the internal and external brands are aligned which drives authenticity. Brand image is built in customer touchpoints, therefore training all the employees on the brand is crucial. Storytelling is often used as a tool to deliver messages to the employees via internal web pages.

Thornton et al (2019, 101–108) emphasize that the employer must be true to its promises to the employees. The brand image that is sold to them and the organization itself needs to be aligned with the truth. Otherwise, employees will notice the mismatch between the two, which will affect their behavior when dealing with customers. Also, studies have shown that when employees are engaged with the brand, they will perform better.

Smith et al. (2021, 835) bring up that today brands are co-created by multiple stakeholders like customers and employees. However, internal branding practices still use traditional brand management tools to motivate employees and to reach organizational goals.

However, Saleem and Iglesias (2016, 44–50) bring up issues that emerge from different researchers examining internal branding from a different point of view and mixing it with employee branding. According to them, this is because there is no commonly accepted definition for internal branding. Therefore, Saleem and Iglesias (2016, 50) define internal branding as a process that helps employees to co-create value with the organization's stakeholders.

Internal branding is sometimes mixed with employer branding. But according to Saleem and Iglesias (2016, 50–53.), five differences between internal branding and employer branding are important to articulate. They have different discipline, goals, focus, components, and brand role. First, internal branding as a discipline appears often in brand literature whereas employer branding influences a wider range of disciplines, such as HRM, management, and personnel management. Second, the goal of internal branding is to co-create brand value among employees and the organization's stakeholders. Employer branding on the other hand aims for a positive employer brand image in employees' and prospective employees' minds. Third, internal branding focuses on targeting existing employees, and employer branding targets both existing and prospective employees. Fourth, the building blocks of the two disciplines are different. Internal branding consists of brand ideologies, brand leadership, brand-centered HRM, internal brand communication, and internal brand communities while employer branding focuses on recruitment and talent attraction. Finally, the brand role differs between the two in what is in focus. In internal branding, the brand enables employees to communicate and co-create value with stakeholders. In employer branding, the brand is used to differentiate the employer from competitors and provide potential recruits with brand values. The differences between internal branding and employer branding are presented in Table 7.

Table 7. Differences between internal branding and employer branding. Adapted from Saleem & Iglesias (2016, 52–53).

	Internal branding	Employer branding
Discipline	Appears more often in the brand literature.	Influences on a wider range of disciplines, such as HRM, management and personnel management.
Goal	Facilitates the brand value co-creation between stakeholders through internal processes.	Pursue a positive employer brand image in employees' and prospective employees' minds.
Focus	Targets existing employees.	Targets existing and prospective employees.
Components	Consists of brand ideologies, brand leadership, brand-centred HRM, internal brand communication and internal brand communities.	Focus on recruitment and talent attraction.
Brand role	The brand enables employees to communicate and co-create value with stakeholders.	Brand is used to differentiate the employer from competitors and provide potential recruits with brand values.

According to Iglesias et al. (2020, 38), internalizing is making the brand alive through employees' daily actions. Proper training is the key for employees to fully understand the brand identity and to be able to take action in the process. Also, employees need to have similar values as the brand does. The goal is that the employees adopt the brand values and act according to them.

5.2 Employee brand equity

According to Smith et al. (2021, 834), employee brand equity (EBE) is a force that affects how employees behave in their working environment.

King et al. (2012, 273–274) define that EBE represents employees' current and future actions, and consists of brand consistent behavior, brand endorsement, and brand allegiance. Brand-consistent behavior means employee behavior that is not led by the organization but is aligned with its values. On the other hand, positive employee communication with other stakeholders about the brand is called brand endorsement. Brand allegiance talks about the employees' future plans and whether to stay with the company.

King et al. (2009, 122) also presents the Employer Based Brand Equity (EBBE) framework which is one of the brand equity components shown in Figure 9. It creates value through employee behavior, like positive employee word of mouth and satisfaction at work. This thesis concerns EBBE.

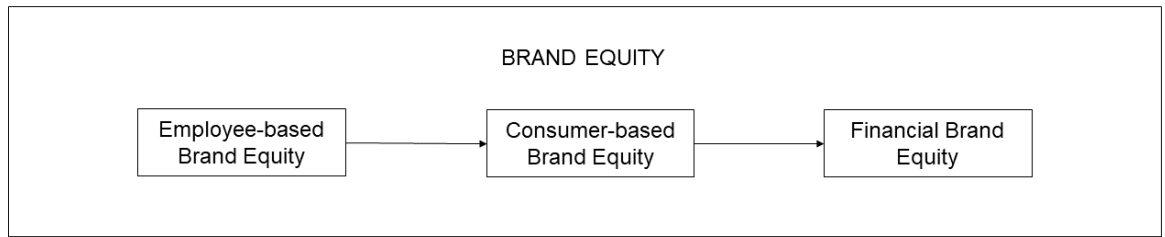


Figure 9. Components of brand equity. Adapted from King et al. (2009, 126).

There are three dimensions in employee-based brand equity. These are internal brand management, employee brand knowledge effects, and EBBE benefits. This framework is presented in Figure 10 by King et al. (2009, 136.)

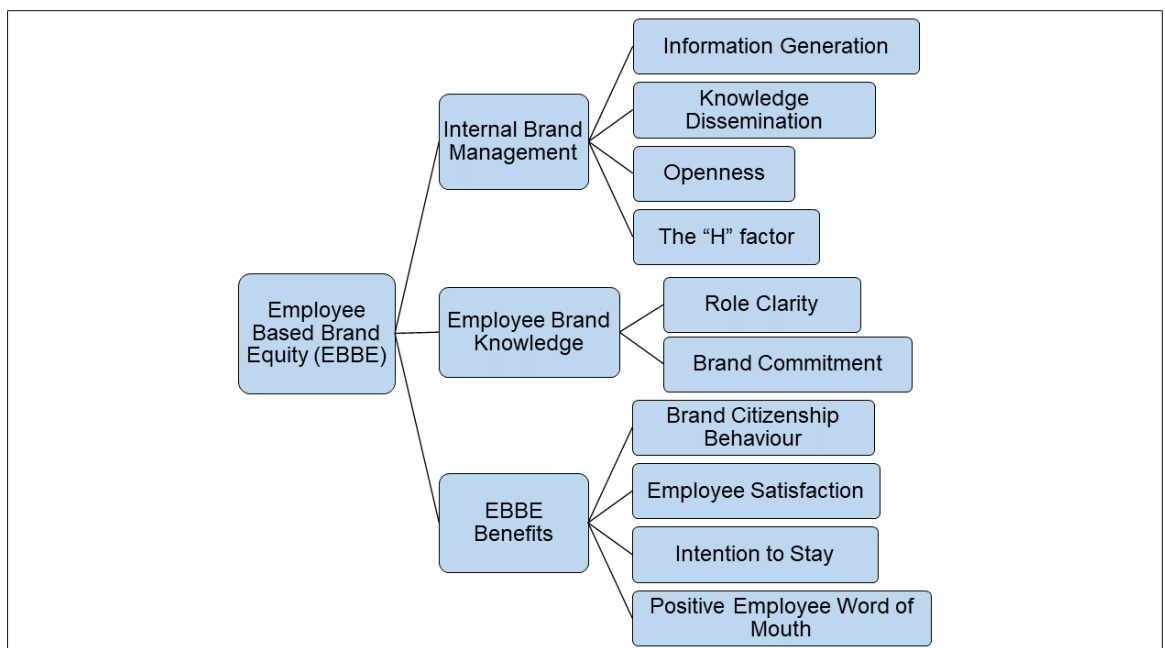


Figure 10. Dimensions of Employee-Based Brand Equity. Adapted from King et al. (2009, 136).

There are four critical components of internal brand management in organizations.

Information generation involves understanding employees' capabilities and needs to develop effective internal messages that can change employee behavior. **Knowledge dissemination** involves providing employees with information about their roles and responsibilities in delivering the brand promise. **Openness** refers to the willingness of employees to receive and interpret organizational information, which is influenced by factors such as management support and employee attitude. **The "H" factor** emphasizes the importance of considering human elements in internal brand building, such as treating employees with respect and creating a positive relationship between the employer and the employee. The overall goal is to ensure that employees have appropriate brand

knowledge to deliver the brand promise, which is key to realizing brand equity. (King et al. 2009, 131–136.)

Company X brand is strong internally. The challenge is to make it visible to the employees so that they know exactly what the brand is and what they are expected to do with it. The employee behavior can be directed to an even more efficient way of presenting the brand by introducing the brand book. With the information at hand, it is easier and more convenient for the employees to communicate the brand attributes confidently.

Two key factors contribute to EBBE: **role clarity** and **brand commitment**. Role clarity, which refers to providing clear guidance and direction to employees, can reduce role conflict and increase job satisfaction and organizational commitment. Brand commitment is the level of an employee's genuine desire to deliver the brand promise. The commitment that reflects an employee's devotion to the organization and its values is crucial for creating brand resonance and a sense of community, which can lead to measurable organizational benefits. (King et al. 2009, 137–138.)

The sense of community is strong within Company X. The employees' roles are clear, even though they are also expected to be self-oriented at their work. There is a lot of freedom but also a lot of responsibility in their work.

The benefits of employee-based brand equity are **brand citizenship behavior, employee satisfaction, intention to stay**, and **positive employee word of mouth**. The positive attitudes and behaviors of employees are in focus to enhance customer satisfaction and financial performance. (King et al. 2009, 139–140.)

The above-mentioned EBBE benefits are shown in Company X's daily life. Although the internal brand management is quite intuitive, the employees are highly committed to the company and talk about it very positively.

5.3 Brand internalization related findings

In this section, the employees' insights on themes engagement and internalizing the brand are presented. Also, the results and development suggestions are discussed. Table 8 demonstrates the relationship between categories, interview questions 11–13 presented in table 4, and the theories related to brand internalization and brand management. The yellow color on both tables marks the interview questions discussed.

Table 8. Relationship of category, interview questions, and theory.

Category	Interview questions	Related theory
Engagement	11	Brand internalization
Internalization	12–13	Internal brand management, Brand internalization

The interviewees discussed brand engagement, how the brand shows in their work, and how they could bring the brand forward in their daily work. Some interesting citations from the interviewees are also included.

Company X employees were asked **what the brand means to them**. All in all, the employees are very committed to the company for many reasons, but everyone shares the love for sport and the mutual feeling of togetherness. It feels good to be a part of the company.

Good leadership was one of the mentioned subjects. A good leader can make a huge difference and make people stay in the company by helping them to grow and letting them shine. Another important thing was the company story about what it does for people and how it has grown into a business. Also, seeing the actual benefits of Company X’s service, especially during the Covid-19 pandemic, and realizing the importance of one’s work, was an important subject.

Finally, meeting the employees’ values so that they can wholeheartedly stand behind the company was brought into the discussion. As was, the company’s way of working and deeply caring for the customer.

The employees communicated their engagement with Company X as follows:

“You can see how much our company is needed.”

“I believe that the story about what we are doing and what we have achieved as a company is very good. And it has grown into an actual business.”

“This has been a fun ride.”

The question about **Company X’s brand showing in their work** divided answers. Depending on an interviewee’s position, the Company X brand either shows a lot in their work or it shows very little. The brand shows the strongest in sales and customer service when connecting with the customers daily. On the other hand, it shows in product design

and marketing materials, as well. The product must have a brandlike look and feel, just like customer implementations do.

The employees explained how the Company X brand shows in their work as follows:

“I’m available for the customers pretty well and communicate with them a lot.”

“I often encourage the customers to take a look at our support pages to easily find solutions for their problems.”

“The brand shows in our daily work so that we can handle customers’ requests at a fast pace.”

The answers to the question about **bringing the brand into their daily work** were very similar. Most of the interviewees felt that they are already bringing the brand forward in their daily work, especially with customers. Some said that they could focus more on the brand, and they wished that it would be recognizable in all communication in the future.

This sentence summarizes the employees’ thoughts about bringing the brand into their work:

“I would like to make the brand more recognizable to the customers in all communication.”

5.4 Brand internalization related results and development suggestions

Company X employees have a very personal relationship with the company, and they are engaged in it. They brought up good leadership and innovativeness as topics that mean a lot to them. Also, it was important for the employees to be able to stand behind the company values.

The Company X brand shows in many aspects of work, for example product development and marketing materials. The most it shows in the everyday customer work in communication and assisting customers. The customers are highly satisfied with the service they get.

The Company X employees feel that they are already bringing the brand into their everyday work. The brand promise applies to all technical and other work. Although the employees think that they could still focus more on the brand and crystallize it so that it would be recognizable in all communication.

The brand looks good and works well. There was one important thing that was articulated. This was to make the brand clearer. The benefit from this would show to the customers in communication so that the brand would be more present. Also, there was a wish for some sort of brand guidelines. The brand book helps in this process.

6 Summary of findings and answering research questions

This chapter presents the findings of the study. The results of the employee interviews and the results of interviewing the company CEO are discussed. Also, the research questions are answered, and the findings are summarized. Additionally, strengths, opportunities and risks of brand internalization based on the results from the interviews are discussed, and finally, the brand book content is presented.

6.1 Findings and answers to the research questions

The main research question was: How to support brand internalization in Company X?

Company X employees are highly engaged in the company. This is due to good leadership and innovativeness. The employees feel like they can stand behind the company's values.

The brand internalization is on a good level at the Company X. The brand is present in everyday customer work, marketing, and product development. This has led to high customer satisfaction. One thing that the employees could focus more on, is crystallizing the brand's meaning so it would be easier to communicate.

As Saleem and Iglesias (2016, 50) affirmed in chapter 5, internal branding is about creating value between the employees and the organization's stakeholders. The Company X employees were asked about internalizing the brand inside the company and they expressed that it was on a good level. However, they did articulate one challenge that is discussed next.

The employees wish that they could have something to turn to when they feel like they are not quite sure how they should communicate the brand to the customers and other stakeholders. This issue is solved by internal brand management and the brand book that is composed based on the interviews.

SQ1: How to ensure the employees to have appropriate brand knowledge and an ability to communicate it?

As stated in chapter 5, it has been challenging to find ways to make the brand visible to Company X employees, and to make sure that they truly understand the meaning of the brand and what they are expected to do with it. According to King et al. (2009, 136) this is the key to execute brand equity.

SQ1: How to ensure the employees to have appropriate brand knowledge and an ability to communicate it? Studies the above-mentioned concerns. The Company X employees know the brand by heart. The important topic is to make sure that they are able to communicate it to the customers and other stakeholders.

Crystalizing the Company X's brand so that it is clear to everyone, is the answer to this question. This concern also emerged from the interviews with the employees. The brand book helps in the process, and the interviews give a lot of useful insight into how to make the brand clearer, but also to what already is clear.

SQ2: What is the current state of brand management in Company X?

This section answers SQ2: What is the current state of brand management in Company X? The company CEO was interviewed in October 2020 on the topic and the information was used as a base for analysis with some new information in 2022.

In 2020 Company X had a problem of not informing the customers and other stakeholders enough of what was going on in the company. In a rapidly growing company brand management did not really exist due to a lack of time and resources.

Now, brand communication is on another level. A lot of work has been done to make the brand more visible and recognizable. Social media presence has increased and is now at a good level. Stakeholders receive a newsletter regularly to get knowledge on the company's milestones.

SQ3: What is the current state of brand awareness among Company X employees?

Employees described Company X as playful, reliable, and professional. They see professionalism and security as the core of the brand. Playfulness shows in the company name and marketing communication.

Company X's purpose is clear. It is to help people take care of their daily business digitally without having to leave their homes. This was emphasized during the Covid-19 pandemic when the company was on the frontline helping its customer organizations to take the digital leap.

Quality, security, and caring for the customers are the most important values to Company X employees. These values are aligned with the employees' values very well and it produces excellent customer care and experience.

Work in Company X is flexible and there is very little control. Remote work is allowed, and the employees can adjust their work-life balance as they wish. Many small things make the atmosphere at Company X relaxed and positive.

According to Bergkvist and Taylor (2022, 295), brand awareness is the ability to recognize the brand. This leads to SQ3, what is the current state of brand awareness among Company X employees?

It seems that brand awareness is at a high level among Company X employees. They can describe the company in many ways, and they agree on the brand attributes that are related to the company. Also, the brand values match the employees' values, and the employees recognize the core values (quality, security, and caring for the customers) similarly.

6.2 The strengths and opportunities of brand internalization

Digitalization offers continuously expanding opportunities to sell digital SaaS solutions to a wider audience. Especially in the B2B markets and in the segment Company X offers its solution, lies a great potential because COVID-19 changed the function of the markets to the digital way. The whole Finland took a 10-year leap forward in digitalization in a very short period of time. Now, digital services are developing and those who already are in the business have an advantage of demonstrated functioning services that are familiar to the segment they are selling to.

The employees are highly aware of the Company X's brand qualities, and its values are aligned with ones of the employees'. One can say that they are living the brand as stated in the citation from Brand trust (brand-trust.de) in chapter 5.1. This creates a good basis for them to make the brand clear and visible in their daily customer work.

Company X's brand communication has developed lately a lot. It is heading into a right direction and a lot of work have been done with it. Increasing communication leads to increasing visibility that can produce new leads.

6.3 The risks of brand internalization

There are also some risks to consider that were articulated in the interviews. The risks are related to employees' behavior in brand communication and understanding the values and organizational culture. With good internal management the risks can be managed and reduced.

The interviewees brought up that there were situations in which they would want to check a font, brand color etc. but they were not easily available. This challenge has been acquired by having the brand information available in the form of brand book. Internal brand management is still needed to get the information to everyone and to make sure that the brand is made visible in everyday customer work. For example, by making sure that new employees find the material and know about it. The brand book is one tool for this, but it does not solve the challenge if it is not used.

Another risk that is related to the clarity of the brand can be insufficient communication. Brand values must always be clear, and they need to be communicated clearly and efficiently. If the message becomes unclear, it loses its effectiveness and might even harm the organization. Also, if the brand communication stopped for some reason, it would show in the visibility to the Company X's audience and reduce their interest in the company.

6.4 The brand book

The brand book was created on basis of the interview results. The final version of it is excluded from this thesis because it is meant for the Company X's internal use. However, a short version of it is found in the appendix 4.

The brand book has 10 pages including a cover page and a table of contents that explains the use of the brand book and gives information on the content. Also, it is written using the Company X font and brand colors, and the company mascot is hiding on the pages behind a bubble that serves as base to highlight the text from the background. Additionally, the text is written using the tone of voice of the Company X.

The content includes brand description, values, culture, tone of voice, information on colors and typography, logos the company use, and a selection of images that are used in Company X's marketing and communication.

The brand description describes the Company X brand the way the interviewed employees see it. Company X' brand is playful but reliable and professional. Professionalism and security are at the core of the brand. As a person it would be customer-centric reliable professional who provides a secure and sustainable solution to the customer. Company X's purpose is to help people to take care of their daily business digitally without having to leave their homes.

Company X's values are quality, security and caring for the customers. These are the qualities that are the most important to the company employees. The company values align with the employees' values well and creates a good, welcoming atmosphere inside the company.

Work at Company X is self-administrative, agile, and fits everyone's situation. Everyone can have an impact on their work but there is also the responsibility of one's work. Co-operation at the company is agile, brainstorming and problem solving. Employees are the heart of the company. These are the building blocks of the organizational culture.

Company X's tone of voice is correct and reliable, but it is also friendly, open, and easily approachable. This is a topic the employees agree on, and their answers were the most similar in this one.

Typography and colors present the font styles and brand colors that Company X uses in its daily business. Logos are presented in the document to easily show the use of different logo variations. And finally, the imagery shows the use of images in company X marketing and communication. These are excluded from appendix 4 to protect the company's anonymity.

7 Discussion

This chapter discusses the feedback from the commissioning company; what the management thought about the results and what an employee said about the interviews. Next, reliability, validity and ethical issues are discussed. Then the author reflects on her learning process, and finally, suggestions for further development are presented.

7.1 Feedback from the commissioning company

Company X gave positive feedback on the research results. They saw value especially in the part of the work that made the company's culture and values visible. The information gained from this study will be used in Company X's brand work. It offers a foundation that can be used to build the company's brand. Below is the statement that Company X manager gave on the results:

"The brand work has helped a lot in mapping the company's culture and values. In the long run, this exercise serves as support material and foundation to the brand designing work."

Also, the employees felt that the interviews were important to them. Thinking about the brand made some of them even a little emotional. One employee gave the following feedback during the interview.

"It is nice to think about the brand and what it means to me."

7.2 Reliability, validity, and ethical issues

According to Puusa and Juuti (2020, 167), three elements within qualitative research need to be taken into consideration: reliability, validity, and ethical issues. Reliability shows the researcher's competence, that they know how to choose the right methods and approach for the research questions. They also need to be able to describe the research so that the reader can follow it without any difficulties.

The reliability of this study is met as the research process is described accurately and understandably. The chosen method and the reason the study is conducted as a case study are discussed. Additionally, the other option for conducting the study is presented. Then, the collecting and analyzing the data is explained. Also, the theoretical framework is connected with the data analysis and results to present the connection between them. To highlight this, the so-called zipper model is used to write the thesis because it presents the theoretical framework and the study together in the same chapter. This way it is easier to see the connections and reasoning for the author's choices.

Validity relates to how colleagues, research subjects, and other audiences will accept the results and rely on that the research has been conducted correctly. Therefore, the researcher needs to write their report convincingly and make sure it is clear and understandable even if the subject is unfamiliar to the reader. (Puusa and Juuti 2020, 167.)

The chosen methods and execution of the interviews were aligned with the theoretical framework and fit inside the topic. The interviews were carefully planned and produced answers to the questions as expected. The research data is presented consistently which strengthens the validity. Reading the instructions to every interviewee and planning the questions the way anyone could understand them, ensured that everyone had the same knowledge and was equal.

Ethicalness means that the researcher has followed ethical principles during the whole research. Also, it should not cause any harm to the research subjects or anyone else. The research and analysis methods should be executed in a manner that could be used as a guideline for any research. (Puusa and Juuti 2020, 167.)

The author made sure that the interviewees know their rights and how the material is handled after the thesis is published. She used an information document to inform them. Since the interviews were recorded, a permission to do so was asked and deleting the recordings was communicated. Also, employees as in different positions as possible were interviewed so that the insights from them would be as diverse as possible.

7.3 Reflection on learning

By conducting this study, I have learned a lot about brand building, organizational culture, and internal branding. I have familiarized myself with theories on the brand, brand building, brand identity, brand values, internal branding, organizational culture, purpose, and employee brand equity. My skills in planning and conducting an interview have increased. Also, my knowledge of branding and organizational culture has grown significantly.

Conducting this thesis has given me a lot of knowledge and new skills in the brand management field, especially from the employee point of view. The original idea of the thesis was quite different from the outcome. This resulted from an unexpected development within the commissioning company. As a result, I had to change the scope and rearrange the thesis. Also, the interviews resulted in another change when organizational culture stood out from the results. I decided to include it in my thesis because it had a significant meaning to the employees.

The unexpected difficulties affected my thesis project, of course. Also, other issues were going on at the same time. I handled them as well as I could in that situation. What I would change in the thesis process is to read the literature more widely before deciding on the thesis topic. Of course, it was very clear in my mind, so it was easy to start with it. However, limiting the topic would have been easier if I had read on the topic more widely in the beginning. I also had to reschedule a lot due to the unexpected events within the commissioning company and it made my work harder. There were challenges, but the most challenging part was writing the report in the traditional thesis manner since it is very different from the way I normally write.

During the thesis process, it was interesting to learn about the different points of view that different researchers had on the same topic. Also, it was interesting to learn from different theories and guidelines for research and to decide which one would serve my study the best. By conducting this thesis, I have contributed to the research on internal branding and especially employee brand. The employee side of the brand is a topic that should be researched more. Branding and brand management continue to be popular topics in the business world because, in the end, the brand is what differentiates a product or service from others.

The deliverables of this thesis can be used in the ongoing processes within Company X and to integrate employees to the company in the future. The wider benefit of this thesis is to show how internal brands can be researched.

7.4 Suggestions for further development

There were a lot of interesting topics to study in Company X that I could have chosen as the topic of my thesis. Since I was interested in internal branding, I had to exclude many interesting topics to be researched later. Customer journey and customer experience are among them since the point of view is on the customer's side.

Customer journey is a great tool when a company wants to know more about their potential customers and to analyze the touch points and customer behavior. A customer journey map helps both sales and marketing to target the ideal customer and to better match the offering to their needs.

Customer experience is related to the customer journey. It is crucial to know how customers experience the use of a product or service to know what they appreciate and expect. Now that the brand values are in place, they should be communicated to the customers to maintain a good customer experience and satisfaction. These could be measured as part of a thesis concerning this topic.

Finally, brand strategy is an interesting topic that should also be studied more. Brand strategy is conducted from a company's business strategy, and it would serve as a thesis topic on its own.

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Attachments

Appendix 1. Questions for the CEO's interview

Nykytila (missä ollaan nyt)

1. Jos puhutaan Yritys X:n nykytilasta, niin millaisena näkisit sen nyt?
2. Mitkä ovat Yritys X:n kohdeyleisöt?
3. Onko muita tärkeitä sidosryhmiä?
4. Miten Yritys X:stä viestitään tällä hetkellä kohderyhmille? Millaisia viestejä?
5. Kuinka hyvin nämä kohderyhmät tavoitetaan tällä hetkellä?
6. Kuinka hyvin kohderyhmät tuntevat Yritys X:n?
7. Miten kohdeyleisöt saavat tietoa Yritys X:stä?
8. Mikä on Yritys X:n yleinen tunnettuus?
9. Mitä kanavia Yritys X:llä on käytössä ja miten niitä käytetään?
10. Kuinka paljon viestintää näissä kanavissa on?
11. Ovatko nyt käytössä olevat kanavat riittävät?

Tavoitetila (minne halutaan päästä)

12. Millainen sitten olisi se tavoite, mitä brändiviestinnällä haluttaisiin saavuttaa?
13. Millaisia kasvutavoitteita näkisit tulevaisuudessa?
14. Miten uusia asiakkaita voitaisiin tavoitella?
15. Millaista viestintää haluaisit kohdistaa kohdeyleisöihin tulevaisuudessa?
16. Kenen muun pitäisi tietää Yritys X:stä kuin kohdeyleisön?
17. Millaisia tavoitteita Yritys X:llä on ulkomailla?
18. Pitäisikö olla käytössä jotain muita kanavia? Mitä?

Appendix 2. Questions for the employees' interview

Kiitos, että osallistut tähän haastatteluun. Tarkoituksena on selvittää sinun ajatuksiasi Yritys X:n brändistä. Lisäksi haastattelujen pohjalta luodaan brändikirja.

Vääriä vastauksia ei ole ja kaikkea sanomaasi käsitellään luottamuksellisesti. Pyydän, että vastaat esittämiini kysymyksiin juuri siten kuin asiasta ajattelet.

Kysymyksiä on 13 ja käymme ne läpi yksi kerrallaan. Onko sinulla tässä vaiheessa kysyttävää?

Hyvä, laitan nyt nauhoituksen päälle, niin voimme aloittaa.

Brand understanding

1. Mitä sana brändi tarkoittaa sinulle? (toisille logo, toisille tunne tai kokemus)
2. Miten kuvailisit Yritys X:n brändiä? (millainen, adjektiiveja)

Purpose

3. Miksi Yritys X on olemassa? Eli mitä tarkoitusta se palvelee?

Vision

4. Millaiseksi kuvittelisit Yritys X:n tulevaisuuden?

Values

5. Mikä Yritys X:ssä on tärkeää sinulle? (voit vastata, miten itse asian näet)

Culture

6. Millaisia työskentelytapoja Yritys X:ssä on? Eli miten ihmiset tekevät työtä (esim. itseohjautuvaa)
7. Miten kuvailisit yrityslaisten yhteistyötä? (millaista, adjektiiveja)

Personality

8. Jos Yritys X olisi henkilö, millainen hän olisi?

Tone of Voice

9. Millainen on Yritys X:n äänensävy? Eli se, miten kommunikoimme asiakkaiden ja muiden sidosryhmien kanssa.
10. Millainen Yritys X:n äänensävyn pitäisi olla sinun mielestäsi?

Engagement

11. Mitä Yritys X:n brändi merkitsee sinulle?

RQ3 How to internalize the brand in everyday work?

12. Miten Yritys X:n brändi näkyy työssäsi?
13. Miten voisit tuoda brändiä esille päivittäisessä työssäsi?

Tässä olivat kysymykset. Tuleeko sinulle mieleen vielä jotain, mitä haluaisit sanoa?
Kiitos haastattelusta!

Appendix 3. Research information letter in Finnish

TIEDOTE TUTKIMUKSESTA

Sisäisen brändin rakentaminen asiakaslähtöisen markkinoinnin keinona (Internal branding as a means of customer centric marketing communication).

Pyyntö osallistua tutkimukseen

Teitä on pyydetty mukaan tutkimukseen, jossa tutkitaan sisäisen brändin rakentamista asiakaslähtöisen markkinoinnin keinona. Tutkimuksessa tutkitaan osallistujien näkemyksiä Yritys X:n brändistä nyt ja tulevaisuudessa. Vastauksia käytetään yhtenäisen kuvan muodostamiseen Yritys X:n brändistä. Lisäksi vastausten perusteella muodostetaan brändikäsikirja, jota voidaan hyödyntää organisaation sisällä erilaisiin tarkoituksiin, kuten myynnin ja markkinoinnin tukena.

Tämä tiedote kuvaa tutkimusta ja teidän osuuttanne siinä. Perehdyttyänne tähän tiedotteeseen teillä on mahdollisuus vielä esittää kysymyksiä tutkimuksesta.

Vapaaehtoisuus

Tutkimukseen osallistuminen on täysin vapaaehtoista. Voitte myös keskeyttää tutkimuksen koska tahansa syytä ilmoittamatta. Mikäli peruutatte suostumuksenne aineistonkeruun aikana, keskeytykseen tai peruutukseen mennessä kertyneiden teitä koskevan aineiston täydellistä poistamista aineistokokonaisuudesta ei voida taata.

Tutkimuksen tarkoitus

Tämän tutkimuksen tarkoituksena on luoda ja kehittää sisäistä ymmärrystä Yritys X:n brändistä. Tämä on tärkeää, koska työntekijät toimivat rajapintana asiakkaiden ja potentiaalisten asiakkaiden sekä yrityksen välillä. Työntekijät ovat tärkeässä roolissa kommunikoidessaan brändin arvoja sidosryhmille.

Tutkimuksen toteuttaja

Tutkimus tehdään Yritys X:lle. Sen toteuttaa Saara Sevon, joka toimii myös Master-opinnäytetyön tutkijana.

Tutkimusmenetelmät ja toimenpiteet

Tutkimus on luonteeltaan laadullinen ja siinä hyödynnetään narratiivista analyysia. Aineisto koostuu laadullisen haastattelun aineistosta.

Tässä tutkimuksessa kerättävät henkilötiedot ovat tutkittavan nimi ja sähköpostiosoite.

Haastattelut tallennetaan aineiston käsittelyn ajaksi.

Haastattelut ovat luottamuksellisia ja anonyymeja eikä niitä voida yhdistää henkilöön.
Kustannukset ja niiden korvaaminen

Tutkimukseen osallistuminen ei maksa teille mitään. Osallistumisesta ei myöskään makseta erillistä korvausta.

Tutkimustuloksista tiedottaminen

Tutkimus on osa Master-opinnäytetyötä, joka tehdään Haaga-Helia Ammattikorkeakoulun Liiketoiminnan uudistamisen ja johtamisen -koulutusohjelmassa. Lopulliset tulokset julkaistaan Theseus -tietokannassa. Työstä mahdollisesti myös kirjoitetaan blogeja tai artikkeleita Haaga-Helian verkkojulkaisuissa.

Tutkimuksen päättyminen

Myös tutkimuksen suorittaja voi keskeyttää tutkimuksen vakavan sairauden tai muun yllättävän esteen takia, joka estää tutkimuksen tekemisen.

Tutkimuksessa käytettyjen nauhoitusten ja henkilötietojen poisto

Tallenteet ja henkilötiedot hävitetään, kun opinnäytetyö on julkaistu.

Lisätiedot

Pyydän teitä tarvittaessa esittämään tutkimukseen liittyviä kysymyksiä tutkijalle/tutkimuksesta vastaavalle henkilölle.

Tutkijoiden yhteystiedot

Tutkija / opinnäytetyön tekijä

Nimi: Saara Sevon

Puh.

Sähköposti:

Tutkimuksesta vastaa / opinnäytetyön ohjaaja

Titteli: VTM, Yliopistonlehtori

Nimi: Mirka Sunimento

Korkeakoulu / yksikkö: Haaga-Helia Ammattikorkeakoulu

Sähköposti:

Kiitos osallistumisestanne!

Saara Sevon

Appendix 4. Brand book

Brand description

The Company x's brand is playful but reliable and professional at the same time. It is well known among a niche segment but otherwise, it is not very well known on the markets. Professionalism and security are at the core of the brand. If Company X was a person, it would be a customer-centric reliable professional who provides a secure and sustainable solution to the customer.

Company X's purpose is to help people to take care of their daily business digitally without having to leave their homes.

Values

There are certain qualities in the Company X brand that are the most important to the employees. These values are quality, security, and caring for the customers. The company values align with the employee values well and that creates a good, welcoming atmosphere inside the company. It also shows to the customers and other stakeholders.

- Quality
- Security
- Caring for the customers

Culture

Work at Company X is self-administrative, agile, and fits everyone's situation. Everyone can have an impact on their work. On the other hand, everyone is responsible for their work, as well.

The organization model is flat, and the hierarchy is at a minimum. Communication works well via short daily meetings where everyone can update their current doings and mingle. Many are working remotely, so it is important to meet the team regularly.

The work itself is very independent, but there is a lot of cooperation among the Company X employees. The working atmosphere is good and safe at Company X. Everyone can express themselves freely and ask for help when needed. Co-operation at Company X is agile, brainstorming, and problem-solving.

- Work is self-administrative, agile and fits everyone's situation
- You can influence your work
- You are responsible for your work
- Co-operation is agile, brainstorming and problem solving
- Employees are the heart of the company

TOV (Tone of Voice)

Company X's tone of voice is correct and reliable, but it is also friendly, open, and easily approachable.

- correct and reliable
- open
- friendly
- easily approachable