



COLLABORATIVE BRANDING



Harriet Fagerholm



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Contents

Acknowledgements.....	5
Abstract	7
1 Introduction.....	9
1.1 The Multi-Client Project	10
1.2 Dimensions in the Multi-Client learning process	13
1.3 Research problem	14
1.4 Research questions	16
2 Methods.....	18
2.1 Assumptions.....	18
2.2 Action research and data collection	18
2.3 Problem-based learning (PBL) in the Multi-Client process	21
2.4 Participatory observation and content analysis	24
2.5 The role of the researcher	25
3 Theory.....	28
3.1 Purpose of branding	28
3.2 From corporate branding to collaborative branding.....	31
3.3 Phases and risks in internal branding.....	35
4 Findings: internal branding processes in MCP companies and learning process in MCP workshops.....	43
4.1 Company C.....	43
4.1.1 Background of internal branding efforts and internal branding problem	43
4.1.2 MCP workshop on branding and strategy	46
4.2 Company A	54
4.2.1 Background of internal branding efforts and the internal branding problem	55
4.2.2 MCP workshop on branding and collaboration	58
4.3 Company B.....	68
4.3.1 Background of internal branding efforts and internal branding problem	68
4.3.2 MCP workshop on Branding and Leadership.....	71
4.4 Company D	78
4.4.1 Background of the internal branding efforts and the internal branding problem	78
4.4.2 MCP workshop on Branding and Leadership.....	80

5 Discussion	86
5.1 Analysis of the internal branding challenges in MCP companies	86
5.1.1 Company C	86
5.1.2 Company A	90
5.1.3 Company B.....	92
5.1.4 Company D	97
5.2 Creating the big picture in internal branding – emerging categories, themes and dimensions from the Multi-Client research process	99
5.2.1 The nature of the brand.....	101
5.2.2 The creation of the brand	106
5.2.3 The acting on the brand	107
5.3 Conclusions	110
5.3.1 What are the different phases in internal branding?.....	110
5.3.2 What conditions and risks are affecting collaborative branding?.....	116
5.3.3 How can collaborative learning (PBL) support internal branding?	118
5.4 Reviewing the research process	122
5.4.1 Further research opportunities	126
Bibliography	128
Figure 1. Multi-Client project orientation chart	12
Figure 2. Research dimensions in the Multi-Client project	14
Figure 3. The data collection process in each company	19
Figure 4. Key features of participatory action research	24
Figure 5. Collaborative branding (adapted from Jakubik 2006)	34
Figure 6. Internal branding in a collaborative branding context	42
Figure 7. Internal branding challenges in company C	89
Figure 8. Internal branding challenges in company A	92
Figure 9. Internal branding challenges in company B.....	96
Figure 10. Internal branding challenges in company D	99
Figure 11. Emerging categories, themes and dimensions.....	100
Figure 12. Phases in collaborative branding	116
Figure 13. Internal branding process for collaborative branding	121

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Helsinki, 27 April 2007

Harriet Fagerholm

Abstract

■ The objective of the study was to create a learning model, through which the corporate brand is internalized and developed in the organization. The learning model aims at actively engaging the employees in the brand. The intention of the study was to find out how collaborative learning (PBL) can support internal branding. Another intention was to describe the conditions affecting internal branding as well as the knowledge creation needed in the different phases of internal branding.

The theoretical framework was based on literature about corporate branding (Schultz & Ind) and organizational development (Senge). The conceptual framework describes the co-creation of the brand in the network society, where the brand context consists of multiple stakeholders and where the brand purpose and vision guides the brand. The brand content and brand process are aiming at creating a sustainable, profitable brand. The employees are active constructors of the brand reality and performance in the organization.

The study was carried out in a learning community of managers from four large Finnish companies, experts, students and learning process facilitators. The analytical approach was qualitative and the research strategy was based on action-research methodology.

Data was collected by a multi-methodological approach through participant and structured observations, documentation of learning processes from PBL-sessions and joint workshops, student research theses and reflections. Action research strategy was chosen because collaborative learning by nature requires a participatory way of working. The mental processes of knowledge creation can best be understood from inside, with a direct involvement of the researchers. This is not research on how to communicate the brand internally it is about how to create the brand together with collaborative learning.

The findings showed that there is possibility for collaborative learning to support internal branding, but there are conditions affecting the success of it. The lack of support from corporate strategy and top management, a competitive company structure and a lack of understanding of the underlying assumptions of the brand prevent collaboration in internal branding. The creation of a shared meaning of the brand concept

appeared to be important. The results also indicate a lack of connection between the concepts of leadership and branding.

In conclusion, there might be possibilities for collaborative branding in organizations. In order to succeed, the underlying assumptions about knowledge creation and collaboration need to be revised. The new active role of employees and other stakeholders in branding needs new ways of working together. Brand development needs informal meetings, learning of new mental models, ongoing discussions about the brand purpose, brand vision and performance throughout the organization. The collaboration between functions (HR, marketing, sales and communications) is especially important.

1

Introduction

■ This research paper describes the knowledge creation process in the Multi-Client project, which enabled the participants to involve themselves in collaborative learning processes to find ways for improving internal branding. The new mental models and tools regarding internal branding, strategy implementation and learning will hopefully lead to a higher understanding and commitment of the employees in the participating organisations. The ultimate aim from the company's perspective is a start towards creating a shared vision, mission, values, strategy and corporate brand.

Branding has been a contemporary topic for many years (Ind 2003, Schultz & Hatch 2003a, Balmer & Greyser 2003) and companies have started to realize the potential of a strong brand. Nonetheless, branding is mainly seen as a communicative tool, where the focus is on creating favorable images among customers. There is, however, a paradigm shift taking place in how the brand is perceived. Researchers claim that branding should be seen as an overall leadership philosophy in the company (Le Pla, Davis & Parker 2003), where the activities throughout the company are aligned according to the brand identity. This requires a new way of seeing the role of leadership in brand building.

The brand also used to be seen as a concept, often created with outside branding professionals, which was presented in brand manuals and other documents. If the brand is merely seen as a concept to be communicated among different stakeholders both internally and externally, the collaboration around the brand will not be very deep. I wanted to study the brand as created in an ongoing process, where dialogue and meaning are leading the brand towards becoming a strong, unifying force in the organisation. Is there a possibility for **collaborative branding** in organizations?

The shift from concept to process is not only taking place in branding, the same change is taking place in strategy creation. The focus used to be on the strategic plan, but today strategy work is seen as a process, where fast reactions to environmental changes are needed. If the brand is seen as a unifying, overall leadership philosophy, it will have an impact

on the strategy as well. Therefore, one research aspect in the Multi-Client project was to examine the role of the brand in relation to strategy.

In addition to the strategic perspective, the research group also considered the knowledge management aspect to be important. The brand can be seen as a unique knowledge asset in the company, which hardly can be copied by competitors. In the same way as in branding and strategy, there is a paradigm shift taking place in the field of knowledge management. Assets are now considered as processes, where new knowledge is constantly created. Instead of managing existing knowledge assets, companies should make sure that new knowledge is created. One research focus in the Multi-Client project was to examine the role and possibilities of knowledge creation among branding professionals from different companies.

The spark to initiate the research project came from the will to get a practical approach to align the organization around the brand. In many sources there are statements about creating a brand-driven organization, but very few authors present concrete ways of how to do it in practice. Every organization has its unique way of operating, and the brand alignment demands consideration of this aspect, too. This research paper examines branding from many perspectives and the outcome will hopefully create a new understanding of how the branding process needs to be perceived internally.

Following this introduction, I present the background and dimensions of the Multi-Client Project, the research problem and questions. Chapter two explains the research strategy and the problem-based learning approach. Chapter three provides a brief discussion on the theoretical aspects in corporate and internal branding. In chapter four, I describe and analyze the internal branding and the learning processes in the four participating companies. In chapter five, I create an overall picture of the emerging themes and dimensions in internal branding. Chapter six discusses the answers to the research questions, and I review the research process and suggest further opportunities to continue research in this field.

1.1 The Multi-Client Project

The Multi-Client Project took place in a learning community consisting of branding professionals from four well-known Finnish companies, an expert company in leadership and strategy, a branding consultant, student researchers and two teacher researchers from Helia University of Applied Sciences. The learning process took place in discussions in the companies,

in three full-day workshops arranged in Helia, and research executed by students in each case company (see figure 1). During the workshops, the different companies' problems related to internal branding were described and analysed by the workshop participants. The companies were in different phases of their internal branding processes and the relevant concepts regarding corporate strategy, corporate branding and employee brand involvement were studied in different company contexts.

The first workshop focused on the role of corporate strategy in branding. The challenge of finding a common language when using the concepts related to corporate strategy and the corporate brand was addressed. Another aspect in implementing the strategy and the corporate brand is the leadership needed when bringing the strategy alive in the organization. The co-operation between key managers such as the managing directors, HR-managers, brand managers and marketing and communication managers were emphasized in the process.

The second workshop discussed the need for collaboration in internal branding. Important aspects were concrete ways of sharing and creating understanding of the corporate vision, mission, values and strategies among the employees. The brand heritage was also an important topic.

The third workshop focused on the leadership needed in branding. The connection between the concepts of leadership and branding is not yet complete, but fruitful discussion took place to find ways of leading the brand through examples. The involvement of the employees in branding was considered to affect the success of the branding process. The shift in brand context (B-to-C brand aiming at the B-to-B market and vice versa) was another topic for elaboration.

Throughout the process, a learning process/approach was created with the help of the problem-based learning framework and participatory inquiry. The data gathered during the workshops and in the opening discussions arranged in the companies were analyzed between each workshop. Students gathered data for their theses and projects in the companies through interviews and questionnaires between the workshops, and the data was presented during the workshops as learning triggers for the discussions. The whole process is described in figure 1.

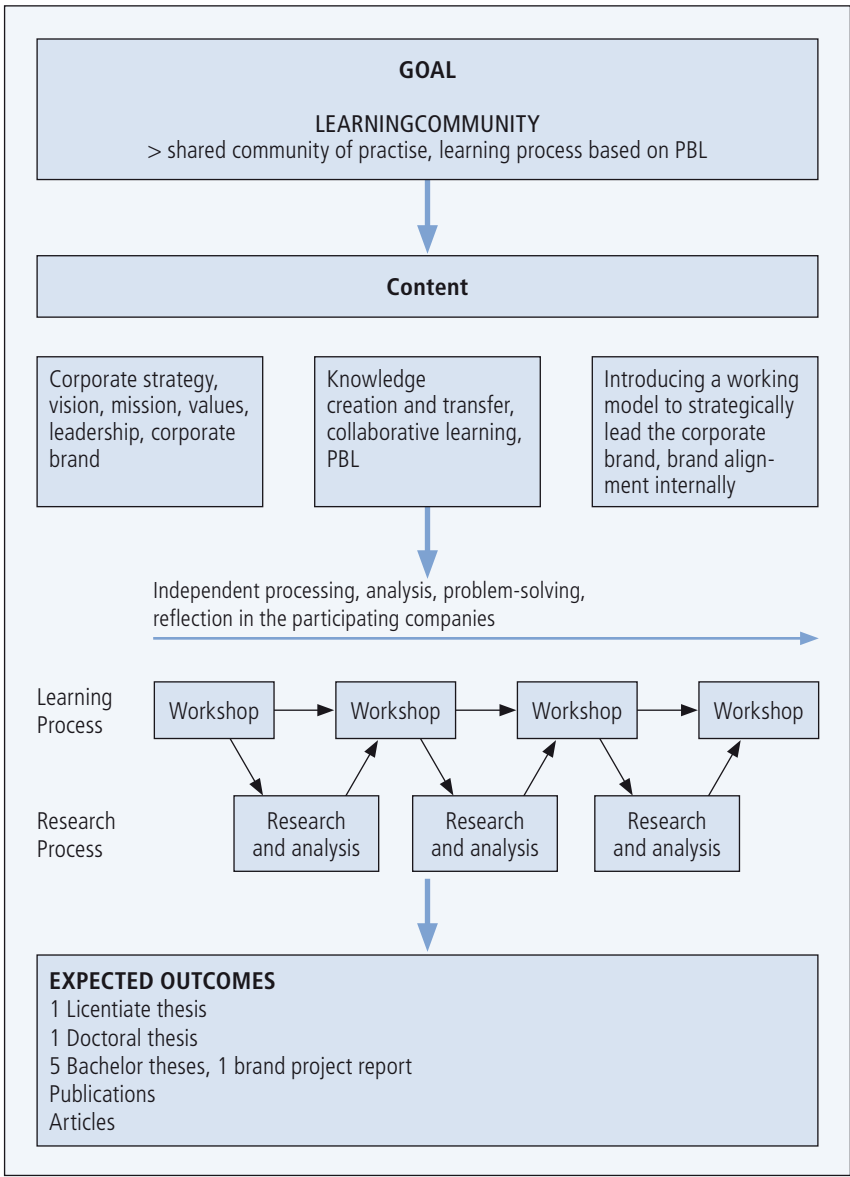


Figure 1. Multi-Client project orientation chart.

I have been the project manager for the PBL R&D development project in Helia during the years 2000-2004 and my interest in taking the PBL knowledge into new contexts has initiated the Multi-Client research project. For further information on how PBL is used in the LiiBBA-programme see (Fagerholm & Helelä 2003).

The PBL philosophy in learning provides a tool for creating new knowledge. In this project, the PBL model was tested in a company

environment in order to engage the employees in a knowledge creation process regarding strategy and corporate branding.

Why is then the corporate brand and internal branding an interesting and relevant area for study? The role of the corporate brand is becoming increasingly important. Companies are organizing their product and unit brands under one corporate brand. The reasons for this are increasing difficulty in differentiating the products and the fragmentation of customer segments in fast-changing markets. Differentiation nowadays requires positioning the whole organization, instead of products. Accordingly, the values and emotions symbolized by the organization become key elements for differentiation strategies. The role of a strategic vision in management is growing and it integrates the brand building in the organization (Schultz & Hatch 2003b, 1040-1041).

Because of the growing role of the corporate brand, its connection to the business strategy becomes clearer. The brand becomes a strategic issue, not only a communicative tool. Hereby the link between strategy, brand and knowledge creation becomes obvious. This study attempts to address these issues from the perspectives of branding and knowledge creation.

1.2 Dimensions in the Multi-Client learning process

The Multi-client project had three dimensions: content, process and context. The contents are the three themes of the project: Internal Branding, Leadership and Knowledge Creation. This research paper focuses only on the content of internal branding and the process of collaborative learning (PBL) (see figure 2). One of the main questions before initiating the Multi-Client project was the role of the process in motivating the employees to live the brand. The question of how internal branding should be done in a modern organization guided the creation of the Multi-Client process. Therefore, internal branding cannot be studied only from a narrow content point of view. Internal branding needs to be redefined by adding the principles of process thinking shown in figure 2. The role of leadership in creating that kind of process is crucial. The leadership perspective is researched by the CLC, Center for Leading Competence Oy.

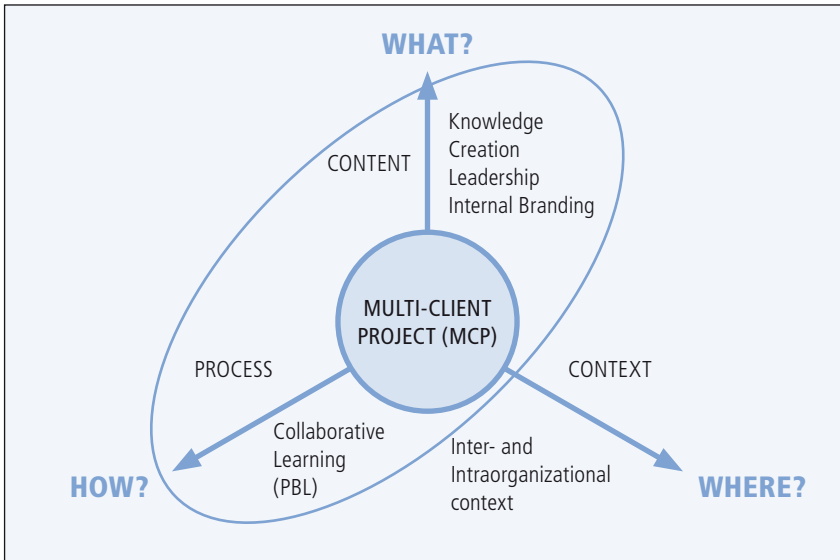


Figure 2. Research dimensions in the Multi-Client project.

1.3 Research problem

The role of brands has been emphasized during the last ten years, but the focus has mainly been put on the communicative side of the brand and the target groups have been customers and external stakeholders. The marketing and communication function have been responsible for the brand. It has mainly been a top-down issue manifested by instructions and definitions of the brand, which have been communicated to the employees. Employees have been viewed as one stakeholder among others to whom the brand needed to be communicated. As Nicholas Ind (2003, 51) and Majken Schultz (2003, 1043) both state, the importance of the employees to be engaged in the overall purpose of the organization has been neglected. Executives still see the creation of intellectual capital as their responsibility, the employees are only there to implement the wisdom of the executives. The thinking is separated from the doing and this way of working survives, because it is familiar and it is seen to save costs due to efficiency.

Therefore, this study looks at the knowledge creation needed inside the organization to engage the employees both in defining and implementing the brand. The marketing and external communication aspect of the brand is left outside the scope of this research.

If we start to look at internal branding as a continuous process instead of a communication issue directed to the employees, there are new challenges to the leadership needed in developing the corporate brand. The leadership aspect is more deeply studied in a separate part of the Multi-Client research, done by the CLC (Center for Leading Competence Oy).

This part will look at internal branding from a knowledge creation point of view. There is a need to find a tool for the process of giving the brand a meaning internally and to integrate the customer and marketing point of view to the internal branding process. One of the big challenges in internal branding is seen to be the true understanding of what motivates the employees to make a brand buy-in, on both an intellectual level and emotional level (Thomson, de Chernatony, Arganbright & Khan 1999, 823). The authors argue that it is not enough for the employees to make an intellectual buy-in of the brand, that is, receiving knowledge of processes, people, know-how, but that the emotional buy-in is more important, which means that the feelings of the employees towards the brand make them act on the knowledge about the organization and the business goals. If the feelings towards the brand are negative, it will surely have an impact on the actions of the employees. It will also be noticed by customers.

I propose a question in this research; by engaging the employees in the brand at an early stage, would it affect the emotional buy-in of the brand in a positive way? The understanding of the brand is the first step towards living the brand, but brand commitment is the key to better brand and business performance.

The learning aspect of internal branding has not been actively addressed in literature. The case companies participating in the MCP project were mostly B-B companies, where the understanding of the brand is mostly associated with the consumer markets. Engineer-led organizations often don't necessarily have the right understanding of the brand. In an article about digital brands, Kamal Ghose (2002, 99) points out the importance of the learning organization to the success of internal branding. He also argues that branding is not only a top-level management issue, but that the organizations which can benefit from the commitment of the employees and their capacity to learn at all levels of the organization will be the ones excelling in the future. The speed of learning is also of outmost importance.

There seem to be a clear connection between internal branding and knowledge creation. The aim of this research is **to create a learning model, through which the corporate brand is internalized and developed in the organization. The learning model aims at actively engaging the**

employees in the brand. The aim for the organization is to increase commitment from employees, customers and other stakeholders to the brand.

1.4 Research questions

As earlier stated, in this part of the research I study the content of internal branding in relation to learning and collaboration throughout the organization. The phenomenon will be studied in the context of the four companies participating in the learning community. The companies operate in different types of businesses and they are in different phases of their internal branding processes. This provides the research an interesting look at the phenomenon. By adding the learning aspect to internal branding, we can add a new dimension to the topic. The main research question looks as follows:

- ◇ How can collaborative learning (PBL) support internal branding?

The following sub questions help to identify the relevant issues affecting the success of internal branding:

- ◇ What conditions affect internal branding?
- ◇ What phases are there in internal branding and what kind of knowledge creation is needed in each phase?

During the Multi-Client project I collected qualitative data through participative observations, memos and theses, and various reflections to find out the different phases of internal branding and the conditions that affect the success of the branding work. The collaborative learning model (PBL) was used in each company to get a hands-on testing experience. The research approach was inductive, since I didn't have any theory-based hypotheses to be proved. The phenomenon was studied with versatile methods and the findings can possibly be used to further deepen the understanding of internal branding. The versatility of the research group (senior lecturers, consultants, students and practitioners) also provide a broad input to the studying of the subject. The learning community context and the business context provided both a useful, but slightly different input to the knowledge creation process.

The questions I wanted to find answers to in the Multi-Client project related to the content of internal branding are: How can we find a common language to discuss branding in a engineer-dominated B-B environment,

where branding usually is not a daily issue? What affects the success of internal branding? How should it be linked to strategy? What kind of leadership does successful branding need? What is the role of learning in creating a brand-driven organization? What kind of collaboration is needed?

Based on analysis of the workshop processes, PBL-sessions in the companies, research projects by students the frameworks will be created for understanding what conditions need to be considered, before embarking on internal branding processes.

The expected contributions of the research on internal branding will be in a) seeing the brand as an integrating force in the company and b) creating a learning model which can be used to improve brand commitment among the employees.

2

Methods

2.1 Assumptions

■ The basic ontological and epistemological assumptions for the research are explained in detail in Maria Jakubik's (Jakubik 2006, 17-23) part concerning knowledge creation. Since the content studied in this part of the research is a separate entity that is part of the bigger knowledge creation study conducted in the Multi-Client project, the same assumptions will be valid. As is summed up in Jakubik's work, the ontological assumption is a "becoming ontology" in which the processual view of the organization is emphasized. The epistemological assumption is multi-paradigmatic, positioned in the middle between positivism and interpretivism. The methodological assumptions are multi-methodical, aiming at increasing the understanding of the knowledge creation in internal branding. (See Jakubik 2006.) The aim is to understand internal branding and knowledge creation from within, as members of the learning community.

2.2 Action research and data collection

Internal branding was studied with qualitative methods with an emphasis on understanding the phenomenon through the use of soft data presented in videotapes, documents, presentations and observations. The qualitative methods applied are: participatory research (action research); participant observations during the workshops and PBL-sessions; workshop materials (memos, documents, presentations, video tapes, audio tapes) and bachelor theses about each case company.

The data collection process in each company can be illustrated as following:

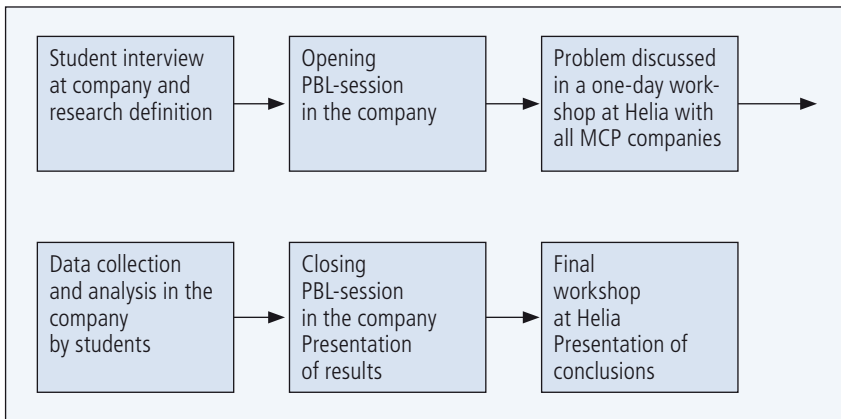


Figure 3. The data collection process in each company.

Data used in this research consists of three parts: MCP learning process documentation, company PBL learning process documentation and survey data summarized by student research groups in BBA theses and project reports. Both the student research processes and the MCP workshop process took place in spring 2005. Four parallel research processes took place in the companies and they were summarized and analyzed in the joint MCP learning process conducted by the process facilitators. The reporting of the findings followed the sequence of the process, first the company findings in the order of procedure, then the workshop, then the next company problem until reaching the final conclusions from the whole process. In the description of the findings, I summarized the discussion and I was able to identify in some cases clear contributions from different parties (brand consultant, teacher researcher, learning process facilitator, company representative, student) and I indicated these contributions in brackets.

Each of the four MCP companies was assigned a group of students, who assisted in collecting the data in the companies. The data collection process started with an interview by the research group in the company. Students wrote a PBL-trigger based on the interview material and a PBL opening session was arranged in the company. The session was taped and documented in a memo. The problem was brought to the MCP- oneday workshop for further elaboration. The workshop was documented in a videotape and group discussions were documented in memos. Students collected meanwhile data in the companies though various methods (on-line surveys, surveys, qualitative interviews). The data was analyzed and documented in BBA theses and project reports (see Früchtenicht et al.; Ormaa 2005; Delcroix & Lormeu 2005; Handler & Weiss 2005). The

summarized data and the main findings were used in this research report to understand the challenges in internal branding in each MCP company. The outcomes were presented and discussed in PBL closing discussions in each company. The overall outcomes from the whole learning process were presented and discussed in a final workshop in spring 2006.

The Multi-Client process was conducted according to the principles of **participatory action research** methodology. The reason for this is that action research aims at creating activities that are based on existing working principles but with the goal to change them in the future. The Multi-Client project described earlier (figure 1) fulfills the following characteristics of action research (Kemmis 2001): it is problem-oriented, context-based, participative in nature, change-oriented, process-like, interactive and action-based. One important part of action research is the combination of theory and practice into a working entity. The focus of action research is not in theory development, but in application.

According to Kemmis (2001, 581), the focus and the perspective of the action research needs to be defined. The focus can either be on the individual or on the social, and the perspective can be objective or subjective. The Multi-Client process focuses on the social processes in internal branding and the perspective is subjective, since the practice of doing internal branding is seen as socially constructed and shaped by traditions.

The process of participatory action research usually involves a spiral of self-reflective cycles: planning a change, acting and observing the process and consequences of the change, reflecting on these processes and consequences and then replanning, acting, observing and reflecting, and so forth (Kemmis 2001, 581).

The Multi-Client process applies to the participatory action research process as following. It was based on Problem-based learning, which consists of 8 steps. The planning of a change can here be seen as the researcher's need to test whether the PBL-approach could be useful in internal branding in a company context. PBL has successfully been used in education worldwide, but is less known in other fields. The acting phase consisted of opening sessions in each company, where the researcher observed the process in action. The consequences of the change were documented in the opening memos and the reflection of the opening discussions affected the content of the problem which was to be discussed during joint workshop sessions with all companies present. The action research process continued during a one-day workshop session, where the problem was elaborated among all participants. The workshop day discussions were observed, documented and reflected on. The next re-planning phase was

done when the closing discussions were conducted in each company. The final reflection was done after the presentations of the conclusions. Each of the steps was undertaken collaboratively between researchers, student researchers, participants and process facilitators. It was seen as both a social and an educational process. See Jakubik (2006, 65-68) for further reflections on the knowledge creation process.

As problem-based learning (PBL) is the foundation for the action research process in the Multi-Client project, the actual philosophy of PBL will be presented next.

2.3 Problem-based learning (PBL) in the Multi-Client process

PBL is a learning philosophy with its history in medicine education at Mac Master University in Canada. It has been implemented in various disciplines and educational institutions all over the world. The main idea behind PBL is small group work and the different steps the learning and problem-solving process contains. It is based on a socio-constructionist perception of learning, meaning that the individuals construct knowledge in dialogue with each other. It can be seen as both a learning process for acquiring knowledge and as a problem-solving process for elaborating on concrete, real problems from business.

The PBL-process is characterized by the following: the process starts with **stimulus material** (usually a text where the problem is described in the form of a story). In the Multi-Client project they were called **triggers**. The triggers were made by the student researchers, based on interviews and discussions with company representatives. The branding problem was different in each company, but the main focus was on an issue related to the internal aspect of branding. The role of the trigger is important; it shouldn't be too easy and clear, it should contain a contradiction and it should be realistic regarding the company's type of business. The typical trigger contained the situation of how a new employee perceived the brand of his employer and its relation to the customers. The aspects of internal cooperation and induction provided to the new employees were also presented in the triggers. The situation was fictional, but as realistically as possible presented, so that it might have been perceived as real.

Another important character of PBL is the **multi-disciplinary approach** to team formation and the content of the problem. In internal branding, the role of cross-functional teams is important and therefore

the companies were asked to invite diverse people to the PBL-discussions. In many cases people from HR and marketing as well as sales and product development attended the company PBL-discussions. This was seen as a very fruitful part of the process. The workshop days in Helia were mostly attended by marketing and communication experts, so the cross-functional attendance didn't succeed in every aspect.

The third characteristic of PBL is the **different roles in the discussion**. There should be a discussion leader, which in the Multi-Client project was performed by a student researcher, and a recorder, who is making a thorough memo of the discussion. This role was also performed by a student researcher. The last role is the facilitator, who is in charge of the process and who makes challenging questions to the participants. The teacher researcher conducted the role of a process facilitator. The last role is the observer and it was performed by the other teacher researcher, studying the knowledge creation process. The amount of the participants varied between two and eight in each company. The best size of a PBL group is considered to be around eight participants. During the workshop days the participants were divided into smaller groups and there were a discussion leader and a recorder to take care of the process.

The last characteristic of PBL to be mentioned in this context is the **identification of learning needs** as a result of the group process. Every group in each company achieved clear learning tasks/objectives, and although the group members were not obliged to work on the learning tasks after the session, an impact on their perceptions of the brand issue was still there.

The eight steps involved in the PBL-process starts with the trigger and the first step is the **identification of key and unfamiliar concepts** and issues embedded in the trigger text. In a company context this isn't so significant, but in some groups there were concepts related to HR that the sales and marketing people were not familiar with. The branding concepts can be unfamiliar to many experts from fields outside marketing.

The second step is **problem formulation**. Every group had long, lively discussions about the problem area of internal branding and the discussion leader had to be strict with the timing. This is a crucial part of PBL, since sometimes the preconceived perceptions of the participants can distort the elaboration of the problem. For example, management can have different perceptions than the employees involved with the customers. In problem formulation a common language is established, and it is important for the discussion leader to let everyone's voice be heard. Finally, the problem is described in one sentence, preferably as a question.

The third step is **brainstorming**. Each group brainstormed with post-it notes and the recorder helped out with the **categorization of the brainstorming (the fourth step)** on a flip chart. The participants all actively shared their opinions about the different parts of the problem. All results of the brainstorming were carefully documented in the memos. The last and fifth step in the opening session was the **identification of the learning objectives**.

Each opening discussion lasted for about two hours and it was taped and recorded by the research team of teachers and students. The idea of having a closing discussion was introduced to the participants and in all cases they agreed it would be good to conclude the discussion. The research group gave out study material to all groups for the preparation of the closing discussion.

The next phase in the Multi-Client process was the opening of the branding problem during a one-day workshop together with all the other company participants. The company and the branding problem were first presented to the audience, who then in small groups worked on the problem to find new angles and ideas to solve it. Each small group presented their ideas to the rest of the group and there was a closing discussion to summarize the problem.

Finally the solutions were presented and discussed in each company as a closing session of the PBL-cycle. The **evaluation** (the eight step of the PBL-cycle) was done with the help of the value-mapping tool described in Maria Jakubik's part (Jakubik 2006).

The action research spiral described earlier corresponds very well to the actual Multi-Client process, where the problem was planned, acted on and observed and then re-planned and acted on again with another audience and reflected and observed and documented by the research team (see Kemmis 2001, 595).

The key features of participatory action research (Kemmis 2001) can be analyzed according to the following features. Applied to the Multi-Client process the list looks as following:

Features of participatory action research	Application to the Multi-Client project
Social process	Both interorganizational and intraorganizational group discussions
Participatory	Engaged all participants to examine their knowledge of internal branding
Practical and collaborative	PBL requires collaboration in order to succeed, and it is by nature practical, aiming at improving interactions between participants
Emancipatory	Process facilitators aimed at emancipating the participants to think of the brand in new ways and to challenge their perceptions, participants also asked to be challenged in their thinking
Critical	Process facilitators aimed at releasing the constraints embedded in participants
Reflexive and dialectical	Multi-Client enabled the participants to investigate the brand and learning reality in a new way in order to change their practices
Transformation of theory and practice	The development of both theory and practice was the goal in MCP, although more emphasis was put on practice

Figure 4. Key features of participatory action research.

2.4 Participatory observation and content analysis

The methodology used in MCP was qualitative, since the aim was not to measure a quantitative sample of how internal branding is performed. The aim was to increase understanding of the phenomenon and to identify what conditions affect internal branding in different stages. Observation was fundamental in order to understand the social processes in the companies and among the participants in the learning community. The other method used was textual analysis, where the aim was to understand the participants' categories affecting their perception and practices of internal branding. The aim of getting an authentic understanding of people's experiences of internal branding was well met (Silverman 2001, 13), since the group discussions in the companies were put together with people working in different key functions in the company. Although they didn't work with the branding issues deliberately on a daily basis, their work in some way was related to internal branding (sales, HR and marketing, for example). Although the group was asked to come together for this research purpose, the feeling of authenticity was there to the researchers. The process made the participants engage themselves in the topic, and the first, cautious tension quickly disappeared and very lively discussions started in each MCP company.

As the aim of observational research was to see through the eyes of the people being studied and to describe what was going on in a particular context, the researcher tried not to impose any theoretical questions and concepts into the discussion, but it was allowed to take place according to how the group wanted to address the question of internal branding. The steps of PBL were kept in order to get reliable information on how the PBL-cycle worked in internal branding.

The analysis of the versatile data gathered in the Multi-Client process followed stages in grounded theory, at first there was an initial attempt to develop categories, which illuminate the data, see figure 5 and then after the description of the companies, these categories were saturated with the case companies, in order to demonstrate their relevance. Finally, the categories were used to develop more general analytical frameworks with relevance outside the Multi-Client setting (Silverman 2001, 71) (see figures 11 and 12).

I started the analysis by identifying initial concepts within the data and by grouping the concepts into categories. Next, I searched for relationships between the categories and that enabled me to group them further into themes. The themes were then assembled in the final phase into emerging dimensions, which provide an understanding of the different phases in internal branding. The grouping and identification of themes and categories was a process-like procedure, which continued until I felt that I have a solid idea of what emerged in the research process (Corley 2004, 1153).

2.5 The role of the researcher

The main role of the researcher was the learning process facilitator, actively giving input to the process but letting the participants work on the content. The same approach was used as in the problem-based learning context, where the teacher's role is to guide the process and to enhance the learning by posing challenging questions. The researcher in the Multi-Client had a strong personal interest in both branding and problem-based learning. I have been teaching branding with PBL for five years and I have led the project of transforming the International Business program into a problem-based learning curriculum. At some point I had the idea of trying to use the problem-based learning approach in internal branding since I found out that there usually was a lack of description in the textbooks and articles how to do internal branding in practice. The Multi-Client project enabled us to put the idea into practice and to understand the

potential collaborative learning can provide in internal branding. As a researcher, I was indeed very closely involved in the learning process and the ready perceptions of the usefulness of PBL in internal branding can have an impact on the analysis. The risk for biases was clearly there, but I tried my best to consider the critical aspect of how well PBL can be used in the internal branding context in the analysis.

Qualitative research design requires the researcher to become the research instrument, which means that the researcher must have the ability to observe behavior (Janesick 2000, 386). Due to long experience of tutoring PBL processes, I can say I have developed a good skill to observe processes and to use both eyes and ears to grasp the social processes going on. My ideological preference regarding branding and learning clearly affected my role as researcher, since I have a specific view regarding the importance and role of the brand in the organization. I see the brand according to the new paradigm explained in more detail in chapter 3.2. My view of learning is clearly socio-constructive, meaning that I see each individual as an active constructor of knowledge with the help of the group. My role as a learning facilitator is to enable the knowledge construction in the group.

One crucial challenge for me in researching internal branding was to really use an inductive way of analyzing the data. The categories, themes and patterns come from the data and are not imposed prior to data collection (Janesick 2000, 389). Since the topic was also studied from a cross-disciplinary perspective, there were no ready models to be used in the analysis. Knowledge creation and collaborative learning aren't usually discussed in the materials of internal branding. Therefore, the data provided us with the new themes and categories to be studied in internal branding. The research initiated a new perspective on branding.

The challenge in the analysis arose from the fact that my previous knowledge in branding could have affected my objectivity in analyzing the data, meaning that I could have searched for support for already existing assumptions about the topic instead of being open to new categories from the data. To be open to how the participants in the Multi-Client project constructed their meanings of internal branding was the main goal for the research according to the constructive principles (Greene 2000, 986). The researcher's role was to interpret those meanings in order to get a more comprehensive understanding of the conditions affecting internal branding in Finnish B-B companies. The social world of internal branding in these case companies is all constructed in the interactions between individuals. One main concern for me as a researcher is how this

context should be socially constructed in order to engage the employees in the brand.

Research about internal branding done by Vallaster (2004, 111) indicates as well that the complexity of internal branding requires versatile research methods like qualitative, action research. She studied the impact of multicultural teams in internal branding with an action research approach and she designed a research, which encouraged participation, social interaction and reflection about the internal branding process. She as a researcher helped the managers to understand their roles in internal branding. She also argues in the conclusions that managers ignore the research findings by business schools and therefore research needs to be done in such a way that it forces the participants to reflect and learn about their own behavior. In the Multi-Client process, this happened both inside organizations and between the branding experts from the different organizations during the workshops. The role of the researcher was crucial to make this reflection and learning happen.

Next, I will present a brief description of the theory of corporate brands and internal branding. The content will be analyzed from the perspective of knowledge creation and collaborative learning.

3

Theory

3.1 Purpose of branding

■ Branding has received growing interest over the last decade. The focus in branding has changed from being an external communication tool to mean an integrative, strategic force for competitive advantage in a fast changing environment. (See Aaker & Joachimstaler 2003, Le Pla et al. 2003.) The role of the corporate brand has grown steadily and there is a vast amount of literature and research being done on corporate brands. When it comes to defining the corporate brand the following questions by Balmer & Greyser (2003, 314) can help grasp the definition. Is the corporate brand strategically managed? Is the *raison d'être* made explicit? Does the rhetoric in the company mirror behavior? Is there adequate, on-going financial support? Is pride instilled among personnel? Is there congruent communication which is both vertical and horizontal?

The answers to the above questions indicate the commitment to the brand in the organization. The scope of corporate branding is much broader both when it comes to communication of the brand and the definition of the brand. Since most manufacturers have come to learn that the source of success doesn't lie only in superior production and technology processes, nor in the product features or in quality; they have had to start building the brand and its emotional qualities. The outsourcing trend has speeded up the development. Management has had, after resistance and denial, to accept the increasing role of the brand, but it takes time to accept that product superiority has gone forever and that brand values have taken over as the differentiating factor. The brand needs to be institutionalized, nurtured and looked after and the management of the brand professionalized (Olins 2000, 59–60).

However, brand management has been criticized for relying mainly on the brand as delivering customer value. Famous brands like Marlboro

had to face the fact that the brand no longer offered sufficient customer value. Rapid innovation and a growing amount of choice for the customers made reliance on a familiar and trusted brand name risky for management. Brands used to be a risk-reducing factor for the customer, but the customers increasingly look for positive added value to discriminate between products and services. The value is mainly created in logistics, manufacturing and information systems and not by brand managers (Knox, Maklan & Thompson 2000, 138–139). It is no longer enough to promise the same as before, the brand needs to live according to the changing circumstances as well. This will lead to a new view of the brand. Knox et al. argue that organizations have to integrate all their efforts through external alliances, networks and partnerships and their internal business systems with the aim to create better customer value. This requires increased knowledge sharing and knowledge creation among teams and networks.

The relationship between the consumer and the organization is being redefined, consumers are more dependent on the products and services generated by organizations and organizations are increasingly structured around an image of the customer. The presumed needs, desires and aspirations of the customers are to be inscribed into organizational practices. All organizational members are held accountable for the satisfaction of the customer. The work in this kind of customer-saturated organization is seen as a place where people actively produce their identities, employees and managers are encouraged to relate to their work as consumers (Du Gay 2001, 70). This leads to a common negotiation of how the brand is created in relationships between the corporation and the customers and other stakeholders. A strong brand is giving meaning to both the customer and the employees, who both build their personalities with the help of the brand. Both parties therefore have an interest in the wellbeing and future of the brand.

Alan Mitchell (Mitchell 2003, 36–54) argues in a critical article about brand narcissism that brand management is very seller-centric and that brand communication is nothing more than screaming out the loudest to the customers “buy-me.” The focus is on what the product delivers and not on the relationship with the customer. Although many sources are emphasizing the brand as a relationship creator (Lindberg-Repo 2005; Ind 2001), it seems that the change in practice takes longer. The possibility to benefit from authentic messages from the individual customers with clear needs and wishes demands a redefinition of both marketing and branding. The relationship marketing paradigm is starting to create possibilities for changing branding into a value-creating process instead of just selling products and services. This seller-centered background

contains a risk for internal branding, if internal branding is only seen as a brand aligning process among the employees, the seller-centered approach is allowed to continue in the company and the brand loses its potential to create real value for both employees and customers through their engagement in the brand.

The role of senior management is crucial in enhancing the idea of the corporate brand. The development of the brand from a product brand to a corporate brand pushes the thinking considerably beyond the product and its relationship to the consumer or customer. Corporations and their members are exposed to more scrutiny regarding the brand, meaning that the organizational behavior becomes more visible and transparent than before (Schultz & Hatch 2003b, 1044). Corporate branding also requires a shift in managerial responsibility, due to the strategic perspective of the corporate brand and the top-management therefore needs to be in charge of branding. Corporate brands are also by nature targeted to broader audiences than the product brands, stakeholders like investors, partners, suppliers, etc. all have an interest in the corporate brand. The ethical perspective of the corporate brand needs to increasingly be considered, the brand needs to be sustainable and responsible to the stakeholders. The demand for ethically conducted business is growing throughout the world.

Tim Kitchin (Kitchin 2003, 67-86) even argues in his article about brand sustainability that this view of stakeholder collaboration is the main brand context in the future. Brand management is shifting from centralized brand promise-management to decentralized reality-based branding where the organization is very sensitive to changes in markets and where the organizational ability to react and learn about these changes is determining the success. The brand must be relevant to stakeholders, the brand values need to be clear and with an energizing purpose. Brands can be said to be managed by stakeholders in the future. The brand can even create excitement if leadership is providing a supportive culture, where learning is enabled in open dialogue. This takes corporate branding into a new phase, the phase of collaborative branding.

3.2 From corporate branding to collaborative branding

The shift from product to corporate brand management has several organizational implications, which according to Schultz and Hatch (2003b, 1043) haven't been addressed enough and adequately in marketing literature. I have reached the same conclusions with the branding students in my course each time we discussed and examined the topic of internal branding. There is very little discussion on how it actually affects the organization and how the internal branding process could be done.

The responsibility for product brands was usually taken care of by the marketing departments whereas corporate brands need support throughout the organization. The realization of the corporate brand promise is involving all parties across functions and from top to bottom. This leads inevitably to the question of internal branding and how the involvement of the employees in the corporate brand will take place.

The transformation of focus to the corporate brand has taken place over the last decade, but it is not until recently that the scholars and practitioners have started to see the full potential of the corporate brand. The idea of corporate branding has gone through a multi-faceted change during which initially the brand was seen as mark of ownership and an image-building device. Symbols associated with key values (like the famous Nike swoosh) were one way of defining the brand. The next step was to see the brand as a means of constructing individual identities and finally as a conduit to create pleasurable experiences. According to Balmer & Greyser (2003, 974), all these definitions apply to the corporate brand, but the multiple stakeholders aspect has to be especially acknowledged. For product-brands the role of other stakeholders is not so crucial. The main stakeholder for the corporate brand success are the employees, for which the creation of identity can be said to be strongly affected by the corporate brand as already mentioned in the previous chapter. The broadening of the brand context is a demanding question to management. To engage employees is a challenging task and then the next step to engage other stakeholders will add an even bigger challenge to it.

The academic work on corporate branding has identified key features of the corporate brand. These differences are often presented as a comparison between the differing factors in a product brand and the corporate brand. The disciplinary scope and management are key differentiating factors as well as the radical rethinking of marketing in the organization. The traditional marketing framework applied in product branding is not enough for building strong corporate brands. The characteristics of the

corporate brand identified by Balmer & Greyser (2003, 977) help to better see the difference. First, corporate brands tend to have strong **cultural** roots. Secondly, it is **multidisciplinary**. Thirdly, it is both **tangible** and **ethereal**, meaning that both emotional and symbolic aspects as well as concrete questions like product quality affects it. Finally, the corporate brand needs **commitment** from all personnel. Corporate brands have strong values and they are very often grounded in the values of the owners and founders, management and personnel. Employees play a crucial role in submitting the values to stakeholders since they provide the interface between internal and external audiences. This has major implications for recruitment of personnel and the development of human resources. Because of the strategic nature of corporate brands, senior management needs to be concerned with the brand (Balmer & Greyser 2003, 978-979).

Values make up the cornerstone in corporate branding, more specifically in the brand identity, as Balmer & Greyser (2003, 980) states corporate brand values are clearly articulated, concise, well-defined and distinct. They are broadly constant over time and they are manifested in corporate behaviors and activities. But a major change is happening regarding the view of brand identity. Nicholas Ind (2003, 22) argues that the brand should be seen as organizational relationships based on openness, honesty, transparency and above all on shared value-creation and mutually beneficial exchange. The brand identity is common for all stakeholders, who make the meaning and associations given to the brand. The brand can be said to be a medium through which stakeholders interact and exchange with each other. Creation of brand values should therefore involve more stakeholders than senior management. Even the customers could join the brand values identification process. The ownership of the brand is transformed from a company-led activity into a negotiated, joint process of giving meaning and getting favorable associations of the brand. If company leaders accept the fact that they are not in control of the brand identity, they can accept that neither employees nor customers can be manipulated by management and marketing activities. On the contrary, together with competitors, they affect the meaning of the brand in the marketplace (Ind 2003, 24).

When defining and analyzing the brand values, the stakeholders need to be engaged in the process. Then transparency is possible and the brand becomes an important and powerful issue. Companies need to listen more to their stakeholders and new ways of working together and learning about each other are needed. If employees notice a discrepancy between stated brand values and reality, their attitude and behavior will

be affected in a negative way. The same applies to external stakeholders like customers and investors.

According to Ind (2003, 28), by adopting this relationship attitude to the brand, companies get more sound ways of manifesting themselves in the world and their business relationships to all stakeholders will be more productive. Brand values then become more than just a tool for branding with which the company is communicating to customers and employees. The idea of controlling the brand by aligning employees and communicating the brand to customers will have a new meaning, acknowledging their role as active participators of the construction of meaning. This can be related to the principle of learning in PBL, where the students are seen as active constructors of knowledge in charge of their own learning processes. This learning philosophy needs to be adopted in the corporate branding framework. Then the power of the brand building is given to the stakeholders, and management is guiding the process by identifying the relevant brand knowledge needed and above all providing a vision to the brand. This view of branding I call collaborative branding.

The concepts of context, process and content generated to analyze the knowledge creation in the Multi-Client learning community are very relevant for this new view on branding. It starts with the idea that the brand needs a clear, distinct purpose and an inspiring vision for the future. The brand context consists of the multiple stakeholders (customers, employees, suppliers, investors, partners, local communities, media). They all are co-creating the brand in relationships where their expectations, evaluations of delivery and especially the trust they have towards the brand affect the judgments they make. The actual brand behavior is mirrored against the implication the brand is giving of itself by different ways of communication (Kitchin 2003, 74).

The brand content consists of the brand values, the brand identity and personality conveyed by the brand values. The content is dynamic and socially constructed in everyday performance. Brand content can also be very strongly linked to the corporate culture; family companies with a longer history might have a considerably strong culture to base the brand identity on.

The brand process provides the glue to the organization and it is based on collaborative learning among teams, functions and leaders from the inside. By adding external stakeholders to the process, the company is keeping itself up-to-date with the wishes and needs from the stakeholders. Brand knowledge needs to be shared. Both explicit and implicit knowledge are needed. A profound change in thinking about the brand is needed first and the creative process in PBL (problem-based learning)

can enable that profound change, if the process is managed well by the process facilitators.

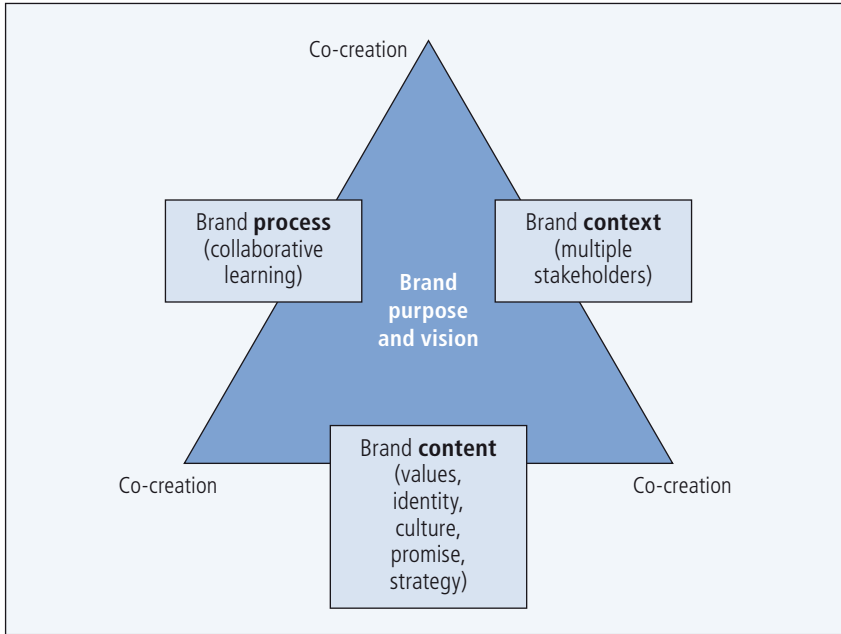


Figure 5. Collaborative branding (adapted from Jakubik 2006).

This profound change in seeing and thinking about the brand requires challenging old mental models about the brand. The old seller-centered way of seeing the brand as a separate entity to be communicated needs to be replaced with an understanding of how the brand is everywhere and nowhere. It is about how it is perceived and the members of the organization can create a new brand reality through seeing its wholeness and existence in the daily processes. To be aware of the brand in daily work helps create the seeing needed. To be sensible to the brand behavior that deviates from brand purpose and vision helps to keep brand work on the right track. Peter Senge describes the profound change in organizations with the concept of presence (Senge, Scharmer, Jaworski & Flowers 2005), where managers start to realize how they see their seeing and how mental models can be suspended by letting the old perceptions disappear. The change process entails three major stages: the first is observe, observe and observe, which means becoming one with the world (this is called sensing). The second is retreat and reflect, which means allowing the inner knowing to emerge (this is called presencing). The third is act swiftly, with a natural flow (this is called realizing) (Senge et al. 2005, 87). This can be applied to branding

as following: sensing means observing the reality about branding in the organization, presencing means allowing a new inner meaning about the brand to emerge and realizing means a natural move towards making that new emerging reality take place. A brand needs presence to become alive in the organization. The organization's members need to perceive how they create the brand reality in their behavior (realizing).

This type of thinking is very demanding and therefore there is a need for a learning process that challenges thinking and emotions. Ordinary meetings and discussions usually don't provide possibilities for challenging the way we think about the brand. Managers often, due to time and resource restraints, don't see the need for questioning the existing brand knowledge. Fast decisions regarding slogans and other communicative elements are made without questioning prevailing mental models. Therefore, I believe that collaborative learning can provide a tool for seeing the old seeing of the brand and to address the underlying problems instead of aiming at quick-fix solutions. Seeing the whole in branding makes everybody active participants instead of passive observers. Life is encountered at work (Senge et al. 2005, 48).

The brand purpose can enable a group to connect deeply around a common goal, and if the group is able to shift the perception of the larger whole of the brand, change will take place. Branding can be a very new situation for a company, which in the past was managed well due to technology or product superiority. Then it is even more important not to make hasty decisions that are not compelling to people. The inner knowing needed to support the branding process needs time to develop, but through engagement of people, it can be relatively fast incorporated into the organization after realizing the purpose of the brand.

3.3 Phases and risks in internal branding

The application of a corporate brand has implications on many different levels and functions in the organization. Internal branding processes will be discussed from a collaborative perspective. The strategic vision of the brand becomes more important, indicating where the brand comes from and what it wants to be. The corporate brand cannot be merely a desired brand image or market position, but must be grounded in core company values. The paths for the future are unfolded by its heritage (Schultz & Hatch 2003b, 1051). This again means that the role of internal branding will be more important. Managers that understand the importance of the brand vision, brand values and culture will outperform compared

to those who neglect their roles. The collaborative aspect might not be concretely present in the strategy work or in the assessment of corporate heritage, but those companies who already have a collaborative approach to developing the business will have an advantage.

One of the biggest challenges is to remove the organizational barriers between HRM, marketing and communication. The collaboration between these functions is crucial in internal branding. At the LEGO Company they realized the need to develop the organizational co-operation in order to bridge the internal gaps for the corporate brand to succeed. In global companies there might be a need to establish a global brand communication unit directly related to the executive office to take care of the strategic guidance (Schultz & Hatch 2003b, 1051).

The true guardian of the brand should be the CEO, who in turn creates a brand team with the necessary skills to build both the intellectual and emotional brand capital of the brand internally. A brand champion could be appointed to make sure that the CEO's brand vision will be put into action. The role of the CEO is crucial since in the end it is only the CEO who can motivate internal customers to embrace the necessary change needed to support the corporate brand (Ellwood 2002, 267). Therefore, it is necessary that the CEO realizes the power of collaboration in the process. Who has the skill to challenge the CEO in his/her perceptions of collaboration in the branding process? Is there a need for an outside expert group to help the management see their thinking regarding collaboration and internal branding? How to motivate the CEO to challenge his/her thinking?

The **objective** of internal branding is to create a sense of flow around the brand, a possibility for employees to develop themselves and improve their lives. This provides them with motivation and even a passion for life. The brand provides a real purpose. The engagement with this purpose generates new ways of working, it makes the employees share knowledge and it can stimulate innovation (Ind 2005, 53). A strong brand also helps the employees to make decisions in everyday work as the brand provides the direction and the guidelines. To check whether the decision is in line with the brand becomes automatic. The objective is clearly a win-win situation for the employees and the brand (organization). Another important objective for internal branding is to make employees embrace the relationship with the customer.

Emotional capital can also be increased in the organization through internal branding. Thomson et al. (1999) has identified the positive emotions affecting business success: obsession, challenge, passion, strong affection or enthusiasm, commitment, determination, delight, love, pride,

trust. Internal brand audits can be made where the level of brand related emotions are studied. The negative emotions like fear, anger, apathy, stress, anxiety, hostility, envy, greed, selfishness and hatred all hurt the brand (Ellwood 2002, 277). Collaborative learning has been regarded as very motivating for PBL-students in various educational institutions all over the world. The involvement in the learning process helps increase positive emotions. When managers and employees together create positive emotions around the brand, they should also understand that they are contributing to making the brand unique. This is the ultimate goal of corporate branding.

Employees constitute the interface between external and internal environments and managers need to make sure that the brand behavior is cohesive and consistent in delivery. Consumers' perceptions of both the brand and the organization are strongly influenced by the employees. Because of this, managers need to acknowledge the changing role of the employees. They become active participators in the brand work, even brand ambassadors, who have a big impact on stakeholders' perceptions. Therefore, employees need to join the brand definition work on an early basis. Then the alignment of brand values and employee values is possible (Harris & de Chernatony 2001, 441-442). Managers need to recognize this big difference in seeing the role of the employees. This is part of the profound change in seeing the brand work as described earlier. There is a risk that management maintains old mental models of how to engage employees. If the leadership culture is very authoritative, the possibility for engaging employees is low. The whole idea of leadership in the organization needs to be assessed in light of employee participation and collaboration.

In a recent doctoral thesis by Kari Viinisalo (<http://www.tut.fi/public/print.cfm>), he states that participatory leadership leads to higher financial results. By deciding the direction of the company together and by giving the employees autonomy to perform, there is a good balance between efficiency and health in the organization. But in order to make this happen, management needs to change and that is usually the weak point he continues, since management often is not willing to change its thinking. Here we can identify one of the keys to successful corporate branding.

The corporate culture creates the atmosphere at work, and the pattern of shared values and beliefs created over time. These values set norms for acceptable behavior, for change and conservatism, creativity and conformity, group orientation and individuality, customer service, etc. The corporate brand is deeply embedded in culture and it can be easily destroyed in mergers and acquisitions. The harmony between the brand and corporate

culture needs to be cherished by management as another objective for internal branding (Rothacher 2004, 3). Collaborative branding can change the corporate culture and the learning process can be implemented in other contexts as well. People get energized by the involvement and the positive effects can easily spread to other parts of the organization.

The **process** of internal branding is usually related to internal communication and the organization of management resources. One process described by Tosti and Stotz (2001, 29-33) starts with analysis, followed by senior management orientation, mid-management involvement, enrolling the employees, tactical planning, brand camps and finally support, assessment and review. I will review the process according to the collaborative aspect of internal branding.

During the analysis step, it is important to critically assess the brand from an internal perspective. The desired brand identity, values and behavioral practices that deliver value need to be discussed. The authors don't specify who is doing this analysis work, but the impression from the article is that it is solely management's task. In this stage the brand thinking needs to be challenged for the first time. If management only considers internal branding as deciding on a slogan or a marketing campaign, there is a big risk for failure. Internal branding needs both the coordination of marketing efforts and organizational change management.

Some authors like Jo Causon (2004, 300) sees internal branding as change management. Especially when internal branding is about re-branding, the management needs to realize that internal branding is a high-risk strategy which require long-term commitment. Since the brand is about creating a unique customer experience, the customer shouldn't be forgotten in this phase. Maybe it would be possible to invite some key customers to join some of the discussions. Then the customer perspective remains actively present.

The senior management orientation is a critical step since the internal branding needs understanding, actively demonstrated commitment and support on all levels. The challenge is to take the necessary time to make this commitment happen, other projects might disturb the concentration. Initial verbal support can easily be given, but will the senior management actually do the implementation? The process needs to involve them and motivate them (Tosti & Stotz, 2001, 31).

Middle managers mostly lead the internal branding initiative in their daily leadership. They need to be thoroughly educated and supported. When planning the workshops or brand groups their nature needs to be defined, they are not training sessions but working sessions or business meetings. The responsibilities for brand implementation need to be clari-

fied to all and personal feedback about brand behavior is important. At this point a question of cultural differences needs to be addressed, at what point is the brand behavior too much defined for the Finnish business culture, where individuality and personal differentiation at work is seen as important? How much individualism can/should the brand allow? How much conformity is needed to make the brand strong to the stakeholders? If the brand is seen according to the collaborative point of view, how could stakeholders be involved in this phase of determining desirable brand behavior? The decision between individual expression and brand conformity needs to be analyzed in accordance with the organization's culture and tradition. If changing conditions in the business environment require the organization to more streamlined and conformed behavior, the brand groups need to decide on the levels of conformity.

The brand groups can become very supportive to each other, open feedback and dialogue can help the managers to develop working principles for the brand. Perhaps they can even critically assess their management behavior in relation to the desired brand behavior. They need to reflect on how their leadership can support the vision of the brand. The clarity of the brand needs to be clear to everyone in this phase, especially the message needs to be clear. It is also important is to create consensus around the brand, without consensus there is no commitment. There is no way to force that commitment to happen, the positive emotions mentioned earlier need to be involved. In some organizations it is enough that the CEO states the commitment and in other organizations there must be lengthy discussions, compromises and refinements (Bergstrom, Blumenthal & Crothers 2002, 136).

Commitment is an on-going process, which need to be supported with brand task forces or educational programs. When the initial enthusiasm fades away, the dedicated brand team will keep the momentum going. Tosti & Stotz (2001, 32) argue that once management is engaged in internal branding, the employees can be enrolled. As they emphasize, the word enroll is important since the employees need to have a connection with the process and enrollment is a voluntary thing. Education per se is not enough. The internal brand change needs to be experienced instead of only informed of and the context for change is often not explained to the employees. There needs to be a possibility for employees to ask questions. According to their experiences, Tosti and Stotz argue that the personal motivation of the employees increases if they experience the brand firsthand and if they are able to build a connection to the brand promise. The feeling of having a possibility to affect the organization's success is new to many employees and it is highly motivating for them.

The role of language in branding is discussed by Ellwood (2002, 281-282). Three different types of languages are identified: directive, requesting and inspirational. The most typical type is requesting in organizations and it is seen as a good way to motivate employees, since they are included in decision making. The inspirational language provides with the most powerful type of language in corporate branding, since it evokes the emotions and it gives fuel to commitment. Collaboration needs both requesting and inspirational language, since a directive style of communication excludes the whole idea of collaboration.

After having enrolled the employees, tactical planning sessions should be arranged between mid-managers and their supervisors according to Tosti (in Tosti & Stotz 2001, 32). The groups need to revise their brand behavior according to the aspired brand. Changing existing cultural practices and addressing cross-functional collaboration problems are the key issues in this phase. Some cultural practices might inhibit delivery of brand value. These destructive brand practices need to be deleted. From the collaboration perspective it is important to note that the groups themselves are allowed to discover the problems and to find solutions to the problems. Ways of sharing this problem solving between groups would be good to spread good practices in the organization.

Tosti's and Stotz's internal branding process is created for an organization with many layers of management (Tosti & Stotz 2001). The next phase is to create brand plans for supervisors and their employees. In practice this means linking all the previous analysis, learning and process and translating it into concrete action for employees to take. Frontline teams implement the brand plans. Here the brand values are tested by the customers. If this frontline group of employees is not participating at an earlier stage in the process, some critical questions might be overlooked. In this model of internal branding, it seems the collaboration happens between the same types of employees: mid-managers collaborate with mid-managers and supervisors with supervisors. The dynamic of giving different employee groups a possibility to discuss and collaborate is missing.

Finally, the process and implementation must be supported, assessed and reviewed. After the initial implementation, it still needs support and resources to solve occurring problems in the organization. The collaboration aspect also need to be assessed: what were the major obstacles in collaboration, what kind of learning took place in the interactions and how could it still be enhanced?

How does collaboration happen? What if the employees feel that there is no reason to change, everything is fine as it is? One way argued by Bergstrom and Blumentahl (in Bergstrom, Blumenthal & Crothers

2002, 138) is to threaten for non-cooperation although it is not considered as the most favorable way. To constantly communicate that the brand is meaningful and relevant is a more preferable way to motivate the change. If the employees are given the freedom to choose the brand, they will take active roles in the process. There needs to be a reason to cooperate, there must be a role for everyone to play for and there must be consequences for opting in or out. The leaders' role behavior is very important here; they must be into it with their whole personality.

The support needed for internal branding is not only related to the collaboration part, but also the compensation systems need to be reassessed in light of the desired brand behavior. Often frontline employees, who are really the ones creating value for the customers, are the ones least paid. Those who deliver for the brand also need to be properly compensated.

The understanding of the brand as a whole, dynamic entity, which guides the actions throughout the company requires above all learning away from old mental models regarding the brand. It is not about creating awareness and communicating how beautiful and good the organization is (Le Pla et al. 2003, 11). It is about achieving the vision of the organization, about giving meaning to stakeholders in long-lasting win-win relationships, where the brand is negotiated every day in performance throughout the organization.

Authenticity is a growing concern in branding because people have lost their confidence in advertising and media and they want products and services they can rely on. The same goes for employees, who are getting more critical towards how things are done in the organization compared to what is said. Employees want to be inspired by examples of brand delivery (Moore 2003, 113-115). The authentic relationships must start inside organizations and be continued in stakeholder relationships. This requires courage, transparency and a profound change in thinking.

The theoretical framework is summarized in the following figure. Next I will describe the internal branding problems in the Multi-Client case companies.

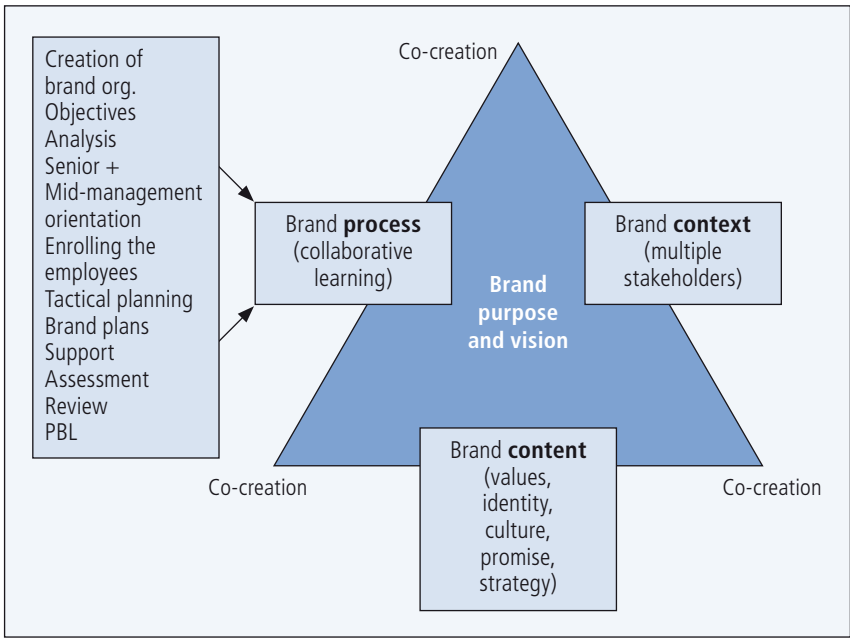


Figure 6. Internal branding in a collaborative branding context.

4

Findings: internal branding processes in MCP companies and learning process in MCP workshops

4.1 Company C

■ Since company C was the first company to be analyzed in the MCP-process, I will start the analysis by looking into the internal branding challenges of company C. The background of the company is family-owned, founded in 1958. The company produces electrical solutions and systems in 14 countries with 1,200 employees. The company has production facilities in Finland, Poland, Estonia and China. The revenue of the company was over EUR 160 million in the year 2004. The company has three strong strategic business units (SBUs).

4.1.1 Background of internal branding efforts and internal branding problem

The company has been emphasizing internal branding for several years already. For this reason, we wanted to start the MCP process with this company. I had the possibility to follow an internal branding workshop in 2003 with salespeople from several market areas. A Helia student researched and documented the internal branding process in a thesis. The workshop was very practical and it contained several creative elements, like painting and acting on the brand values. One noteworthy feature was that the internal branding workshops were done in cooperation between the brand manager and the HR manager. This indicates that the understanding of internal branding was on a high level in the company. The brand was also documented in a brand workbook, which was meant as an active

tool for the employees to make their own documentation of the brand. In the brand workbook, the mission, vision and values were presented in the form of a brand house, which provides the foundation for the company's existence. The internal branding workshops were conducted for people throughout the organization and they still took place in the years 2004 and 2005 when the MCP process started. Although branding was done in a highly professional manner, with cooperation and creative workshops, the brand manager still felt that the branding process had reached a critical step. This was the reason for them to join the MCP project.

To begin with, the student researcher gathered background information to formulate the critical questions to be researched. The problem description was presented in a learning trigger for the opening PBL discussion in the company. The trigger explained a situation where a new, eager employee had joined one of the SBUs and how well the company arranged his orientation to the working principles in the organization. The employee had adopted the vision and the strategic function in the unit as well as the brand promise. Then he participated in a conference covering the whole organization and he got to meet his colleagues from the other SBUs. He inquired about how they felt about the company spirit, vision and values and found out that they seemed to have very different perceptions and experiences of the company brand. It seemed that there were no common strategic goals.

The trigger situation was fictive, but it contained the problem described from a new employee perspective and it was realistically described. There was a contradictive situation, indicating that the induction to the company brand had been very good but the perceptions of the different SBUs still differed considerably.

The opening session in the company was managed by the student researcher. The brand manager and the HR manager participated in the discussion as well as three Helia teachers. To begin, the company people stated that the problem described in the trigger is very common in the organization, and they indicated that new employees are not necessary given a good orientation to the company. It is very dependant on the superior. "Furthermore, in company C individuals are valued highly. As creativity is one of the organization's main values, employees are given freedom to express that." There is a fear that if everyone did things the same way, people would feel restricted.

Then the discussion went on to address the question of the need for common guidelines between the different SBUs. The need for a group strategy was expressed, but it should be loose enough to still foster creativity among the individuals. Another issue to be discussed was how to

find one company spirit when the SBUs are different. The company values were seen as commonly shared in the company. These values are customer care, reliability and creativity.

Then the discussion went on to question where the brand is in the strategy. Is there a need to state the brand separately? It should be in the minds of every employee at every level. Unfortunately, often the brand is still thought of as an external issue referring to the blueprint which includes the logo. The discussion went on with the common agreement that there is a lack of corporate strategy and that the place of the brand in the strategy is unclear. Another dimension of the problem is how to convince the company management that there should be a corporate strategy which includes the brand. The problem was summarized in one sentence: the role of corporate strategy and corporate vision at company C (opening tutorial memo 14.3.2005).

The next step included the brainstorming of the problem. Several categories of content affecting the problem were identified. The **corporate level mission and vision** were identified and the issues related to that topic were a shared vision, internationalization, growth, culture and values. These were affected by **history** and the fact that the company is **family-owned**. **Internal resources** were also considered to affect the corporate level mission and vision. Leadership, skills, competencies, resources, key success factors, context management were put under the category of internal resources.

The **corporate level strategy** contained issues like management, structure, common image, differentiation, strategic alliances, vertical integration, in which business the company is in, diversification, centralization vs. decentralization, processes and contract. This corporate level strategy affects the **SBU level strategy**, where issues like organization and responsibilities, target groups, commonalities, differences and cooperation were mentioned. Finally, the **tools** for implementing the strategy are communication, time & scheduling, workbook, comprehension, motivation, performance appraisals, confidence and learning community.

The **brand strategy** category was left without connection to the other categories, but issues like the brand promise, slogan, brand hierarchy, mono vs. multi-brand were identified under this category.

Finally, the group agreed on the following learning objectives for further exploration. What are the advantages of corporate strategy and vision in branding? Why are they so important? (opening tutorial memo 14.3.2005).

4.1.2 MCP workshop on branding and strategy

The learning process in the workshop started off with a question about the situations in the companies regarding strategy and branding. Many representatives stated the fact that they are in a mess. The reason was mentioned to be that the management hasn't stated the strategy explicitly and that everybody has different perceptions. The learning process facilitator asked how to get existing knowledge in the system and told about a study showing that the best way is to allow the people to do it themselves. The aims in the MCP learning process, pointed out by the learning process facilitator, are not to only to chat about the issues, but to challenge the mindsets we have.

The discussion continued with a statement that we are used to a model in Finland in which management decides and does the planning. Another trend is that we now tend to state that there are no right or wrong answers, but the risk is that we don't recognize the wrong answers and our wrong thinking. By adding so-called more right answers to the mess, the mess only gets bigger. A comment from a student about how the branding literature tends to present different languages and concepts about the same things led to a discussion about how to make models simpler. Our thinking still tends to provide similarities rather than dissimilarities, according to the learning process facilitator and he continued by stating that often the thinking is summarized in two main clusters. But the key is to challenge the underlying assumptions in thinking. Before one can make simple models, profound knowledge is needed. The knowledge exploration process is first complex, then it gets simpler according to the teacher researcher.

The brand manager of company C continued the workshop by explaining the branding work at the company, how the transformation of the company had taken place over the years. The family company, which had several small businesses with very technical and domestic products, had changed into an international, customer-oriented company concentrating on solutions, systems and consulting sales. The company used to be personified in the founder of the company. The branding work has valued the heritage of the company and it has built on the strong features of the company culture presented in "the company way." The company values are very strong and both the HR and brand manager emphasized that the company values originate from the factory floor, they were not given by management. The branding work started in year 2002 and the cooperation with a corporate identity design agency started. Interviews were made during a couple of months to find out the company spirit.

The decision to have one brand was made due to scarcity of resources. The brand workbook was presented to the audience and the HR manager stressed the fact that they don't internally use the word brand, since it is often understood so narrowly as a logo. Three hour workshops were arranged for employees to clarify their roles in building the company spirit/brand.

The brand manager continued by explaining the brand house of the brand workbook and about the unique customer care the company provides. The products can easily be copied, but the relationships with the customers cannot be copied. The company is famous for customer care. The openness of the corporate culture is very special. Employees are seen as very open-minded. Customers are openly given information and they also take part in product development. The building of the target image is done by all people and this is a strong message to the employees. The basis of the house is always kept the same: the values will not change although the business changes. The HR manager explained that they have started to use the word social capital to describe the power of social relationships. The company way always comes first according to her and the strong basis will be built on in the future. The history and heritage will be kept the same.

The brand manager presented the brand positioning and the question of how they really differ from the competitors was discussed. In Finland it seems the company has a competitive, differentiating edge, but in international markets they are too small to be different. The brand positioning is not clear enough. The presentation ended in explaining the current challenge in branding, which is related to the lack of corporate strategy and the clarity of the brand promise. What is the glue that keeps the company together?

The reason why the company doesn't have a corporate strategy is that the founder had everything in his head, but when a company grows, there is a need for a common vision. The company is now reaching the point in which the question of a corporate strategy is crucial.

Before the participants of the MCP learning community started to discuss the company C problem in smaller groups, the learning process facilitator was illuminating the process of progressive inquiry. The research questions for company C were identified on the board.

Then the learning process facilitator illuminated the different views of looking at the theory of business. There is no need for the groups to reinvent the wheel since theory already exists he argued. The underlying paradigm behind theory can be related to power, machine or culture. These directly affect the theory of business, the strategy, the manage-

ment and processes. A specific concept always comes with baggage. The mess is then created in our heads. Is something good when it is defined? What is the basis for evaluating what is good and bad? What is the hidden framework affecting branding and strategy?

The worldview of the business paradigm affects the way we perceive business problems. The machine paradigm is about giving information, instructing and controlling. The buy-in of employees can be improved by training. The culture paradigm is about shared mental models and belonging. The village metaphor of company C fits well into the culture paradigm. The leaders in the culture paradigm are inspired by history and community. Management is about creating meaning. The brand is about maintaining the village. Is the strategy about constructing a communication process or a belonging process? The village in company C used to be closed, not involving the customers. The global village is changing the factors affecting the belongingness of the village members.

Will the corporate strategy help produce the global village or will it produce a more streamlined business? What is the purpose of the corporate strategy? What then leads to a good corporate strategy? These questions should be kept in mind as the groups went on to discuss the solutions to the problem. There were two groups with participants from all MCP companies, student researchers and Helia teachers. CLC's role was the learning process facilitator. An outside branding expert joined the group discussions later.

Immediately before the group work started, the HR manager in company C told business in the company is viewed through the cultural lenses. This is not a clear decision, but it has simply evolved in the company. The organizational culture is in a significant position, which shows in the length of stay of employees. People stay long if the culture suits them and leave after a short period if they feel it is not suitable. Another noteworthy point was that this culture is similar between the SBUs and abroad, since work is arranged in multicultural teams. It was stated that there is a need for a corporate strategy, which could lead to one brand and one brand promise. As it is now, the company is losing resources as the three SBUs are pulling in different directions. Because every employee shares the same values and history, it was seen as easy to create a corporate strategy. Meanwhile, the process facilitator made the group identify the major questions to be discussed. One question was about why the company needs a corporate level strategy, and who should be the leader or initiator in this process. How to commit people internally to the strategy and how to manage the customer experience?

Findings from group discussions

A unanimous “yes” to the question of whether the company needs a corporate level strategy was clear to the first group and its justification lies in that it would give direction throughout the company. It was also seen to promote collaboration and coordination in the company as well as helping to avoid misunderstandings. The question whether the strategy could commit the employees to corporate goals was discussed. The aim of the company is to grow and the idea of one brand getting recognition in the international market would help the goal come true. The meaning of the corporate brand was illustrated in the group by stating that the corporate brand allows one to wear a corporate hat but business area glasses. The levels of perception are different but support each other. By making one corporate level strategy instead of three business unit strategies, the company would save resources. Important to remember is that each business unit still would have its own strategy or plan, but it should serve the corporate strategy in the long run.

The second group also supported the idea of a corporate level strategy, especially because of international competition, which makes it hard to consistently communicate the brand. The one brand strategy was supported because of the coordination of the businesses and customer care. The unification of the SBUs was seen as important. The brand promise was discussed and the brand manager explained how the old slogan had been clearer to the employees in explaining the brand promise. Many people come to her now and ask what the brand promise is and this has made her job more difficult. The words in the brand promise are not remembered as well as the slogan.

However, a positive finding is that everyone is aware of the company values. The values had been put to action in a series of creative and engaging workshops together with employees. The company values were discovered through dialogues. It was seen as a very good thing that the managers hadn't just phrased them out of the blue.

The second group continued by discussing the structure of the company, there was a concern about how three different SBUs can facilitate the creation of one corporate brand. The common denominator seemed to be the company values, since they are equal in every corner of the company, although the SBUs have their own vision and strategies. An interesting point was that in the sales offices abroad, where there are less company people from Finland, there are fewer problems with the brand since the company is seen as one instead being influenced by the three SBUs.

The next topic for discussion was the functions in the company and their roles. HR and finance are both centralized but the marketing com-

munications function is not. There is no common marketing strategy in the company. The group saw this as a significant issue in the brand building of one strong brand. The one brand strategy also brings synergies to the processes.

The marketing and branding consultant joined the second group and challenged their discussion to relate to the value consumers perceive of the brand. The consumer doesn't care about the company structure but only about the value the brand provides. The different messages from the three SBUs, for example, are confusing not only to the staff at the sales office, but it can also be evidenced in the customers. By seeing the role and value the company is playing towards the end consumer, the focus would be on how to differentiate themselves towards the consumers. The stakeholders consist of the customers, suppliers, government and distribution and they all contribute to the value for the end consumer. According to the brand consultant, the company has a corporate strategy, since the three SBUs are the strategy. Maybe the strategy has retired with the owner of the company. In order to understand true consumer values, there might now be a need for a corporate strategy. Since the company perceives itself as a strong B-B company, this aspect of the end user brought a new dimension to the thinking of the brand.

The next phase in the discussion was about the way to acknowledge the values of the end consumer and the customers. Conducting a survey to find out the consumer values was mentioned, but making an external survey might get the SBUs to feel criticized for their activities. Interviewing various employees internally on how they perceive the customer value might provide a more beneficial outcome. To create one corporate strategy, the different SBUs need to be put together and the focus should be on customer values. By bringing the SBUs together in making the strategy, the purpose of the company would be clearer. Mixed and collaborative action between SBUs was emphasized, not just mixing them for discussions but for joint actions, like sports events and other informal events in a neutral environment, where no particular SBU is strong. SBU directors could also do the vision building together in conferences. The expected results would be commitment, shared values, vision and one consistent brand.

The first group discussed the question of who should be in charge of the process to create the corporate strategy and branding strategy. It seemed clear to the group that it is the CEO who should be in charge, but people from many levels in the organization need to be involved. The CEO should be in charge for both the corporate strategy and the branding strategy in order to harmonize both. Interestingly, it has been the brand

and the HR managers who have initiated the process at company C. The involvement of each SBU was seen as important and an atmosphere of togetherness should be promoted, instead of competition. The discussion went on to address the issue of how to commit the people internally to the process and strategy. The managers need to communicate the goals and the individual's roles in achieving the goals. The aim is to make them feel important and to make them experience that their contribution is significant to the company. The new corporate strategy also needs to be clear, so employees can relate to it. It needs to be loose enough to foster creativity among individuals, which is one of the company values and very characteristic for the company. An incentive system was seen as important for the implementation of the strategy.

The group continued discussing the management of the customer experiences. It was seen as important to choose specifically that way of expressing the brand instead of communicating the brand, which might sound ambiguous. Some crucial questions arose in the debate, how can the company manage the customer experience when the identity of the customer is unclear? Should the company manage the wholesaler or the end user experience? The HR manager explained that the company is now concentrating more on the end user experience. However, the company is mainly a B-B brand and a few large customers make up their customer base. This makes it easy to keep personal contacts with the customers. Continuous interaction is necessary and these main customers could also, according to the group, be involved in the branding process.

By mapping the sales processes, the company also could see the critical phases and pay attention to them. Some actions to make the employees understand their roles in the branding process need to be taken. They need to recognize that their performances affect the customer's perception of the corporate brand. The cooperation between the brand manager and HR manager should also continue.

There was discussion about the brand promise and a suggestion to change it to "Always enjoy power in life." The previous brand promise: reliability, creativity and customer care are all expressed in the suggested brand promise. Finally the role of production was also emphasized in managing the customer experience, if the attitude in production is like the products were produced for own use, it would encourage the employees to do their best.

Making a synthesis from the group discussions

The joint discussion after the group sessions started with the question of the need of a corporate strategy. Where to start from in creating the

strategy, internally or externally? How well do the company values meet the customer needs was a concern. Whether to conduct a customer survey was questioned because of the competition between the SBUs as earlier stated in the group discussion part. Vision building with mixed teams and events to have informal collaboration were mentioned. The sense of togetherness needs to be increased. After the founder retired, there has been a power vacuum in the company. The children of the founder are playing a larger role all the time now, so they will slowly have a bigger impact on the decisions.

Brand ambassadors are an important tool for joint strategy building. Training will be crucial in the process. The training should start with the presidents. Collaboration is already done on the other levels, but not at the president level according to the brand manager. The higher the level in the company, the less leadership exists according to a general leadership survey, which means that people are not on the agenda of the top management, according to the learning process facilitator.

The strategy needs to be clear and simple, so everyone knows his/her role and place in the organization. Incentive systems need to be developed according to the corporate strategy. Involvement of employees should happen already in the creation phase, as well as in implementation and decision-making.

How to communicate the brand is not the best way to describe it; managing the customer experience is more suitable. Involvement of customers is important, since it is about personal contacts.

The HR manager considered it good that the groups discussed how to give evidence to the management of the need for a corporate strategy. The numbers provide proof, but the resources for corporate joint activities need to be tripled. Asking the customer about the benefit of having a one-company strategy could also be done. A scenario analysis about what will happen if the company doesn't make any changes could be useful. Counterforce to the change is traditional thinking and keeping the power balance. Maybe there is no sense of urgency for change, why is there a need to change since change is a risk? From a culture paradigm perspective, change resistance might be about losing the people and the group. What is the incentive for change for the owner family?

The brand manager told how she keeps up telling the CEO information about the markets and about the need for one message from the company. This will slowly have an impact on the CEO, she hopes. Next the discussion went on to address if the change will affect control in the company? Will it remove control from the family owners? It will require more involvement from more people. Control could be used as an argu-

ment, if you want to keep control in the family, you need one corporate strategy.

What new questions are now emerging from the process, the learning process facilitator inquired? The brand manager feels the group is supporting her ideas for the corporate strategy. The clarity of the brand promise was still discussed. How could it be crystallized together? Or should it *first be created separately* and then communicated to the people?

There were competing frameworks in the discussion which increased the challenge according to the learning process facilitator. The multiple perspectives meant that the leadership/strategy perspective and the marketing perspective from the branding expert were confusing the discussion. The leadership perspective is about culture and power and the marketing perspective is about machine. Depending on the pairs of spectacles, the interpretation and the end result will be different. If we think it is about the family aiming at keeping the power, all talk about collaboration is unnecessary. If we think the problem is about growth, the machine paradigm is affecting the thinking. From an entrepreneurial perspective, the family owner thinks there is growth since we have grown together. There must be something about community in the company, looking at how the family owners bought back the company a couple of years ago. The paradigms seem to be colliding. Look at the paradigm in the company first, and think of how the managers see it. The different paradigms were present in the group presentations of solutions.

Communities are created through joint actions, not only through discussions. An example from the theater business explained how nowadays the audience wants to be part of creating the play instead of only watching. The trend in many areas shows that people are not willing to be only spectators, they want to be co-creators. By only asking comments about opinions on the brand manual, for example, we are not involving the people. How do we establish the setting for making contribution possible for people to get involved in creating the brand material? Collaboration also means costs, to put the CEO to join the process is costly, but necessary.

Findings from bachelor thesis in company C

Student researcher Ormaa continued the process in his thesis about company C's corporate strategy and structure for strategic management (Ormaa 2005). The results from the thesis indicate that the role of the brand was considered as a unifying factor at company C. However, the results also showed that there is still work to do before it happens. Altogether 12 interviews were conducted among the three SBUs and from corporate- and

business level managers. The important results which have an impact on the branding process are the top management support and leadership, the creation of a company-wide vision, a more cooperative form of company structure, integration of marketing and sales functions, creation of a centralized marketing function, formulation of an explicit corporate strategy, redirection of innovativeness towards more customer-oriented solutions and visionary leadership.

Top management was revealed in the interviews as being very gentle, approachable and coaching. Top management supports ideas coming from the lower levels and regards the open space to be very important for innovativeness. This way of leading might lead to misunderstandings as it gives an impression of a lack of assertiveness and initiative. The lack of a common vision for the whole company creates a lack of inspiration and reflection of the leaders' beliefs about the direction of the company. The results suggested that a combination of the three SBU visions could be done to enable a good foundation for visionary leadership in the company. The formulation of a horizontal strategy would enable sustainable coordination, which is based on consistency and commitment through learning. The coordination shouldn't be only spontaneous and situation-based across SBUs, but aimed at finding tangible and interrelated contents for coordination. One suggestion based on the results is that there is a need for more across SBU long-term planning. This would enhance the whole company's interest instead of only the interest of one specific SBU. The integration of marketing and sales has a large implication for the steering of the corporate brand. Learning about innovative customer systems and solutions from each SBU will enable the goal of creating one company mindset. The reward system in the company should also reflect the increased coordination between the SBUs. Common follow-ups were seen as necessary for the across-SBU projects in order to keep track of the development of coordination (Ormaa 2005, 54–60).

The results were presented in a closing discussion at the company, in which the CEO as well as SBU presidents and central administration participated. The need for the corporate strategy was stated and the discussion will go on in the company.

4.2 Company A

Company A was established in 1936 by a professor working at the Finnish Weather Institute. The company is listed on the Helsinki Stock Exchange, but the family owners still have a big share of the company. Today the

company has about 1,000 employees, operating in over 100 countries. The net sales in year 2004 exceeded EUR 179 million. There is a decreasing trend in the net sales figures, the amount of orders also dropped in 2003 and 2004. The profit has nonetheless shown a positive increasing trend. The nearly seventy years of successful growth is now coming to an end.

The mission of the company is to provide environmental measurements to the world, with an aim to improve the quality of life and to protect the environment. Improving the understanding of climate change is also one aspect of the mission. The vision of the company is to be the most respected, the biggest, the most comprehensive and most successful geophysical environment measurement and service-company in the world. The brand is a premium-class brand in this business area, since the business is very narrow and limited, it isn't worthwhile being the second or the third brand.

The goal of the company is to grow, to maintain profitability and to become a global market leader in the business. The cornerstones of the company are innovation, reliability and solutions. These cornerstones are considered to be the core competencies necessary in this type of business. The customers can be divided in two groups: the meteorological professionals (at the moment in 150 countries) and industry in need of environmental measurements. The company is structured in three divisions under the umbrella of the corporate brand. The values of the company are: customer focus, science-based innovation, goal orientation, personal growth, focus on greater good and fair play.

4.2.1 Background of internal branding efforts and the internal branding problem

The communication department was established in the year 2000 at company A. The work of the communication department was described in the first meeting with the research group. Since there has been a lack of coordinated communication efforts for a very long time, there hasn't been much effort placed on internal branding. The visual aspects of the brand in brochures and web sites have been taken care of and more material on the brand is provided all the time. The research questions for the student researchers were firstly related to the role of the brand in company's strategy and the understanding of the brand among top management. Secondly, the other thesis study sought to find answers to what kind of collaboration is needed in the internal branding process in company A. The emphasis in this study is not on the graphical elements in the brand,

but on a more spiritual level. The key questions were identified to find out whether there is a gap between top management and employees in understanding the brand, to find out who are the employees living the brand (maybe without realizing it), to find out are there brand champions in the company, to find out if communication is well-done and finally do the employees understand top management messages. The cultural differences worldwide affecting the brand was also mentioned, since there has been some comments from the foreign offices that the employees there feel alone in the company group.

Additionally, the material about the brand policy in the company presented in the intranet needs to be evaluated by the employees, do they realize the brand in the written material and how do they incorporate the slogan presented two years ago. The communication department wants the company under one corporate brand. Now it is time to find out how the employees and top management perceive the brand.

Concerning the marketing in company A, there is no common advertising; mainly advertisements are placed in scientific journals. The brand is built by the salespersons when meeting with customers. The company magazine provides a tool for communicating the brand. The role of marketing is quite marginal in this business and one challenge is to find new tools to support the brand communication with customers as well as with stakeholders. Stakeholders are perceived to be important for the brand (memo from meeting at the company 18.2.2005).

Opening discussion at company A

The internal branding problem was described in a PBL trigger. The situation was about a newly graduated engineer who just got accepted to a job at company A. He was positively impressed by the performance of the company and curious about how people collaborate in the company. His period of probation is about to end and he reflects on what he learned about the company. He was surprised to notice that the employees were more interested in the product than in the success of the company as a whole. He also wonders about the lack of feedback for his work and he wasn't sure whether his work was good for the company. He seemed discouraged to go on with his job. He also felt that people were working very individually. Group work did not seem to be natural. He felt that the situation at his department didn't correspond to the company values. He was about to go to his old engineering school to promote the company to new students and he realized that he didn't know much about the corporate brand, he knew information only about his business unit. He

asked his superior for help, but it seemed that the manager hadn't much interest or knowledge about the corporate brand.

The trigger situation was fictional but the group participating in the opening session started a lively discussion about the reality in the company, which was seen to be quite close to the trigger situation. There were seven participants from HR, sales, R&D, marketing and many had a managerial position. The main problems identified by the group related to branding from the perspective of a new employee were the following. The company was seen to be too product-oriented. The question of how to have all the people within the company aware of the brand and how to live the brand was discussed. The living of the brand needs to be addressed both from a knowledge point of view and a communication point of view. How the brand is understood seems to depend a lot on the organizational level and the role of the department. An engineer (the company employees consist mainly of engineers) thinks differently about the brand than a marketing person according to some comments. It seemed clear to the group that there was a communication problem in the company. The slogan was assessed and there were some arguments about its suitability and a suggestion for a more suitable slogan was made. It seems that the brand is seen and lived differently in different departments.

The problem questions were then brainstormed and the following topics emerged from the brainstorming. Four main categories were identified to affect the internal branding process, communication, management/ leadership, means for living the brand and challenges and improvements that need to be made. Under the category of **communication** meetings, clarification, discussions and interpretations were mentioned. Internal branding strategy, feedback, implementation, company policy and the working, internal culture were mentioned to belong to the **management and leadership** category. **The means for living the brand** were training and teamwork, commitment and participation, understanding and self-evidence, networking and common values. **The challenges and improvements** that need to be made are the narrow thinking, the lack of mutual goals, lack of interest, no information sharing and too product-oriented thinking. All these affect each other and are to be considered in the internal branding process.

The group agreed on the learning objectives and they were stated to be: how to communicate the brand and how to involve people to live the brand? In the evaluation of the discussion, the group participants agreed that there had been good knowledge exchange, especially because they represented different departments and functions in company A (opening memo 3.3.2005).

4.2.2 MCP workshop on branding and collaboration

The second workshop with all company representatives started with evaluation of the first workshop discussion on company C's problem with the corporate strategy and the brand. The brand manager in company C told about how the perception of the problem changed after the discussion and a conclusion about how many companies actually share the same problems today was made. It was suggested that this situation might arise because they all use the same consultants. The trend of having a brand book or "bible" was mentioned and how the thinking behind the book is not questioned. There is an assumption that we read it, but is it likely that it is left unread which gives a guilty feeling. Another topic mentioned was the involvement of the top management; there are complaints about the lack of involvement. Can we even expect top management involvement is it something we just have to live without? To challenge thinking was seen important by the MCP members and also to share less successful examples from the other MCP companies in internal branding.

The process started with the brand responsible in company A presenting the company in more detail to the audience. The company values were seen as important cornerstones for the branding. The company now aims at being an expert in its customers' business areas. One challenge for the branding work is the two business models adopted in the company, which on one hand is based on the customers' applications, and on the other hand on the phenomena the product solutions are made to solve. The strategy of the company is based on growth. The structure of the company is arranged in three independent business units that partly have the same customers. The business units can have their own identities, but they are under the umbrella corporate brand. The brand value proposition of innovation, reliability and solutions guide the brand policy, but she noted that the value proposition hadn't been explained well enough in the company.

Brand building isn't democratic, everybody's opinion cannot be asked, but branding cannot be achieved by commanding either. Instead we want to provide a set of brand building tools to use. Input to the brand can come from anybody in the organization. The different roles in brand building in company A were presented, and the idea of not needing to act as a police was stated several times. The real challenge is the frame to keep the brand puzzle together, the employees and the outsourced partners. The administration in company A is very centralized and the working is very pragmatic. The heritage of the company is important and it is also valued among foreign markets.

Next, the student researchers went on to describe the data they already had gathered from the company. The learning objective from the opening discussion in the company were presented, how to communicate the brand and the importance of it. The challenges are about communication and collaboration between the business units, they didn't feel like one company, instead they identified themselves more with the business unit. There was little awareness of the brand among the respondents. Every time the student researchers mentioned the word "brand," there was confusion among the respondents in the company. The perception of the brand in company A is very product-based and instrumental at the moment. Since there is material in the intranet, the brand should be understood by everyone, the brand responsible said ironically. There is plenty of material on how to design a product, but only a one brief description of the spirit of the brand in the intranet. There is nothing to help the people understand the brand, like the vision, mission, and values. The brand seems to be based on a product-oriented policy. How come company A is so good even though they seem to be doing wrong in their branding efforts the learning process facilitator wondered?

Over 70 years of experience in a small niche market and a technological edge has made it successful, but there is more competition now and growth is slowing down. Nonetheless, the brand is so good that the financial results are still good. For what reason does company A need the brand? Now the brand is needed to communicate this leading edge to the customers. Branding is more internal in company A according to the brand responsible. It seems though so that by living the brand, the company has achieved good results in the past, but there are new threats from competitors and there is a need to coordinate the branding efforts among business units.

The meaning of the brand for the employees was that the customers still want to buy superior products. There was a lack of implementation of the values in company A according to the interviewees. They knew the values exist and that they are well-defined in the internet, but nobody told them what to do with them and how they can be used. Is it necessary to communicate the values, if we just live them? Product-orientation was mentioned as a problem as well as self-satisfaction. Employees also talked about arrogance as a risk; customers are not contacted.

Management mentioned the same communication and collaboration challenge between business units in the interviews. The different value propositions in the business units can be seen differently by the same customers. The same customer can perceive three different value propositions when contacting the business units. In business-to-business, there is no

need for a strong brand according to the management interviews. The corporate strategy doesn't support the corporate brand. The CEO said that they are not using the brand in the corporate strategy. The brand is very powerful externally, but internally there is little awareness. Is it possible that internal brand knowledge is located somewhere where the student researchers didn't look for it? The strong brand internally is there, the brand responsible said, but how to make it explicit? The truth about the internal brand could be better found among the employees, since management often tends to make things more complex and create more problems. A comment was made about how a strong company perception of the way we do things can be perceived by the external audience as arrogance. People stay for a very long time in company A and they don't need to go the intranet to look for the brand policy, they just do the work. Thus is it so that the brand doesn't exist before it is officially communicated? Is the brand the right kind of brand? One has to realize that the company can't stay where it has been for thirty years, it should also look forward. Even the gurus in the company have to change and their sometimes narrow thinking with the attitude "we know what we are doing" needs to be revised. This narrow thinking is a reason why there is no common brand. There is no talk between the divisions. So is the brand then about developing people? Do we need personnel development?

A vision and a value proposition are needed. The discussion went on by asking, what is the difference between brand and vision. A brand is more practical but they are both aiming at the same thing. The brand needs to be revised and maintained in the future. How to create a new future? What is needed is a new family entrepreneur in company A, but the time we are now living in makes this unrealistic so how to make a new revolution in company A to create a new future? Who should start it? It isn't enough with a leader, there must be an idea. A new business development unit had been founded to think of the future in company A.

Now is a good time to rebuild the brand and define the company culture in company A according to the communication manager. The company will face change anyhow. Sometimes the company needs a crisis to make a change. Now it could be done with respect to what has been done before. A new CEO often doesn't respect the old history of the brand, how to make the brand structures so strong that it survives a new CEO. The CEO of company A is highly respected in the business, although not so known in the public. The way the CEO behaves and what he says and looks like have a strong impact on the brand. The personal label put on the brand is often about the terminology after a new person is develop-

ing the brand. The substance does not change but the new terminology might cause more confusion.

The two groups started to work on the questions and the importance of asking why was reminded to the groups. Instead of jumping to problem solutions we should try to look behind the problem.

Findings from the group discussions

The competition between the business units was seen as a negative phenomenon since it can lead to negative customer satisfaction. Salespeople should be informed about the customer contacts they have had. These contacts could be saved in a database. Salespeople could get bonuses for giving the data promptly. One reason why there is a lack of collaboration between the units was that the information and knowledge exchange is very formal at company A. Informal meetings are seen as a waste of time. This results in few conversations between the members from different divisions. Sports events were seen as one way to increase communication.

The lack of brand awareness was seen as a disadvantage since the company is now shifting from product-orientation to more customer-orientation. The values should help to create a common attitude in the company and this attitude will be transferred to the customer. The long period of market leadership and little competition in the past have led to arrogance and the employees don't see the need for increased customer orientation.

Branding should be used as a management tool and managers need to live the brand, and the sensitivity towards market changes needs to be high. The satisfaction with present results can be a drawback in the future and the company should concentrate on entering new markets, take risks and be more flexible. An internal magazine could be used to support the implementation of the brand. Both personal news and company-related news should be published. The importance of the brand is not acknowledged and there is superficial branding knowledge among management was mentioned as reasons for the fact that the brand is not present in the corporate strategy. The importance of the brand could be enhanced by benchmarking, for example, GE, which is a very technology-oriented company (memo 11.4.2006).

The role of the brand in the balance scorecard was seen as an important question. Should the brand be in the BSC or not? Since the brand is a tool to make money, it can be stated everywhere. At least those who use the BSC should know where the brand is in the BSC. The integration of the brand and the strategy was seen as important. The brand needs support from the strategy. Strong brand leadership is needed on the upper

level of the organization, so that the internal pieces can be brought together to create a big picture of the company. There is silent knowledge of the brand, but nothing is explicit. Instead of trying to change people's behavior, the situation about the brand needs to be clarified in order to increase interest in the brand. The understanding that the brand provides an extra value to the company needs to be promoted. Involving people more in the brand was seen as necessary, so they get an idea of how to use it in their daily work.

Customer-oriented stories are important for the brand and they could also be a means to involve employees. Brand ambassadors in key places in the organization can help people live the brand. Somebody needs to connect the divisions around the brand; networks need to be created in a democratic way. Showing success to everyone is important. Job rotation was mentioned as one way to develop relationships between the divisions. It would help to reinforce the corporate culture. Working groups initiated by top management also could help in creating networks between divisions. (Group solutions)

The joint discussion went on to elaborate the problem. How is arrogance seen in the company? Competition is not taken seriously because of it. Some customers even want to choose a competitor because of the market dominance of company A.

How to store knowledge was discussed; there is a tool for knowledge sharing, but it isn't used. The incentive for using it could be a bonus. To share knowledge doesn't need to be so hard, the attitude needs to be changed. For example, if a project is done between departments, there is a need to make documents available. There is a need for knowledge sharing experiences. All companies have too few informal meetings, which is a question of attitude. Innovation rewards and projects between divisions could be enhanced. When having business meetings in Finland, there could be informal gatherings. In company C, it is the CEO who is responsible for building up one company and one brand, which he does by arranging informal meetings once a month among people to make it happen. There is a difference in feeling responsible to do it and actually liking it. Many dislike to be forced with instructions of what to do.

Two different knowledge management strategies were mentioned; on one hand, codifying information in databases, and on the other hand, the personalization of knowledge. These strategies are good, but one needs to find a balance. One needs personal contacts to share knowledge. Sometimes meetings without an agenda are more useful for sharing knowledge and creating a free flow of information.

The branding consultant joined the discussion by asking what is the brand in company A really about? Why is company A good at measurement? What is especially good in the technology company A is offering? What would the customers say about the brand? What does it mean for them? What one word would you choose to describe the company? Let's say it is precision. If the company wants to be known for that in the market, it chooses that position, then we can go internally and discuss what it means for the culture and outside to develop a concept for communicating the position. This wouldn't take away the problem of having the customers facing different offerings in the business units. Then it is more a coordination problem than a branding problem. A desired position in relation to competition was lacking. Reliability was mentioned to show that position.

Customers are often very straightforward when talking about why they use company A. What is the core of the brand in relation to heritage and desired value? The core of the problem is internal implementation of the brand, not the lack of a brand. By defining which value we will bring to the market, we will optimize our competition and all people in the company should align to that. What about internal branding if we don't have any clients? One should turn it around and take all the heritage and history the company has and think it can be used: by making it easy to understand and by communicating it to the organization. What about those who are not in direct contact with customers? How do you describe the daily living with the customers? It is not difficult to find attributes for the tangible things, but it is a challenge to find the intangible things that make a difference in getting the deal.

Once having defined what the company wants to be known for, it can start by telling a story, then taking it both internally and externally. The stories used externally are also powerful inside the company. Why should one start externally? People start to argue about the meaning of different words that have no relevance for the value. If there is a nice external marketing communications campaign, people also notice it internally and they feel proud. One fundamental thing is to find a common direction for the company. Everybody should align to it. (Brand consultant)

The role of the story can be looked at from the different starting points. Now we look at it from the cultural point of view. There is a story, regardless of we tell it or not. In both company A and C, there are strong stories. Research on corporate culture has declined in favor of research of corporate identity. The story is based on an identity and a community. Behind those there is a face. There are different dialogues in creating the story, firstly the future dialogue where vision and relations to others con-

stitute the brand, secondly the character of the company which constitute the values and the final dialogue is about the journey, which constitutes the strategy. These are all dialogues. If we forget the face behind the dialogues, other dialogues are affected. (Learning process facilitator)

Some generic stories exist, the savior, the pioneer story and the driftwood story are examples of generic stories. These are genetically based in the human being. If we start to look at the brand in pieces, there is a risk in losing sight of what really is the soul behind them. You can actually be very proud of the faces behind the story in company A and C. There is always a face behind a success story. (Learning process facilitator)

The second group presented their ideas to solving the problem in accordance with the comments stated earlier. The idea of the using brand ambassadors was elaborated in more detail. Company C is using brand ambassadors and they consist of managing directors, marketing assistants and sales representatives. They don't get any extra pay for doing it and they are invited once a month to share ideas and information. They are considered a very valuable asset to the brand team.

The first step is to find out where we are. How are we different from competition? If one asks internally, one also finds out what the company is good at. One must talk to different stakeholders, like retailers and to the clients of the different business units. General research about the market situation in different countries needs to be done. Business units are made to make the life of management easier, for the customers they are irrelevant. By telling our story, we tempt the customers to join our tribe. There is a good reason to be employed by company A. The current market situation is assessed and direction is revised if needed. If the company operates in many countries, each market must be assessed separately. Should each business unit be checked so that they are working in accordance with the corporate brand? There is a need for a corporate level control of the brand. There is no need for the business units to have separate value propositions. Therefore, it is so important to go out and talk with the customers.

What if the brand is very much associated with the marketing or communication function in a very engineering-dominated company? Will this make the branding issue more distant and irrelevant to the others?

Somebody in top management or the board needs to take the brand as one of his/her important duties. By talking to sales people, one gets valuable input to justify the brand management. For company A, the next step would be to find out an external view of why the company is good. The brand needs to be described in more detail than before. The brand shouldn't only be developed by marketing people; when develop-

ing the brand as a process it needs to be built, reviewed and managed, a process that takes about 5 years. Yet companies that have built brands are also growing faster than others. Things need to be kept simple in the process. It is about strategic differentiation. The company can't make nice advertising campaigns that are not founded in the desired position in the market. Maybe the role of marketing people is to gather customer data and feed the information to the others to use. Desired reputation is another word to be used in branding, if the word brand isn't suitable for the organization. (Brand consultant)

The teacher researcher presented a knowledge management framework and branding was seen as a functional process (as an expert model), where individual actors are important. Branding is not seen as collaborative and a complex process in the model. Is this an old model of the brand? An example was provided about a company where brand management and financial function was combined. But brand definition was still done among the core group, not involving any others. It is also about education, branding is taught to be a separate function in the company. People graduate from educational institutions with a certain mindset. Company A is already working very collaboratively, for example, in marketing.

Instead of talking about a brand, we need to talk about branding, because it indicates a more active process. This can be linked to the transition in the definition of knowledge. Knowledge is seen either as an asset or a process. Today the process view is more acknowledged. Dialogues are important in the process. Branding needs to be seen as a process. The process is ongoing in brand management. The knowledge sharing process is important. In groups knowledge is often kept among themselves. If there are strong ties between the members in a group, they know the same things and have the same knowledge base and therefore when they share knowledge the value of the knowledge is very low. People from the same functions usually have the same knowledge. Knowledge sharing among functions will provide higher value. Due to scarcity of time, management is not finding out market knowledge for brand management and management tends to keep the same thinking alive among themselves. (Teacher researcher)

Results from bachelor thesis studies at company A

The brand was studied from a strategic point of view and top management was interviewed about the role of the brand in the company strategy. The results indicated that brand knowledge among top management is quite low, there is a lack of realization of the power of the brand and the brand

is seen as a supportive tool. Corporate strategy does not take the brand into account (Delcroix & Lormeau 2005).

In the other thesis, employees were interviewed at different levels in company A and the objective of the research was to assess and analyze the communication and collaboration in the internal branding process in company A. The focus was on brand awareness among the employees. The framework in the thesis combined internal branding with knowledge management. Internal branding was related to the knowledge creation process (Handler & Weiss 2005, 2–3).

The results showed that the brand awareness among the employees isn't very high: one third of the respondents could state the mission and the slogan was known to about 70 % of the respondents. Moreover, the values were not present in their daily work and they are not considered important. Values are mentioned only in the intranet, but nowhere else. One recommendation made in the thesis was to create more places where knowledge about the brand can be shared and created. Communication was not seen as open and the model of the supervisors was emphasized in internal branding communication. The role of informal meetings is still underestimated in company A. The competition between business units was seen as a big challenge in communication. Although employees are not committed to the brand policy, they are very open towards learning. They are also committed to the company and they are satisfied with their workplace. These results were considered as significant characteristics for the success of internal branding. The next phase in internal branding is to transform the data and information in the brand policy into knowledge and wisdom in the mind of the employees (Handler & Weiss 2005, 80–83).

In the recommendations section, an internal brand education was suggested for company A. The internal branding process needs to be seen as a change process in the company. It takes time and continuous messages. Therefore, people need to first understand the nature of the change before they will believe and act upon the change. A speech by the CEO and a poster campaign are not enough. Training about the importance of the brand is necessary. The process has to be truly educational and involving as well as inspiring. The internal branding campaign needs to fit the external marketing message. Internal company processes have to be evaluated in light of the goal of internal branding. Brand values need to be represented in performance criteria. Brand values also need to be translated for the employees and they have to become meaningful as the brand thinking is internalized. The brand knowledge of the employees can be used whenever needed. To be able to get the strong benefits of a

brand, brand policy needs to be clear, consistent and constant. This would diminish the confusion among employees and provide a clear direction. Constancy means visibility for the employees, brand thinking needs to always be present.

Employees need to be put in the official brand policy of the company since they are currently not mentioned in the company values. The idea of people branding is spreading in companies. Words like “optimistic” and “trustworthy” show how employees are considered in defining corporate brand values as an active part of the brand. Mentoring was suggested as one part of the internal branding education. Mentoring is seen as a good way of keeping and transferring experiences and knowledge (Handler & Weiss 2005, 87–92).

Training of the brand policy should be aimed at overcoming the knowing-doing gap, which emerged in the survey among employees. The implementation of the brand policy in everyday work is the main goal of the training. Leadership by example was also mentioned as important in the training. Knowledge sharing is crucial in this process and it should take place between functions. Openness is emphasized in the process (Handler & Weiss 2005, 93–95).

The role of visual communication to increase the brand awareness is important. Employees need to be exposed to the brand in many places. Visual signs about the brand can enable the start of a knowledge sharing process whenever the employees meet, for example, in staff restaurant, at the work desks, etc. By arranging an Open Day for inside and outside stakeholders, there are possibilities to create brand involvement (Handler & Weiss 2005, 95–100).

Closing discussion at company A

The amount of participants was quite low, but there was a fruitful discussion about the need for communicating the brand in the company. The corporate communications is young in the company and it was established mainly for investor-related communication. One idea about how to communicate the values to the employees was to mention the way the values were created among the employees. This could increase the motivation when realized that the values actually come from the employees. A mentoring system for new employees was discussed as a way to introduce the corporate brand. Finally the PBL-approach as a tool for communicating the brand internally was discussed. The process will go on in company A and in order to get people involved, the PBL discussion needs a name that indicates the target of the session (Memo 3.5.2005).

4.3 Company B

Company B operates in insurance, banking, saving and investment services to consumers and corporate clients. The company was established 24 years ago through a merger. The historical roots date back to 1857. The insurance group is customer-owned and it employs about 2,400 people. In year 2003, the profits were EUR 246 million and the turnover had risen by 9.3 %. The business idea of the company is to promote economic security for its customers. The business idea is based on four values: customer benefit, shared success, ethical activity and entrepreneurship. These values create a ground for company B's strategic aims and success factors. Customers are the number one priority in the company. The customer owners receive benefits, not only from the company B, but also from the partners of the company. The brand is built to meet the intended image of the insurance group. The brand is crystallized in the promise of an expert that sincerely cares about its customers. The common vision, mission and strategy of the company aim at making the brand promise come true. The brand policy is described in a brand booklet for the employees. Basic customer needs, appreciation, serenity and financial benefit are significant brand attributes of company B. Personalized customer service is emphasized.

The role of the personnel in delivering the brand promise is emphasized in company B. With the shared values described above, the employees know what they are trying to achieve through their work and what is the company way to do it. In their work, the personnel is encouraged to think not only for today, but also for the customer of tomorrow (Brand manual company B; Früchtenicht et al. 2005, 3–4).

4.3.1 Background of internal branding efforts and internal branding problem

Company B has been very successful in the B-to-C markets for several years. The branding work has been successfully led by a brand manager. The challenge in branding is at the moment in the B-to-B markets, where company B is expanding by introducing new services and where company B's image is less known and favorable. They aim at enhancing the image of the company among corporate clients. The research topic studied in the branding research project by the students was to find out how company B can distinguish itself as an all-encompassing service provider in B-to-B markets. How should the communication of the personalized services be done so that B-to-B customers' perceptions and knowledge about company B's service offerings are strengthened? How to communicate

the services with the help of the key account managers? (Früchtenicht et. al 2005, 1)

Opening discussion at company B

The problem was described in a trigger, which was about an entrepreneur facing a bad day at his company. A worker had had an accident and he was unsure whether he would recover to return to work. In addition, the export secretary had been delayed from an important meeting in China, which could have led to a contract doubling the yearly sales. He was pondering about how an insurance company had contacted him to discuss voluntary employee insurance, but he hadn't had time to think about it. Now he didn't even remember the name of the company which contacted him. He compared in his mind the different insurance companies and what they really offer. He checked the internet, but all offer the same kind of services; everybody offers expertise. Is it possible to get personalized services from a bigger company? A bigger company might be more professional because of its size. Since the company is increasingly arranging trips abroad, the need for insurance was important. He felt stressed out by the mess and wished somebody from the insurance company would come to solve his problems (Company B, trigger 11.3.2005).

The participants of the opening discussion were the brand manager, the B-to-B business manager, two other managers involved in selling insurance to companies as well as two Helia teachers and four students. The discussion about the problem started with the question of what does the entrepreneur really know about insurance. The role of the key personnel and their insurance protection in international business is a growing concern in companies. Accidents are compensated through mandatory insurance, but how does one to get the small and medium-sized entrepreneurs interested in voluntary insurance? The aim of company B is to create an image of a company that takes care of clients' problems and considers what if something happens.

The problem might be that company B hasn't been able to communicate the services to the companies. Although sales representatives have discussed the need for voluntary insurance, the entrepreneur hasn't seen the need for it. Usually the client companies don't have anybody responsible for the insurances, but prefer to outsource the services. Company B wishes to be seen as a partner in this gap. Insurance is considered mandatory. Accidents can't be hindered. But what happens when the key personnel is retiring or switching jobs, how can the company keep the knowledge when younger employees are replacing the people retiring?

The core issue is how to differentiate through the personnel risk expertise. How to create an image of easiness and workability in the expertise? Preventing accidents was seen as a solution, but how to get the SME's interested? Price competition was seen as a non-profitting way of competing in the long run. In image research, clients do not see any difference between the insurance companies, so the role of expertise takes on more importance. Price competition leads to a cut in service consumption, thus what is the value of a little savings when talking about a change of generation or knowledge transfer risks? Companies often talk about business risks and banks are seen as the best means to take care of business risks. Business and money matters are part of everyday business, but insurance matters are more distant. So what are the benefits from the voluntary insurance company B offers and how are the benefits to be presented? The savings provided by insurance need to be presented in figures, since it is a visible part of the insurance.

The following topics were related to the role of voluntary insurance and why they are not considered more in relation to legal insurance. How could this personnel risk expertise be made visible in the brand? A clear service concept might help build the image to the customer. To build an all-encompassing service concept would represent a customer-oriented way of providing insurance services. Thus the problem was defined as: how to profile company B into a comprehensive personnel risk service provider?

The brainstorming provided a broad picture of the problem. On one side there was company B, and on the other side there was the client company. Solutions were the main flow from the insurance provider to the client company and topics like comprehensive, international, expert image, client needs, seller's knowledge, rise of interest and need. Questions for company B were how to get the best employees and how to keep them? The client company has **problems** related to personnel risks: key personnel, owner, professionalism, maintaining the level of knowledge, retirement program, ageing of personnel, continuity of business. The solutions provided are prohibition of risks, risk management, people and the offering of a **comprehensive service**. The goals are **competitive advantage and differentiation**, providing benefits, common benefit and comprehensive service.

The discussion and brainstorming was summarized in two development objectives: How to strengthen the image and knowledge of company B as an expert in personnel risk? How to provide the key account managers a comprehensive picture of the personnel related insurance problems

in order to interpret the client situation and provide process consulting?
(Memo 11.3.2005)

4.3.2 MCP workshop on Branding and Leadership

The workshop day started with evaluations of the previous workshop. Company C's brand manager explained how the comparison with company A was very fruitful. She learned that their own top management's support for the brand is very valuable, but that they still have a lot to learn from the internationalization of company A. Company A, on the other hand, needs to get the top management's support for the brand. The person responsible for the brand in company A explained how the brand's strong heritage is a kind of burden in the brand development. However, there are now messages from different sources supporting the ideas of the branding people.

The process facilitator started by asking the question whether a leadership expert should be interested in branding today. The learning community has become a good group, but there is risk when we notice that our thinking and our problems are alike. Learning means a new perspective, either the group is able to create that new perspective or it comes from the outside. In this case we can't expect it from the outside.

The process facilitator started to list important questions related to the brand. Where is the brand located? Can the brand create our future or does it lag behind? The brand creates content, not only describing it. How does the soul of the company affect the brand? What makes the brand fail? If today we are talking about the brand, what was it yesterday? Does the brand exist although it is not built? If the brand has to be authentic, can it be profitable? The promises we have to make to the clients are so big in the case of authenticity, so can the company then be profitable? In this situation the customers are seen as people. Can we talk about a brand if it is not managed, but there is enthusiasm in what the company is doing? If the company is honest, can it also be profitable? If the company activities are meaningful, is the brand then about creating meaning? When talking about knowledge creation there is a difference between co-creation of knowledge and sharing knowledge and when talking about branding and leadership, there is a need for co-creation since the connection between the concepts is not there yet.

The brand aims at strategic change, which can be based on three different assumptions. If the underlying assumption is based on power thinking, leadership is done with a specific agenda, and the topics of the

agenda depend on the power these topics have. In this thinking, the brand is seen as a manipulative tool. Consumer movements fighting against the global brands exploiting the world, was mentioned as an example.

The other assumption is based on rationality. The company is seen as rational activity. The Finnish mentality is very rational. Knowledge sharing means transferring knowledge to those who don't have it. Brand in this assumption is seen as information and knowledge. Brand management is a system and brand leadership is managing the system. This approach applies very much to company A according to the brand responsible, and we need new words to present the brand to the engineers. Brand management needs to be on the strategic agenda and it is dangerous for the nature of the brand concept to translate it into rational language according to the brand manager of company B. The interpretation of the MCP participants' comments indicate that although people might think like the comment stated above, the adjustment to the rational assumption make us talk like we represent the rational worldview. How can we get more nuances in the brand? It needs to be documented in such a way that everybody needs to get an insight through it.

The last assumption is the community. Our background and experiences affect the assumption we have and live. Leadership is based on this assumption. Leadership came to Finland from Japan, where culture is the basis. These thoughts were taken to Finland without realizing that our culture doesn't support the "belonging together" idea. Vision and values are the leadership tools, and leadership is about creating meaning and leading the culture.

Contents can be used from the perspective of the different assumptions. The rational leadership view of leading with values is to come up with the values and communicate them. One example of how a company decided their values was by looking at the values of their competitors and copy the ones they liked the most, which was suggested as a rational way of adopting values. In the previous workshop, it was commented that community can't be an end in itself, but actually from the community perspective it can be.

In the service sector there is a greater need for the community assumption. It is even necessary. Yet in many service companies there is a rational, machine assumption prevailing and it seems, according to the process facilitator that in company A and C, the two Finnish icons in business, the companies are made into machines by diminishing the importance of the culture of the founders. It is quite rare in Finland that the leadership is based on profound roots and company culture. From the brand building point of view, it is the only lasting ground, commit-

ment to the culture happens through leadership examples according to the brand manager of company B. The services are nowadays alike, but the working principles and value base grounded in a commonly agreed way of working in the company are making a difference.

Does the management really have the courage to go out and say that we don't know where we are going? If we assume that vision and brand have a connection, how could they be done so that it involves people? The strategy is often implemented with a slide show, which overloads the audience with information. The brand from the community perspective means belongingness and a common feeling and brand leadership is ongoing discussion, not simply giving out information on the brand or asking acceptance for the brand.

The company is a community and it has a story. The strategy discussion is needed to keep up the story. The vision discussion is heading towards the future and the brand discussion is defining the roles of us and them, what we want to be to the outside. The role of the brand manual or book was questioned, is it something more than information? If the brand book is defining a common goal, then it is justified. If it is made together it is more valuable. The brand book is often a book where you want to tell somebody something and this is a risk. The value discussion is about defining what we are like, it is about internal definition. The main point is not to have the same values, but to discuss what is important in the company.

The discussion should move between the levels of power, rationality and community. When decisions are made in brand management, we need to ask if we are losing the feeling of the brand or what will happen? If the strategy and brand are communicated as they are defined among management, nobody will understand what they are all about. If every manager has to think of what it means in his/her department and how it is performed in everyday activity, it will be more powerful. It is not necessary to talk about the brand. Thus, we are back to the question of whether it might be better to not use the whole word brand.

In company D there is a clear machine assumption, and when they started to think of the brand, there was a power game to get the topic on the agenda. But the aim is to get 22,000 people to be a community and to think somehow in the same direction. The process slowly comes true, the promise we make it together indicates this aim. If the same words are used as in the management jargon, the message will not be understood. It must happen in activities, then there will be the feeling. 22,000 people can't be a community, a division is not automatically a community, a community consists of people who want to work together and who share

a common goal. Sometimes borders are broken and people are put together in new groups, it is not necessarily good for the community since the community needs to assess what does this mean for us.

Everybody doesn't have to accept the strategy and the brand, and those who do not accept it, will make conclusions that they are in the wrong place. In companies, there is the fear that conflicts will arise, but actually then people are not given a chance to make a choice.

The brand manager of company B emphasized in her presentation the long-term commitment to the brand and how the work is deeply grounded in the everyday activities. The brand and its values are the attraction of the company. The brand is a key element in strategic leadership. Strategy was done in a group of 70 people. The core in branding is that the contents do not contradict each other in the strategy. 2,500 people are focused in making the vision come true and to get customers to recommend their services. The generation of the strategic work was done in the same process as the brand. The ethical code is very strict, creating the standard in the business. Economic knowledge is also very profound in the corporate sector, although the image of the company is not clear among the corporate clients. The sincere caring of the customer, as defined in the brand, is important. The brand position that defines what the company wants to be is not going to be changed in 10 years. The process of redefining the brand was made so that every part of management and the board was involved in the acceptance of the brand goals. Seven divisions have common strategic goals.

In the induction of new employees, branding plays an important role. The value discussion in the company started already in the 80's. Every two years a study is made about the commitment to values among the employees. Communication has a big role in service marketing. The reactions of our own employees to external communications are not followed according to the brand manager. In brand management leadership is very important. The brand is made of all the activities like product/price and distribution channels. The community ownership is not present in the brand definition, but it is the main resource of company B. The services are only one way to build the brand, in differentiation a long-term focus is emphasized, new services are created based on customer needs and feedback. The personnel is the key factor in making this come true. The customers are empowered by the expertise of company B. A big part of the employees use the services of their employer.

When the brand is understood as an image, company B has a big gap in the corporate sector compared to its competitors. Banks are usually seen as more trustworthy in the market. Company B wants to be a big

financial player in the Finnish market and therefore it compares itself to the banks. The lack of profile is the problem. If the problem is not a communication problem, should we first work on our own image of ourselves. “With what kind of process could the employees learn the new role of financial services? How to create an exploratory, knowledge creating process to get rid of the product-orientation? In the corporate sector, the goal of the brand is to enable the continuity of the clients’ business.

The question for the group to solve is to find out the internal learning process of developing the corporate brand. What are the roles in leadership of the different contents (mission, values, vision) presented in the strategic leadership model of the brand at company B?

Findings from the groups

The solutions/questions from the group to company B was whether the brand promise really appeals to the corporate markets and is the company international since the clients are increasingly international? Does the corporate client expect economic expertise? Do the employees know what the clients want and are they committed to B-to-B brand development? A suggestion would be to really take some key clients along in the process, to find out what is the key factor affecting the final deal. “We know what the clients expect from us,” said the brand manager and referred to a lot of research. In international activities the company is co-operating. Lack of internationalism is a shortcoming in the corporate brand definition. Do the employees know or understand the brand? What does understanding mean from a community perspective? Is there a contradiction between the idea of customer ownership and business perspective of the corporate clients? Are the employees truly proud of their B-to-B brand? Today the customer is unpredictable, not behaving according to a pre-determined process. Behind the needs are the concerns of the customers. A process is forced between the provider with a heart and the client with a concern. The corporate client feels the consumer brand is so strong in company B that it hinders the corporate business decision maker to choose the brand. Every contact has to provide a benefit to the client. Is the brand promise too caring? Maybe the business client wants speed and flexibility instead of a brand promise that is too soft.

The real concern is helping to predict the needs of the clients. The aim of company B is to find clients that share the same values according to the B-to-B business manager. They accept the fact that not every company will be interested. The idea of customer-ownership hasn’t been determined in the corporate brand and it is a really relevant question, according to the B-to-B business manager. Next, the discussion went on

to judge the need of changing the strategic direction. Markets change faster and faster all the time, so there was concern that the statement made earlier by the brand manager that the brand strategy has not changed in 10 years is too strong. It can give the wrong image to the clients and the employees; an image of a company not willing to change. The brand manager said that the brand work is long-term and it needs to be so. The fixed goal is not so important in the vision. The vision needs to provide the driver for the company. In this business, clients are not taken care of. Therefore, the vision that takes the client into account is so important. The level of ambition is very high in the vision.

The formula to get the employees involved is not to explain to them, but to make them find out. To create a process to get a critical mass moving is an important next step. A change needs at least three years to be implemented. The problem-based learning approach was suggested as a tool to enable the learning process.

Results from brand project in company B

A group of Helia students arranged an additional PBL-discussion in company B for the eight key account managers serving corporate clients on personnel risk management. The aim of the discussion was to find out how they perceived the role of the brand in selling insurance solutions to corporate clients. The discussion was used a data in the project report presented by Früchtenicht, Lipponen, Venäläinen and Virtanen (2005).

The functional benefits of the brand were emphasized by the key account managers, their attitude was very service- and solution-oriented and the brand seemed to play a minor role. The spiritual dimensions in the brand were mentioned. The company was seen as very ethical and many of the key account managers shared the same values as the company. The idea of partnership was mentioned, but some argued that there is still some way to go before the company accomplishes the goal of long-lasting partnerships with the corporate clients. Although the brand aims at sincere customer care, the key account managers didn't emphasize close relationships with the clients. One comment indicated that the company is partly professional and caring for the customers. However, especially those who had worked for the company for many years stated that the brand has improved drastically. Yet they felt that the process is still in the beginning and that the company is not flexible, innovative and dynamic enough. There was a remark made by the student group that the key account managers seemed to know the brand, but they didn't know how to utilize it to the maximum in their daily work. Since the key account managers are playing a crucial role in building the brand to

the corporate clients, the brand promise potential is not fully used. The functional benefits of the brand have been internalized, but the emotional benefits are not emphasized. They have the knowledge of the both sides in the brand, but they don't rely on the emotional benefits of the brand when they convince the clients of the expertise the company provides (Früchtenicht et.al 2005, 22–24).

The key account managers claimed that they have internalized the values of the company, but when asked to articulate them they were not able to do it. When asked about the brand benefit for the customer, there was difficulty in putting it into words and the reply was that “at least the brand doesn't prevent me from selling the service.” These comments indicate that the culturalization of the brand hasn't been taken into full effect. The brand promise is causing confusion on both the employee side and on the customer side. The personal relation and the service situation are considered the most important in a competitive situation.

Word-of-mouth and personal experiences of the brand create a positive perception of the service provider according to the key account managers. One sales manager had talked to over 100 non-customers and most of them had a very positive image of the brand. The reputation of the company is very good: there have been no scandals in the public according to the respondents (memo 20.04.2005). An interview with one customer justified this information, the positive past experience made her choose company B as service provider and she also claimed that the brand values are reflected in the personnel. Professionalism was emphasized by the key account managers as well as the ability to speak the language of the customer. To be able to relate to the customer's situation is a winning factor in the business. There seem to be a gap between the external perception of professionalism and the internal understanding (Früchtenicht et.al 2005, 24–28).

The student researchers provided suggestions for the communication of the brand as an all-encompassing service provider in their brand manual. The need for a story was emphasized and a suggestion for a brand story was presented. A brand promise based on partnership for life was introduced for the B-to-B business sector, which is a broader idea for the brand than the earlier based on partnership for business (Früchtenicht et.al 2005, 9).

The closing discussion with management was arranged to elaborate on the results from the workshop day and research. The results were familiar to the management and they realized the need for a deeper culturalization of the brand among the key account managers. As the results showed, some have internalized the values and the brand very well and some are

less interested. The long-term focus of the process was emphasized. The possibility of using problem-based learning was discussed and there was some interest to use the process in internal branding.

4.4 Company D

Company D offers technical infrastructure investment and services for the property and construction sector, industry and telecommunications. The main market areas are the Nordic countries, the Baltic countries and Russia. The company employs about 22,000 people in eight countries. In 2004, the net sales was about EUR 3 billion and an operating profit of over EUR 130 million. The focus of the internal branding problem was on one business unit with a staff of over 4,000.

4.4.1 Background of the internal branding efforts and the internal branding problem

The business unit involved in the Multi-Client project provides real estate for the consumer market. The mission of company D is to build and maintain a good living environment for people. The launch of the sub-brand for consumer real estate to support the mission was made eight years ago. The brand building is in the initial stages, and therefore the strengthening of the brand internally was a major goal of the research. The student researchers studied the internal brand situation by interviewing the middle and top management. Another objective of the research was to investigate the perceptions and roles of the real estate agencies selling the brand of company D. How to improve the commitment of the employee to the brand was another goal of the research.

Opening discussion at company D

The trigger described a situation in which a marketing specialist at the company is hired to develop the brand. He is enthusiastic about the task and he thinks he can truly make an impact on the brand, since the development is still quite in an early phase. Due to the competition and the expansion of the business to new markets, there is a need for a strong, common brand. Differentiation in the construction business is very challenging, but a strong brand can strengthen the market position. The employee decides to research customer satisfaction as well as the internal images of the brand. The results are surprisingly positive; customer trust has been created through the values and the level of the

service. He observes the employees and they believe that company D offers excellent, high-quality services. However, when he asks about the internal communication of the brand and the perceptions of the brand, the variety of responses grows. Some employees are really committed to the brand and feel that it is important. Some employees have a strong project- and product-oriented thinking, and they don't necessarily see the need for brand communication and building the image.

Five representatives from company D's management participated in the opening discussion, and the discussion started by evaluating the truthfulness of the trigger story. It is a challenge to get 17 business units to work together. A common view of the brand is lacking. Company D is perceived by clients as a trustworthy service provider, but the sub-brand is often linked to the corporate brand. One sales manager felt that she wasn't able to articulate the brand, so the final definition is missing and therefore the message to stakeholders is blurred.

The way of working in the company involves a lengthy process in which employees seek consensus before there is action. The goal is a personalized service offer to the customer. A comment of how to differentiate was made and the reply by the same manager was by the product, although now service is emphasized. There has been a decision that it isn't a product brand, but still we are behaving like it is a product brand. Is it because the brand is so young? It is not easy to bring a brand to this market. The product promise was left for a long time on the website. Among the sales people, service plays a big role and the whole process should start with the employees. Good service, but what does it mean? The productization of the service is still not ready. The role of the construction ground is unclear and how does the customer see evidence of the service?

Internal communication needs to be improved and ways to have the customer to concretely feel the service promise need to be developed. We need a common agreement on what the service is like. There is also a need for measuring. People in contact with the customers do understand the service process but what about the participation of management? The service process is presented in a slide, but has management thought about what does service mean in the processes? It is not enough to see it only as a management issue. How to motivate the employees in the field? Usually we are just given the real estate to sell, no guidelines are given. With the support of management, these issues will be taken further. How to get the value of the brand to be important to everybody? Brand issues are forgotten, for example when planning a new living area. The slogan "we make it together" needs to be defined. It should be seen in every step of the process. What does the slogan mean in everybody's work? The problem

was defined around the following key words: brand definition, commitment of management and brand communication. The problem in one sentence was: how to get a common agreement about the brand?

The brainstorming was categorized into four categories with the customer process and customer orientation in the middle affecting each category. **Brand development** contained the definition of the brand, strategy, yearly planning, slogan elaboration, brand development process, promise and the evidence of it. Under **management/leadership** responsibility areas, commitment, agenda and leadership were categorized. **External communication** contained communication, marketing, presentations, PR, a website, visual material, consistent communication and presentation material for different occasions. **Internal communication** contained common practices, smaller pieces, communication of practices, training, induction, the balance scorecard, measurements and internal magazines.

After the brainstorm, the discussion went on to include that the customer process is under construction and it should be the starting point. Is it understood how big the decision is when deciding on the use of a sales file, or are the actions lacking? Big changes don't take place if they are not made to happen. It is not enough to give instructions from above. How to get understanding among the employees through training? It needs to be internalized in order to succeed. The role of line/senior management is important; if they are not giving support and not provide the conditions, others can't do it. If it is a senior management issue, then it is seen as important and it will show in the balance score card. Brand measurement needs to be in the balance score card.

The development objectives concluded the discussion and they are how to get senior management involved? How should they be supported when going out of the comfort zone? How to do the processes together (memo 17.5.2005)?

4.4.2 MCP workshop on Branding and Leadership

The presentation by the company D representative started with the statement of how they want to see the brand internally. It is reputation you deserve and not an image you create with advertising. It is a way of working. It should be a service brand and therefore it affects everything we do, not only in communication. The company has grown a lot over the last ten years. Internally we don't really know who we are. This is seen in international offices where the local aspect has to be acknowledged. The headquarters can't dictate the brand. A model for the brand was presented,

its strengths and weaknesses, as well as the needs of the customers in relation to its competitors.

The leadership culture in the company is based on business units and their results. Goals are given and the units perform. The brand needs to be developed in the marketing and development department, which is physically very distant from the business units. External visual elements of the brand are always the same. The corporate brand has been defined with a four dimension model. The functional, emotional, psychological dimensions are defined. The brand is presented in the vision and mission. The model was made partly based on the research Helia students did earlier, but the implementation of the model is still incomplete. The corporate brand was created among eight people, based on existing internal and external research. There was a feeling of emergency, since the company had nothing defined for the brand. The implementation of the corporate brand is the next step.

Currently, it is a challenge for the sub-brand to be linked to the corporate brand. Three years ago there was a decision that the sub-brand needs to be separated from the corporate brand since the values for the consumer market are much softer than on the B-to-B side. The sub-brand is defined as a service process. The goal to have a satisfied customer as a real estate buyer is not self evident; one can always blame the distribution channel and sales and there will always be dissatisfied customers is the argument often heard. One needs to exceed the expectations of the customer so that he recommends the brand to his friend.

The slogan of “let’s make it together” is proven in the sales function. The sales people need to understand the dreams of the buyer, individual desires are easy to fulfill. We would like to be the customer’s number one choice. The location of the real estate is very important. The soul needs to be created for the location first when planning new living areas. The image of construction companies is generally bad. The industry is not very dynamic. By following trends in living you can create a more dynamic image. The hard image of the construction business still affects the perceptions of the customers. The image of the brand is a guy in work overalls and he is really not the person I would like to have in my home. How does this image affect the brand?

We want to understand the customer and their differences and the Risc Monitor research gives us good information about the values of the customers. How to give space to the common reflection on what we are? It is nice to see information that we receive a better grade than the competitors. We have founded different working groups for the implementation of the brand. It is important to choose the right word in

branding; it is about bringing the brand into practices. The establishment of cross-divisionary working groups was quite a hard task, since people responded that they can't work to benefit the other business units because of competition.

People need to get to know each other. It is nice to notice the same problems and to share information and knowledge. They need to feel that it is beneficial for them. It can't be done so that the top management is forcing it on the people. At the moment fifty people are participating in the working groups. The decision making is made in the steering group. How big is the share of those who are participating? Only about 10–20 % and it is still too small. Can the steering group decide about an issue, although the working group whom it concerns is of another opinion? Yes, it can decide if it considers the decision necessary for the good of the whole.

In company B they have the same kind of organization and there are problems in the implementation, since the discussions are mainly about issues that don't disturb any other business units instead of making decisions that might have an impact on the life of another line of business. Without an organization that supports discussion across business units, it is impossible to make decisions that are difficult for a specific business unit. The branding issues also need to be in the Balance score card, then the topic gets attention. After a couple of difficult agreements across business units, we can say that it is worth it in company B but the organization structure needs to support those discussions.

The combination model of the customer and company processes has been made to find out about the activities affecting the service chain in company B. The brand is present in the contacts to the customers. What is the role of the brand in this model? Is it a working tool or a perspective? It is an image, which is born through the contacts, it is not a tool. The brand exists "an siich". But the engineer needs to have something concrete. The company has a need to make processes of everything. Customer feedback surveys are not only part of a boring quality system, but to show real care for the customer. Is the brand part of the offering? Yes and no. The customer ownership in company B means the customers are buying because of our human values so it can be seen as a part of the offering. It is about creating attraction. Some companies like Ferrari and Stockmann have that brand attraction. The brand contains everything, it is built in everything but it is still separate. The brand image in people's minds is in different stages, and it is born with the service, the contacts and the problem solutions they get. The image is based on knowledge from feeling and experiences. It is dangerous to think that it

is a part of the offering, it is so much more. But when looking at it from the customer's perspective, it can be seen as a part of the offering. The image of the whole industry is a problem and a challenge to change in the case of company D.

The problem questions identified from the company D representative to the working group is how to lead the brand more openly, so the topic isn't just put to the agenda through manipulation, but it would be part of leadership? How to get the other employees join the brand discussion outside the core group? What are the traps in this process? Is the meeting the only way to implement the discussion? The meeting forum is there and needed. Is it so that the activity in the meeting rooms in the company hasn't changed like it has changed for example in Helia's classrooms nowadays? How to get the people out from the meetings? How could Helia students for example bring company representatives to other companies to see other realities?

The process went on by presenting the questions identified by the working group. Is there a real need to build the sub-brand separate from the corporate brand which is a strong brand and could be made even stronger? What level is enough for brand commitment in the company? Is it enough that management, sales and marketing are committed or should it be taken to the construction sites too for the guys in overalls to buy-in to the brand? The first question was relevant responded the company D representative, but the decision had been made earlier. It just had to be made sense of. How big would the change be if this decision is revised? It is more about the internal commitment. One brand gets more power. If brand differentiation from competitors is about service, the brand is relevant for the whole group. The decision was made because of the consumer markets, the B-to-B business is very different from the consumer markets with different promises. maybe the markets But are not so different anyway it is more a denomination of the corporate brand. There are so much in common, so the work wouldn't need to be started from zero. This is a relevant question, but it can't be brought to the agenda now, the decision can't be questioned at the moment. Nobody would have the guts to do it.

In company B they also tried to build a separate B-to-B brand but after two years of development work, there was a decision that it will not work. In our company there is always a new sub-brand created, when the logo is made there is a feeling the brand exits said the representative from company D. We could have had that situation in company B too, if the brand manager hadn't been so strict. The logo should reflect the soul of the brand, the promise of the service. Therefore company D needs

different promises for the B-to-C brand. The message is much softer and emphasizes the feelings related to housing. The decision to have one brand is also affected by the fact the legal protection of the brand is very expensive in international business. The brand is seen in the company as a sales issue, others don't have to be concerned according to the company D representative.

The tracking of hard business facts, like the change in sales figures after the brand change, is good evidence. There are clear facts that have affected the market shares after the brand change the first is the brand attractiveness which has improved in company B. What are the community measures to follow? The top management will look at sales figures, if it is fun to work in the company is not a topic for them. But in employee surveys, there is a question of how proud the employee is to work in the company and that is an important measure for the brand. Are you willing to recommend the product to your friends is another key question for the employee brand.

How to get the understanding to the management that branding is not a project, but an ongoing process, a way of operating? How to achieve real commitment among top management? The decisions made in business units can be disastrous for some parts of the business but necessary to save the whole of the business. What branding measures are used in the higher levels of the organization, the hierarchy of measures needs to be reflecting the same things. In company A the measures are more related to the products.

How many buys the product the second time? Does the sub-brand differ from other brands in the business? Can it survive in a tough environment? Can the brand concept be used for the next ten years? What is the real goal for creating a new brand? What is changing internally and in relation to customers outside because of the brand? These were the next questions identified by the working group. The service promise needs to be more general, on a higher level than it is now. We have done a lot of work to improve the service processes so that the customers can really choose their type of real estate said the company D representative. Competitors are following our model with their brands. What if we are just adjusting to the development, should we look for another way to develop the brand?

How to commit the new management on the corporate level to the decisions made by old management? How to bring these questions forward in the company? Would the group who made the corporate brand be a good place to start to sell the idea of building a corporate brand instead of focusing on the sub-brand? Company D representative agreed that

these were every relevant and important questions for the management in the company to consider.

Findings from the student research on internal branding

The interviews were made among the management of company D sub-brand and among the real estate agencies that are selling the homes built by company D. The first conclusion to be made from the research is the fact that management had a much more critical perception of the positioning and differentiation of the brand in the market compared to the real estate agencies selling the homes. The real estate agency representatives perceived the brand as an asset and they acknowledge the need for strict marketing and sales guidelines of the brand.

Internally there seems to be confusion about the role of the brand, the consumer service brand didn't clearly stand out from the answers. More attributes related to the corporate brand were mentioned. The role of the consumer sub-brand in the corporate strategy wasn't clear this can be seen also in the answers of the management, who felt a lack of support to the brand from top management. One comment was stating that "the brand is seen as a separate thing from management, branding needs to be taken in to decision making". Thanks to the international business brand related issues are taken into strategic decision making was another comment. There has been a change over the last years, although decisions are still driven by profit-making expectations. There was a discrepancy among the answers by the management to how the brand related measures are related to the strategic decision making. The measurement of brand equity is not done at the moment and regarding this question the answers were consistent. (De Godzinsky & Hautière-Le Cléac'h 2005, 58–71.)

When asking about how well the employees understand the values of the brand, the answers varied. There is still confusion, although improvement has taken place. There are problems in communicating and keeping promises and there is a need for more discussion about what the brand means among employees. There is still too much project orientation and a lack of unification. But to the question of how well the people who are communicating the brand are aware of the brand values, the answers indicate that they are much more aware than in the whole organization. The brand values need to be easier to communicate. There was a discrepancy in the answers, indicating both high commitment and low awareness. Not all relevant personnel are really taken into the brand building process. "It is a long process and we have started a systematic way of making it better in the company". (De Godzinsky & Hautière-Le Cléac'h 2005, 48–58.)

5

Discussion

5.1 Analysis of the internal branding challenges in MCP companies

■ The model in figure 5 serves as a basis for the analysis of each MCP company. I adopt the concepts of the model to the findings of the analysis.

5.1.1 Company C

Co-creation of the brand

The cooperation between the brand manager and HR manager in the brand team indicates that collaborative branding is already beginning to take place. Both are part of the central organization of company C and they have a clear goal to build one brand in the company. Company brand management is clearly defined and it is directly under the management team which steers the brand team's work. The company has "brand ambassadors" in each country to promote brand issues on a company-wide level (company material).

Purpose and vision

However, the three strong SBUs seem to live their own lives and the joint brand building effort is not succeeding as the brand team wishes. The purpose and the vision of the whole organization are not clear. The growth of the company and the internationalization are affecting the common purpose and vision. The strong culture, based on family values and the company values, is also affecting the development of the company. The brand is not linked to the strategy and there is a lack of corporate level strategy to support the brand building efforts. Each SBU has their own definitions of strategy and the location of the brand in these strategy

documents is different. In one SBU the brand is a part of the customer perspective in the Balance Score Card matrix and in another SBU the brand isn't mentioned at all. The brand promise isn't clearly described in any of the strategy documents (company material).

The tools identified in the brainstorming during the opening session in the company indicate a high level of understanding of the role of compensation and common understanding in building the brand. (Opening memo) The learning community aspect was mentioned and although internal branding workshops had been arranged during a couple of years, there was a concern in the brand team of how the comprehension of the brand had succeeded. Feedback gathered from personnel indicates that brand promise perceptions vary among the different SBUs. Brand promise is defined as customer care, reliability and creativity. These were not directly mentioned in the feedback and there was a question posed by company respondents regarding the need of a specific brand promise (company material).

Context

Stakeholders other than the customer were not mentioned in the problem analysis and the context of the brand was not identified. The role of the employees seems to be very important as the company spirit and culture are mentioned very often, but on the other hand the employees do not collaborate in the brand development work. The managers create the brand content, and it is then communicated to the employees. Is this a crucial factor to be considered when assessing the outcome of the branding efforts? Otherwise brand content is defined, the culture and values are strong brand tools, and the brand identity is described in a brand positioning figure. The customer needs are the basis and the rational advantages are described as customer care and system provider. Brand personality is defined as European, professional, informative and customer-oriented. The symbolic elements are thoroughly defined in the brand manual. The brand promise is crystallized in customer care, reliability and creativity as earlier described. The brand has clear values related to the company values, which gives it a strong foundation for making a difference in the market (company material).

Content and process

The branding problem seems to be mostly related to the content and the process. The lack of a corporate level strategy and vision for the whole company is affecting the success of branding. The role of strategy in the brand content needs to be reflected on. The brand is now seen

as a strategic topic, but it isn't present in the strategy formulation and documentation. The company has very strong values and heritage, based on family values and respect for the individual. This is reflected in the brand content, where creativity, for example, is an important value. This respect for both the individual and the corporate culture, which can be described as a "village," is a strong base for the brand. The changing focus on the end user instead of the business client in the brand context will affect the brand content in the future. The question remains of how to combine the strong brand heritage and culture with the needs and desires of the customers? Asking the customers to join the branding process as was suggested in the workshop discussion is a courageous step towards collaborative branding. The company already invites customers to join in the product development process so the step to ask them to join the branding process is quite natural. Engaging people more in the foreign offices in the creation of one unified brand would also be natural, since they already perceive the company as a whole.

Co-creation

When creating the corporate strategy, employees also need to be involved as suggested in the MCP learning process. They should also join in the implementation and decision-making phases. The company culture supports the idea of co-creation of the strategy and it would motivate the people to see the decisions from a holistic point of view. The importance of communicating the goals and everybody's impact on the success of the company was stressed in the discussion. To co-create the goals would be even more motivating in this type of corporate culture. At the same time, when the corporate strategy is co-created, the brand promise would be crystallized since it is not so clear now to all people involved.

The company has a very characteristic community way of working, but the growth and internationalization of the company has forced a more machine-like way of operating and the clashes are evident. As it was argued in the MCP workshop discussion, is marketing as it is today forcing a machine-like way of operating in companies and therefore many companies are in a mess when it comes to branding and strategy? Especially companies like C, which has a strong culture and which is family owned, clearly affects the way the company operates. How can the process be mastered better so that the confusion disappears? Would co-creation and clear ownership of the strategy and branding process be the answer? By buying consulting services from the outside, the underlying strength of the brand might be lost, but to buy the facilitating co-creation process would be more beneficial. The outside input would only be fed to the

joint learning process, instead of taking it as suggested and given. The intellectual work of defining the brand shouldn't be given to an outside party, but an outside party could provide data and outside reflections for decision-making.

What underlying paradigm does the brand require in order to be successful? Should it be adapted to the existing paradigm or can it be the tool for creating a community in the company? Branding process in company C has a great potential for collaboration and co-creation. The brand manager and HR manager need support from top management, which needs to take a more clear and strong ownership of the strategy and branding. Since the internal branding workshops already have been arranged for many people, the co-creation with employees and customers would be the next step. The justification for allocating resources to the joint collaboration and joint activities was suggested to come from customer data showing the benefit for one brand.

The analysis is summarized in the following figure:

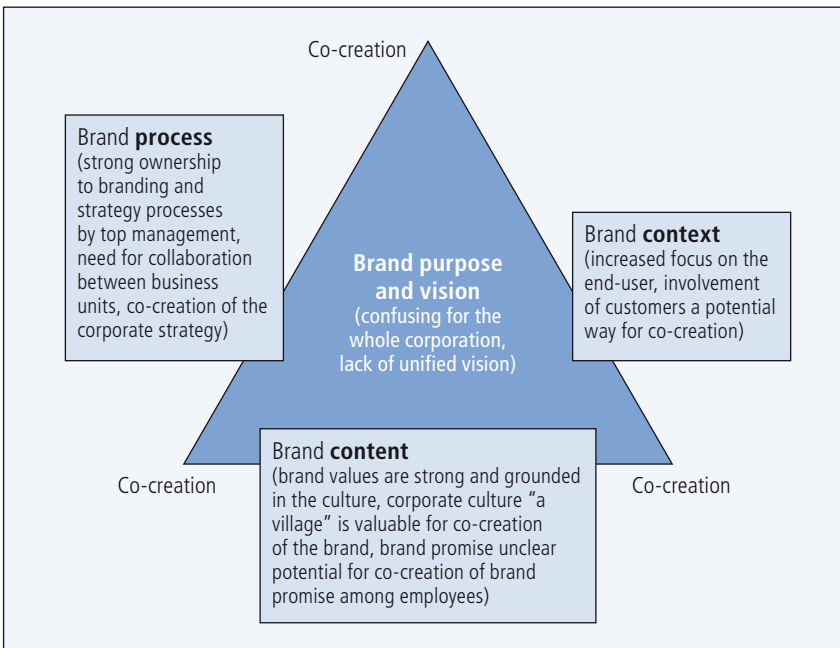


Figure 7. Internal branding challenges in company C.

5.1.2 Company A

Purpose and vision

The opening discussion in the company was arranged with a versatile group of participants from sales, marketing, product development and HR. In the discussion it became clear that the purpose and vision of the brand are defined in company A. There seems to be a direction for the brand and a brand policy is under construction. In the brand context, it seems that the customer and other stakeholders are acknowledged as important, but in practice the orientation is very product-focused in the different departments. The narrow thinking was mentioned as a challenge to overcome. The lack of mutual goals indicates that the brand vision and purpose aren't clear in the company, although defined in the communication department and communicated in the intranet. The brand content seems unclear, the slogan was mentioned but not emphasized, values are not lived throughout the departments, but they are acknowledged to be an important means for living the brand. Brand identity is not mentioned in the brainstorming, the brand so to say is lacking in the categories. Culture is mentioned under management and leadership and the need for an internal branding strategy as well. (Opening memo)

Leaders and managers are expected to have an idea of how to implement the brand through a company policy, but before implementation there is a need for defining the brand identity. The mentioning of clarification and interpretations under the category communication indicate that the understanding is not clear in the company. The need for an internal branding process was clearly seen, but there was not a clear idea of how and where to start it. The need for involving people was clearly seen in the objectives. The brainstorming lacked a bigger picture of the company, like the corporate strategy and brand strategy. This might be interpreted so that the topic is seen as separate from the other topics in the company.

There is a need in company A to start an internal branding process. The discussion during the MCP workshop concentrated very much on the process and the need for collaboration in the process. The living of the brand is seen both from a communication point of view and a knowledge point of view.

Content

The brand content is seen as instrumental and product-based in the company. This can be seen in the material on the Intranet about the brand and the products. There is one slide on the spirit of the brand,

but plenty of material on product design. The person responsible for the brand produces more material on the brand all the time, but it isn't communicated or understood among the employees yet. There was confusion about the word brand in the company. Every time the student researchers mentioned the word brand, there was confusion among the respondents. Brand awareness and acknowledgement of the importance of the brand was low. Brand content is not actively used among the employees. Values are, however, a strong base for the brand content, but the brand knowledge is implicit. There is little explicit brand knowledge. People are simply doing their work and the results have been very good so far. There were some doubts from the communication manager about whether the brand is the right one as it is defined now. The brand is seen as important in the corporate strategy according to the CEO.

Context

The competition creates a more demanding context for the brand in the future and the arrogance and strong heritage in the company can hinder it from making changes needed. The company has strong gurus in the business, who claim they know what is needed to know. The customers were not mentioned very often in the discussions. The role of outsourced partners is also to be considered in the brand context. How big is the risk that internal branding becomes too focused on internal problems and disagreeing instead of taking the customers along in the process by asking them how they see the uniqueness of the brand? Is maybe the role of the marketing people to continuously gather information from stakeholders and especially customers and to give it for others to use? The role of the marketing experts is to deeply understand the context of the brand and share that knowledge with others.

Process

Branding should be seen as a process, instead of an asset. Many ideas for collaboration were presented to company A. The importance of informal meetings, which are not highly regarded in the company, was stressed. How democratic should the branding process be? On the one hand, brand building isn't democratic, but on the other hand, one can't give commands either, so what is the balance then? Branding needs to take input from everybody in the organization according to the brand responsible in company A. This is a very collaborative attitude. If the brand provides fuel to the vision and mission of the company, is the motivation for living the brand then coming without commands? The pride of the employees in company A is evident, the working relationships are long. One major

factor hindering company A from collaborating is the competition between business units. Increasing the amount of knowledge sharing is needed, but how to change the attitude of the employees? The need for leadership in the branding process is evident. What kind of corporate structure is favoring knowledge sharing and collaboration?

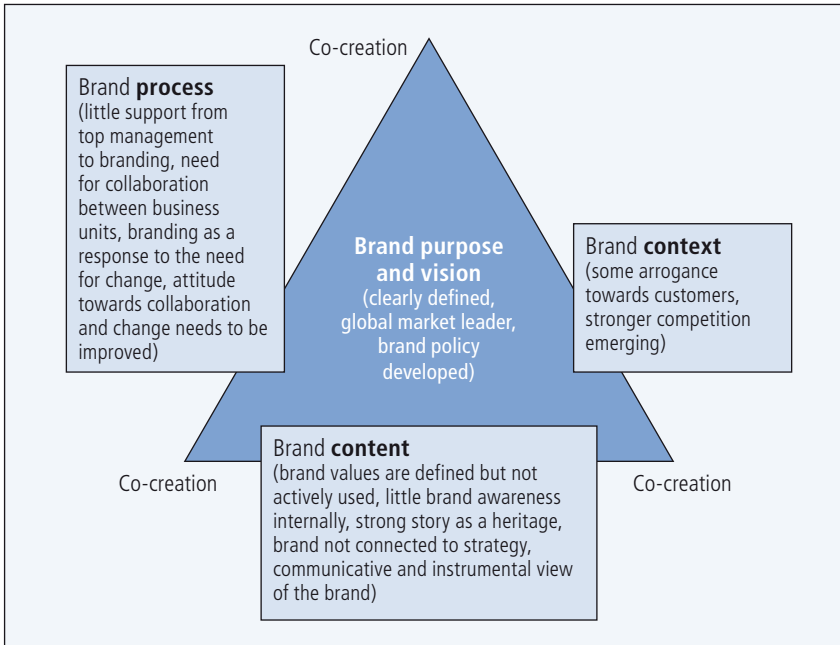


Figure 8. Internal branding challenges in company A.

5.1.3 Company B

Purpose and vision

The core of the problem seems to be the successful extension of a strong consumer brand into the B-to-B market, where different aspects are important for the clients than for the consumers. The mission of the brand, which is to be the most sincere economic expert for its clients, can easily be transferred to another market. The question is how this promise can be concretized in a service offering that is appealing to the corporate client. The opening discussion seemed to go directly to the relationship between the client and the service provider, partly relying on the fact that the brand is good as it is. The brand content was not evaluated in relation to the new market and requirements of the corporate clients. The context was not analyzed. What implications are there for the brand when the company aims at new types of clients? Clients reply in surveys that there

is no difference in the images of the insurance service providers. Clients demand an international focus due to the global nature of business. The participants acknowledged the challenges in this new context for the brand, but few suggestions were made to overcome it. This would be a place to gather more in-depth data from the clients and to revise the definition of the brand in light of the needs of the corporate clients. The relationship between the consumer and corporate clients in the brand context could also been looked at in greater depth. Some corporate clients might have private insurance policies in company B; how does this shift in focus affect the perceptions of the multi-faceted client? Does the consumer-oriented insurance service provider have credibility in the eyes of the corporate client in dealing with more complex corporate insurance?

Content

The content of the brand was not very present in the brainstorming part; the discussion was very seller- and product-oriented, trying to think of ways to offer solutions to clients' needs. The brand content should be focused on the relationship with the buyer. There was an aspect of creating a win-win situation for the relationship mentioned in the brainstorming, but it was not further elaborated. The impression of arrogance in relation to the brand was noticed in the discussion. The management representatives were not so willing to listen to the suggestions from the participants actually involved in the sales processes. They were confident in themselves, knowing what to do. Little effort was shown to challenge one's own thinking about the brand. Ideas related to the brand were fixed and could not be questioned, although the challenges of the brand in this new demanding market were obvious. How can the brand content be defined in such a way that it enables adjustments to needs in a new market?

Process

The internal process of enabling this brand extension to the corporate markets was not discussed. How to get the best employees and how to keep them was mentioned and these questions are very relevant for collaborative branding to happen. But what kind of knowledge is required in the selling of insurance to corporate clients? Are the employees motivated to help the corporate clients to solve their insurance problems? What image of the brand do they provide in their sales work? Is their opinion heard when planning the service concept? Or is it directly given to them by management and they are supposed to act accordingly? Since they are the direct link between the service provider and the client, their role in

the possible success of the business is crucial. Can the company afford to not take them along in the development process?

The role and perception of the management versus the key account managers affect the realization of the B-to-B brand in practice. This was seen in the PBL-discussion arranged with the key account managers by the students. The contradiction is seen as a need to keep the brand content and strategy as defined by management. On the one hand, the question is how the brand content is communicated and understood by the key account managers, and on the other hand, a need to be more flexible and dynamic towards the customers and let the key account managers create the service and the brand. Brand knowledge exists among the key account managers, but the understanding and the use of it in action is lacking. This is shown in the comment “the brand doesn’t hinder me in selling the service” or in the fact that they couldn’t articulate the values when asked. The customer voice from one customer stated that the personal service experience was very good and the perception of the brand therefore is very positive, but the masses of company respondents in surveys indicate a lack of professionalism in relation to competitors. The closeness in business relationships was not emphasized among the key account managers either. On the contrary, there was a strong service/product-orientation, which could be seen both in the opening session with the management and the opening session with the key account managers. The brand wasn’t explicitly present in the discussions. The focus was on the solutions they wanted to provide.

The brand knowledge is very much based on a strong consumer brand with the idea of customer ownership as a guiding principle. Is the brand principle valid and important for the corporate clients and the statement from the B-to-B manager indicating that “we search for companies that share our values and we accept that everybody will not be interested” show that there is a strong value foundation for the brand, and that the brand can be said to lead the business. The same idea was stated in a comment that employees who don’t share the brand values can make their own decisions about whether they are in the right place. This also indicates a very strong direction for the brand and the acknowledgement that the employees are able to make their own conclusions regarding the fit of their personal values to the brand values. Although the brand values are considered strong and important to the managers, the key account managers don’t see the benefit of emphasizing the emotional part of the brand: the values. Their focus is more on solutions and the service as well as the personal relationship.

Context

The new brand context of the corporate clients was well addressed by the Multi-Client participants, who questioned the internationalism and the relevance of the brand attributes to the corporate clients. Their idea of having some major corporate clients join the branding process was a remarkable step towards collaborative branding.

Co-creation

Since strategy had been created in a big group of 70 people as stated by the brand manager, it seems that the company is applying a collaborative way in management. The next step would then to use a collaborative way in the training of employees. The lack of understanding the brand indicates that the process of defining the brand hasn't been their own. Co-creation of brand knowledge is lacking. Communication of brand content is extensive and explicit, for example, in the brand manual. The comment from the B-to-B manager about how "important it is to have the managers of each division make their own interpretations of how the brand is present in every day activity" shows a good understanding of the need to engage the people in assessing the concrete impact of the brand. Yet, engagement in defining the brand to the corporate clients would be even more motivating for the performing employees to live the brand. Continuous learning was mentioned in the PBL-discussion of the key account managers as a development objective. This shows that there is a strong will to learn from each other in the company (memo 20.04.2005). This provides a good basis for collaborative methods in branding. Suggestions from both the student research group and the MCP working group were made to use a problem-based learning approach in activating the key account managers in the branding process. The case-method was also seen as beneficial by the key account managers to spread best-practices among employees (memo 20.04.2005).

Content

The fixed brand content is a challenge in company B. It has been developed over the last twenty years and it will not be changed according to the brand manager in at least ten years. Is this the lack of flexibility that the key account managers and the MCP participants were referring to in their comments? Does the new brand context require a redefinition of the brand content as earlier questioned? On the other hand, the long-term focus of the brand work enables the company to work slowly and steadily towards the goals. The role of the vision was seen as important, not only the goals. The vision to be the most sincere service provider gives a

motivation in company B and the success in the consumer markets shows that the strategy of having the brand leading the business is working. The persistence of the brand manager was acknowledged by the B-to-B manager in one of his comments.

The role of leadership was strongly present and the strong value base they have in the company. The authenticity of the brand is strong and the brand has an impact on the choices of both the customers and the employees. “Leadership by example” was emphasized in the brand building. The connection between the concepts of leadership and brand in company B, the strong position and personality of the brand manager affect the perception. The intent to see the brand as a strategic tool for leadership is present in the talk and behavior of the brand manager. The strong appeal when talking about the brand can give a wrong perception of resistance to change in the case of the brand manager in company B. How this strategic intent is put into practice is then the next challenge. The contradictions earlier presented and the comment made by the key account managers about how “the process is still in the beginning” indicate that the implementation of the strategic intent needs ongoing focus. Could collaborative methods be used to improve the implementation of the strategic intent? Since the role of employees in service business was seen as outmost important in company B, the time for collaboration around the brand would be right. The analysis is summarized in the figure below.

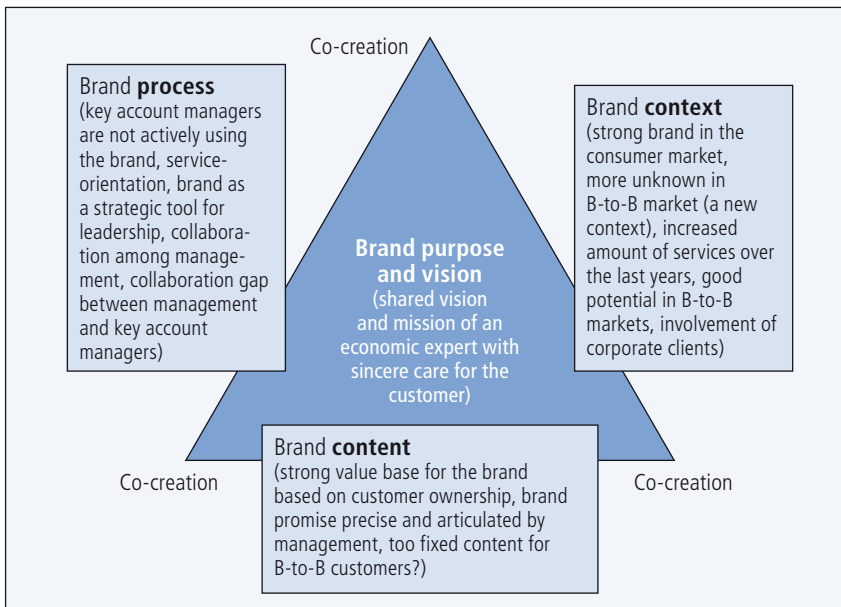


Figure 9. Internal branding challenges in company B.

5.1.4 Company D

Content

Brand building is in the initial stages in company D. In the opening discussion arranged in the company there was confusion in the brand content: is the brand clearly defined? There was a feeling in the discussion that the message to the customer is blurred because of the lack of a final touch in the brand definition. The content of the brand is based on the service process of the customer. This is a good start for the brand the customer is strongly present in the content. But the co-creation of the brand content is missing in the company, the comments about the meaning of the slogan that is blurred and the lack of support from senior management to branding show that people haven't been given the chance to affect the brand content.

Process

The problems in brand content lead to the branding process. The development objectives indicate the need for an idea of how the co-creation of the brand should be done. How to get the senior management involved in the process, how they need to be supported when they are going out of their comfort zones were mentioned. This is a very relevant question in the branding process, from where does the senior management get support in their learning of leading with the brand? If the whole idea of branding is new in the company, from where does the management get the knowledge needed for internal branding? As the comments in the discussion showed, people don't believe that the brand is built by giving instructions from above. This shows a belief that the process must be done together. The content of the brainstorming indicate that there was a holistic view on branding among the participators, since induction and training were mentioned. The need for HR was acknowledged. No HR person however participated in the discussion.

Content and context

The branding problem is mainly related to brand content and the branding process as earlier described. The branding context seems to be clear, the aiming on consumer markets require a brand and the emphasis on soft values for the consumers is a relevant and a good thing to do. The role of the real estate agencies in the brand context is crucial. They can be seen as partners in the brand building process. The poor image of the construction industry is affecting the brand context negatively, but if competitors start building their brands too it will slowly have an impact on the image of the industry. The feedback from real estate agencies and

customers has been very positive towards company D brand and this is an important message to use in the branding process. To broaden the brand context to building site planning and actual construction activities, would bring new partners in the brand building like workers and architects. It seems that there are based on the research results some, positive signals that indicate a growing strength of the brand.

The confusion between the corporate brand and the actual sub-brand seems to be an important issue to solve in the brand content. Politically it seems impossible to raise this question of building one brand at the moment, but as the MCP community suggested the actual work already done wouldn't be wasted. The way the brand is now seen in company D is very communicative, the logo and slogan were emphasized and the sales function is seen as the brand builders. There is no connection of the brand in the corporate strategy and brand equity is not measured according to the student research in the company. The sub-brand needs to be inline with the corporate brand. The confusion can hurt the brand.

Co-creation

Regarding the process of building the brand there is an acknowledgement in the answers from both the opening discussion and the student interviews in the company that "it is a long process and we have started a systematic way of making it better in the company". The need for involving people in the process was present in both the opening discussion and in the interviews. The brand should be seen as a way of working according to the development manager active in the MCP community. The idea of company D as a service brand hasn't been fully implemented in the company. The leadership is lacking behind, they emphasize results from the different business units.

The working groups across business units are a clear, first step towards co-creation of the brand. At the moment about 10–20 % of the people are participating and that amount is too small for collaborative branding to be powerful. The brand building needs to be done so that people feel it is useful for them according to the development manager. It shouldn't be forced from the top. But if the top management doesn't clearly communicate the need for the brand, with what argument can the co-creation of the brand be introduced to the people? Is the collaborative aspect enough for motivation?

The competition between business units is a challenge for collaborative branding as was noticed in company A and C. In company D the need for leadership is emergent. The structure of the company is affecting the brand content as well as the process. The separate marketing and

business development unit where the brand content is normally created is very far from the reality in the business units. The analysis is summarized in the figure below.

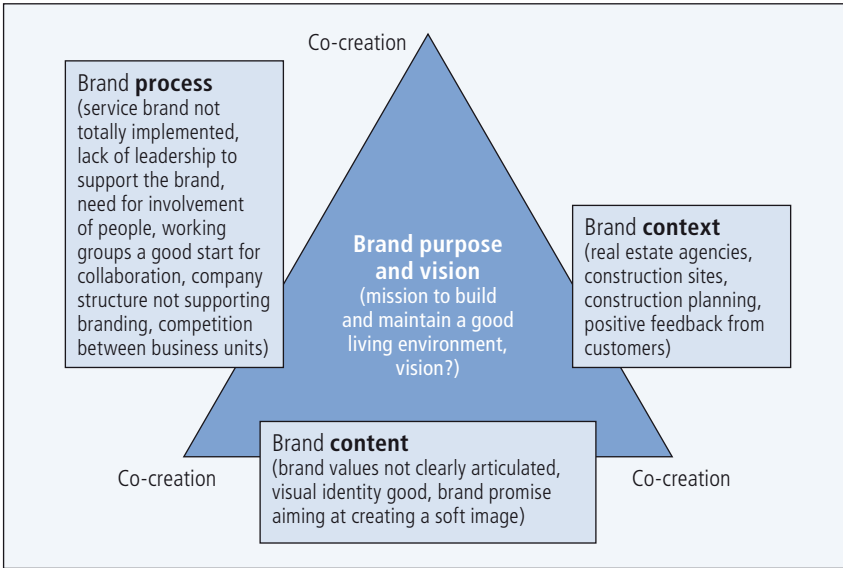


Figure 10. Internal branding challenges in company D.

5.2 Creating the big picture in internal branding – emerging categories, themes and dimensions from the Multi-Client research process

When analyzing the whole process of the learning community, the emergent topics are presented in the figure below.

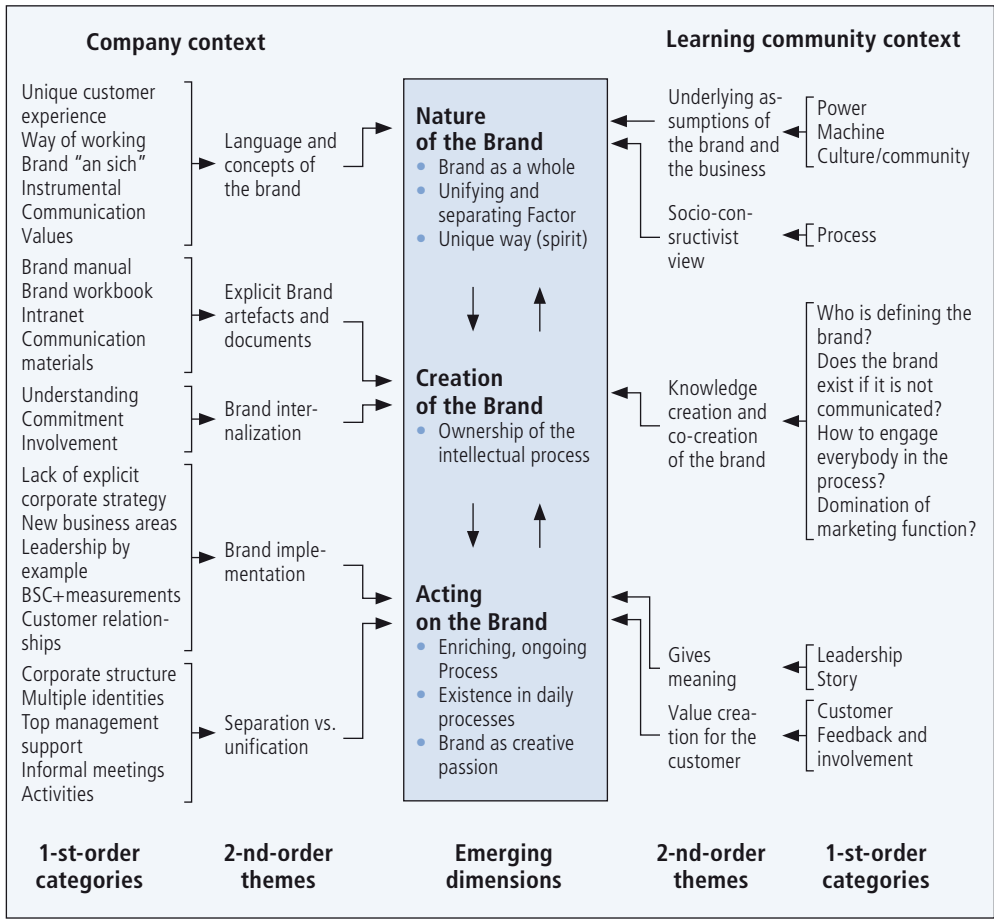


Figure 11. Emerging categories, themes and dimensions.

The contexts identified were the **company context**, which consisted of all research activities and observations and comments from the company people participating in the learning process and the **learning community context**, which consisted of the contribution from the researchers (students and teachers), experts and process facilitators to the learning process. The data showed a difference in perceptions and realities from the both contexts. The company people were naturally quite absorbed by the concrete challenging problems that were at hand in their work and the learning process facilitators were concerned by questions regarding knowledge creation, definitions, why-questions and underlying assumptions. The challenge in the MCP process was to make these two contexts meet in the discussion and to transform the knowledge of the participants into a new synthesis of knowledge.

When categorizing the data in order to create the big picture, the following dimensions of the branding challenges in the four participating companies emerged. Before thinking of the actual process of internal branding there is a need to determine **the nature of the brand**. I made the choice to use the word nature to describe the inner being of the brand. The definition of the brand depends on what we want it to be, it is not fixed in a certain character, but it can be changed according to the meaning we give it. After the creation of a common language, the process of **creating the actual brand** can be made. In the creation process the idea of co-creation is important. It is an important matter who is doing the definition part. In this research I claim that the creation is done together involving more employees and stakeholders than usually. After having a brand defined for the organization the final step is to **act on the brand**. I decided to use the word acting on the brand since implementation is much more unclear and it doesn't indicate the ongoing process of taking concrete actions in line with the brand. The brand is never fully implemented the work continues and requires actions all the time. It is easy to jump to the acting part when discussing internal branding and into concrete problems and challenges, but then the intellectual process of determining the brand is overlooked. These dimensions are more deeply analyzed by relating to literature and finding common denominators for the challenges involved in each dimension. An ongoing re-creation of the branding process seems to emerge as the collaborative way of doing branding. Re-creation means keeping the brand up-to-date. Next the different dimensions are analyzed in further detail.

5.2.1 The nature of the brand

The MCP learning community joint process started by stating that the situation regarding the brand and the strategy is in a mess in most of the participating companies and the reasons for the mess were mentioned to be the lack of a common understanding and definition of the brand. This mess could also be observed in the opening discussions in the companies.

“Strategy isn't stated explicitly and everybody has different perceptions” (Company representative comment in 1st workshop)

“The branding literature presents different language and concepts about the same things” (student comment at 1st workshop)

Both the students and the company people felt a need for determining the definition of the brand. The nature of the brand can be understood as the philosophy of the brand, the way to describe the phenomenon. The discussion of the profound nature of the brand was taking place in all workshops, but especially in the first and the last one. The MCP companies were mostly engineer-dominated B-to-B companies where the word brand was not seen positively by the employees. Therefore words like unique customer experience, way of working were used by the company representatives instead of the word brand. The MCP group agreed that it isn't about the word you use it is what you understand by the word. The branding people seem to accept that they can't use the word brand in their organizations. They also seemed proud to say that "we are in a way fooling the engineers" when talking about another word instead of the brand. They felt that it will lead to the same result. The attitude seems manipulative and not aiming at a community. The community aspect seems to be an important issue to analyze when creating the corporate brand, the discussions asked for a collaborative community and participation, but the actions didn't support the attitude enough. It is a big step to create collaboration instead of only communication of the brand.

From communication to collaboration in brand definition

The learning process facilitator highlighted a model from management that aimed at explaining the underlying assumptions of business. The categories in the model were power, machine and community/culture. This helped at least company C, since the HR manager immediately commented

"Business in company C is looked through the culture/community lenses"

"The company way will always come first"

This strong perception of the community behind the brand indicates a nature of the brand that exists in actions and that is based on feelings. In Company C there was no concern with how the brand should be communicated to the employees, instead the problem was located in the company structure which didn't support the community of the brand. In company A, however an instrumental, product-oriented view of the brand was perceived. The focus of the brand development was in creating communication material about the brand. Considering the young age of the communication department, it is no wonder that most of the energy goes to producing the brand material. The risk in this way of working is that the lack of knowledge about the importance of the brand is pre-

venting brand culturalization internally. The comment below from the communication manager showed that the communication department has thought about why the brand is needed now although the company has been very successful in the past.

“Now the brand is needed to communicate the leading edge to the customers”
(Communication manager company A)

This communicative part of the brand is seen in many comments. Considering the fact that most of the company participants in the MCP process had a background in marketing and communication, it is no surprise to notice the strong belief of communication of the brand. Communication is part of branding, but it depends how it is defined. Traditionally communication has been about providing information through different messages as a one-way type of communicating, rather than creating something unique together. The expectation of a response from the target audience is built in this traditional model of communicating. If communication is seen as a dialogue which involves more levels than the spoken and the written communication, brand communication is different from the one-way type of communication. The psychologist Tony Dunderfelt analyses communication in five levels, which are words (language), physical (gestures, eye contact), intuitive (communication of ideas and meaning), feelings (atmosphere, temperament) and finally the power communication (basic power of opening and closing forces as fundamental power in the soul, power of will) (Dunderfelt 2006). The collaborative nature of the brand demand more levels of communication internally, more power communication with a possibility for employees to participate in the process and to create positive feelings and joint meaning of the brand internally.

The definitions of the brand lack a common agreement in literature, but one of the most used is provided by David Aaker and Erich Joachimstaler (2000) who say that the brand is a name, symbol, concept or the combination of them, through which the products/services are differentiated from competitors. Customers are willing to pay a premium price. This type of definition doesn't provide much space for collaboration, either internally or externally. Nicholas Ind (2001, 18-23) uses a brand definition originating from Feldwick, which also contains the badge of origin, the mean for differentiation and the promise of performance. This definition provides more space for collaboration than the previous through the performance, but still the nature of the brand is quite limited.

During the last MCP workshop, there was a question posed to the audience if the brand exists although it is not communicated? This leads

us to a deeper level in the nature of the brand, and the brand manager of company B stated

“The brand exists “an sich”. It is an image born through contacts”
(Brand manager company B)

This view shows a direction towards the profound thinking referred to by Peter Senge, where the brand can be seen in its wholeness, it is existing per se in every contact, in every dialogue and the reality of the brand is created in everyday action. The brand reality is manifested in all contacts and messages. It is not on a “dead” paper which has been communicated, but not understood.

The brand as both a unifying and a separating factor

The role of the brand as a **separating factor** to the outside is an accepted way of defining the nature of the brand, and the idea of creating a **unique brand**, which can't be copied by the competitors, has evolved. The idea of separation can however be a problem in branding. The understanding that the brand lives through you, existing on its own instead of a separate thing to be communicated, is crucial. This **unifying task of the brand** internally, is challenging if there is separation on an intellectual level. By this separation I mean the notion of seeing that engineers for example don't understand the brand, which was often stated by company C, A and D representatives. By seeing the brand like this, the separation already makes that happen, reality is formed according to what you think and assume. When the brand is as a whole, other stakeholders can easily join in the process of creating brand reality. It is quite natural. But if the brand is only about communication, other stakeholders are separated from the process. The company itself is making the separation. The branding people need to become aware of the way separation in thought is done in the company. Only through awareness you can change your thinking.

“Are we having the right type of brand, you can't stay where you have been for thirty years? The narrow thinking is a reason why there is no common brand” (Communication manager company A)

This type of reflection shows a willingness to see the nature of the brand critically, to be aware of the thinking prevailing in the company. How to enable the awareness of the thinking regarding the brand thinking? Attitudes play a major role.

“You need to start the branding process externally. Internally people start to argue about the meaning of different words that have no relevance for the value

for the customer. One fundamental thing is to find a common direction for the company. Everybody should align for it.” (Branding expert)

This type of attitude shows that the internal discussions of the brand are seen as unproductive, the focus should be on the customer. However, the finding of a common direction is seen as important. Can't the discussion of words and their definitions help to find that common direction? Is it then more about finding good process facilitators for the discussion and to learn ways to have dialogues about both the meaning of words and the direction for the company? The possibility for the employees to have a say on the direction and the meaning of the words the company is using could have a positive impact on their involvement in the brand.

“Instead of talking about the brand we need to talk about branding, because it indicates a more active process. Branding needs to be seen as a process, which is ongoing. The knowledge sharing process is important” (Teacher researcher)

This perception of the brand is in line with the understanding of the **brand as a whole**, existing on its own in all actions and discussions. For knowledge sharing it is important to have discussions between functions and people with different background. Branding and marketing people have the same type knowledge, old thinking is easily kept up among them and the value of new knowledge creation is quite low. This risk was also present in the Multi-Client learning community, which consisted mainly of marketing and communications people. The discussions in the companies involved people with different backgrounds. Already the fact that the discussions were held in the companies affected the perceptions of the participants towards the brand. They can even become key employees, who bring the brand ideas forward. Support to this conclusion can be found in Lauri Tuomi's (2005) dissertation about strategic human resource development in SME's. He concludes that speaking means action and that ongoing discussions about shared interpretations among key employees are important for the strategic success of SMEs. Language is not only a code for communication it is a process for reasoning and thinking and therefore a medium for action. (Tuomi 2005, 53, 207) This means that already by arranging the brand discussions in the companies, there most probably was an impact on the intellectual processes of the individuals participating regarding the brand.

Therefore, I can conclude that branding needs to be seen as both a **social and a learning process** which needs constant nourishing and attention from management. This understanding can be supported by the way Stacey defines the organization. He (Stacey 2003, 325–326) argues

that the organization arises in patterning of the interactions between the members. He further claims that the organization shouldn't be seen as an organism. Since the organization neither can think and learn the learning in the organization happens in an activity of interdependent people. The same argument can be used in defining the brand, it doesn't exist as a living body, but it is formed in processes where individuals are forming the brand and at the same time formed by it. Branding as a social process can form the individuals in the organization. The main part of the social process is interaction through language. There are also other interesting ways for interaction like drama, games etc.

So therefore the creation of the brand and acting of the brand are ongoing, active social processes. The brand is not a dead paper or manual to be communicated, it is brought to life through the interactions in the organization. The way the brand creation is being done sets the scene for the rest of the branding work.

5.2.2 The creation of the brand

The assumption that branding is a **learning process** can be justified by several comments from the company representatives. The notion that the engineers don't understand the brand was presented in many ways. This indicates a need for the engineers to learn about the brand. This fact that they don't understand the brand in the same way as the marketing and communication experts wouldn't necessarily mean that they don't understand the idea of the brand. Anybody can understand the fact that there is no business without clients. The brand needs to be brought into the interactions in different ways. The questions posed from the learning community context tried to go behind the brand creation process. Who's task is it to define the brand? Does the brand exist if it isn't communicated? How could you engage everybody in the process and is it good that the marketing experts are dominating the creation process either internally or by using external experts?

The concerns from the company context were about the internalization of the brand and about the use of brand artefacts, like manuals and communication materials on the Intranet. They realized the gap between the existence of explicit brand documentation and the actual commitment to the content by the employees. Involvement was seen as important, but the way to do it was open. In company C there had been branding workshops throughout the organization and they were perceived

as useful by the attendants. Still the brand promise was unclear among the employees.

The **brand creation process** was seen as a long-term process by the MCP participants.

“The brand needs to be described in more detail than before. The brand shouldn’t only be developed by marketing people, when you develop the brand as a process you need to build, review and manage the process. The process takes about five years. But companies who have built brands are also growing faster than others. Things need to be kept simple in the process.”
(Workshop comment by company representative)

The co-creation of the brand is a demanding **intellectual process**, during which it is important to ask many questions, to search for underlying assumptions, to identify old mental models, to recognize challenges in collaboration and perceptions, to acknowledge the roles and importance of different functions and their knowledge and to accept contradictive views and feelings. This process needs to be done on many levels and involving as many as possible. The responsibility will be on the branding team, and outside experts as learning process facilitators could be used. Different collaborative ways of learning as PBL and the case-method are good tools to enable the learning process. Traditional management-led meetings are not suitable for this purpose. The responsibility must be given to the participants.

5.2.3 The acting on the brand

Brand implementation in the MCP companies had faced many challenges. The lack of support from the corporate strategy was main problems in company C and A, where the strong business units competed and pulled in different directions. A new business area like in company B’s case was causing new challenges for the brand. The role of the brand in the balance score card was also a topic for discussion in all companies. The measurement of the brand was lacking and therefore it had less power in the decision making. The role of close customer relationships were emphasized in company B and C as well as the important role of leadership by example. Leaders have to live the brand.

The acting of the brand should be aiming at **unification of the company** around one corporate brand (in case of product brands the situation is different). The MCP working groups came up with supporting ideas for creating unification.

“A strong brand leadership is needed on the upper level of the organization, so that the internal pieces can be brought together to create a big picture of the company. Somebody needs to connect the divisions around the brand, networks need to be created in a democratic way.”
(Workshop group comment)

Other ways to enhance unification were like in company B and D where there had been a use of cross-functional working groups, which had affected the collaboration positively. Company C used brand ambassadors throughout the organization and the brand team consisted of people from all business units. The close co-operation between the HR and the brand manager helped unification in company C. The support from the top management is crucial for unification. Ideas for activities and informal meetings to enhance unification were discussed.

However, many aspects in the brand implementation in MCP companies led to a separation effect. Not only in the speech of the marketing and communication experts as referred to earlier, but also in many other ways. The corporate structure in company C and A led to separation in branding instead of unification. Competition among business units was affecting the branding work negatively. The absence of the brand in the corporate strategy in company C and A also separates the brand from the core of the strategy. Company B however had created the brand and strategy in the same process and brand implementation had been successful.

The strong role of leadership in the branding process was emphasized from the learning community context, but the connection between the concepts of leadership and branding is not there yet. Leaders are needed to give meaning to the brand and to live the story of the brand.

“There is always a face behind a success story” (MCP process facilitator)

The brand exists in daily processes and its existence needs to be reminded of by leaders and management. If branding can be made into an ongoing, enriching and collaborative process, it can even become the creative passion of the company, a platform for innovation and creativity. Pekka Himanen has studied the nature of work in the information society and he concludes that the man is at his best when he is passionate about what he is doing. And passion evolves when man thinks that he is able to realize his unique creative talent. If people get a meaning from their work, they don't become tired and they are driven by energy and joy. (Himanen 2004, 12) The meaningfulness of the brand can be a powerful tool to

create passion. But if the brand is only a name-tag with empty promises, little passion is enabled for the employees.

Himanen continues by arguing that the role of managers is then to build enriching communities and to create goals that generate joint enthusiasm (Himanen 2004, 12). This applies well to the brand, which needs creativity and passion to outstand the competitors.

This type of organization has been existing in company C and A because of their family company backgrounds. International growth of company C had diminished the power of the community although it was not lost. Companies C and A need to take care of the passion and the creativity in their communities.

In the modern network society, stakeholders are building the brand. The importance of involving customers in the branding process was introduced by the learning community. This would lead to increased value creation for the customer. Company C and B were emphasizing the customer relationships although they hadn't involved them in the internal branding process. For company A the customer orientation was a concern because of the high self-confidence and even arrogance. In their case they have a longer way to go before the customers are involved in branding.

The dimensions presented in figure 11 are separated for the purpose of analysis, but the creation and acting of the brand are linked processes. A clear distinct separated brand creation process is needed in case of the development of a new brand and redefining an old brand. Otherwise branding is recreated in the everyday actions and by being very sensitive to the external and internal changes the re-creation process is fast thanks to the collaborative co-creation process. The underlying nature of the brand needs to be revised regularly as well. Especially when new leaders are joining the process, the nature of the brand needs to be re-evaluated and the learning aspect of the branding process needs to be recognized.

An own definition of how the brand is defined and understood in the organization needs to be done. If the company decides to see branding as a social collaborative process, there are implications for the creation and acting of the brand. These implications first of all change the role and perception of the employee, from being a passive receiver of information of the brand to an active constructor of the brand, both in creation and in implementation. Another implication is the dialogue with other stakeholders, especially the customers. They become active constructors of the brand. A third implication affects the brand communication materials. Brand manuals need to be collaborative by nature, providing space for own interpretations. The Intranet could provide space for brand community and shared stories.

5.3 Conclusions

The aim of the internal branding part of the Multi-Client project was to create a learning model for engaging the employees in the brand on an early stage in the process. The actual research process was done based on principles of action research, and the PBL-approach was used both in data collection and in process execution. The learning model in internal branding is based on problem-based learning. In this last chapter of the research paper, I will present my conclusions, and assess the quality of the research and evaluate the limitations of the research. Finally I propose new research directions.

I was mainly interested in finding out how collaborative learning can support internal branding, which made up the general research question. Secondly I wanted to find out what conditions affect internal branding. Thirdly I wanted to find out what phases there are in internal branding and what kind of knowledge creation is needed in each phase. First the answers to the specific research questions are given and then I discuss the achievements and contributions of the research. The discussion will start from the **different phases in internal branding** and be concluded with a proposed learning model for internal branding. The general research question will be discussed as a final conclusion.

5.3.1 What are the different phases in internal branding?

The idea of the brand as an integrative force in the companies is slowly emerging in two of the MCP organizations. Extensive brand work has been done during many years, but still there are new challenges coming up which hinder the brand from being an integrative force. (See analysis of companies C and B) The other two MCP companies were in a starting phase of internal branding, and they have now the opportunity to carefully think about the way internal branding will be done. The phases of internal branding which emerged from the data are 1) defining the nature of the brand in the organization, 2) the creation of the brand and 3) the acting on the brand.

The first phase is about enabling the assessment of the underlying assumptions of the brand, the organization needs to critically evaluate the purpose and vision of the brand. Realistic judgment regarding the state of branding in the organization is necessary. To enable this presencing tasks need to be done in the management teams. A presencing task could be done in such a way that the group sits quietly and reflects on the nature of the brand, letting deep thoughts and insights about what the essence

of the brand is all about emerge. The intuitions that arise from the session can imaginatively be translated into images and visions that guide action. (Senge et al. 2005, 133) In the presencing task intuitive thoughts about how the brand should be perceived in the organization arise. Is the brand narcissistic as Mitchell (2003, 36-54) discusses or can the brand be made into a value-creating relationship based tool involving all stakeholders as Ind (Ind 2003, 28) argues? Does the brand have a unique purpose in the society? Brands can change the nature of a business with the power of the stakeholders. The Body Shop can be mentioned as a good example. Igloo is at the moment changing the nature of business in real estate business and the cheap flight airlines have changed the airline business with their brand visions.

The nature of the brand was discussed in the PBL-sessions more in light of what term to use for the brand. Questions like **why do we need** or **why do we have a brand** were more rarely posed by the company participants in the discussions held in the companies. However, in the workshop discussions the underlying assumptions of the brand were discussed. It seemed that it was a suitable environment for discussing this type of question. In the companies the discussions went directly to the challenges in brand implementation without questioning the underlying mental models. This leads to a conclusion about the necessity of arranging possibilities for deep discussions about the underlying assumptions and mental models. If they are not questioned, they will prevail in the branding work.

The second conclusion is regarding the use of outside experts in the branding work. Many companies use advertising agencies and design agencies to formulate and define the brand. Some interviews are usually done externally and internally, but deep insights might easily be overlooked as the question of challenging existing brand knowledge. As Hatch and Schultz argue (2003b, 1051) the corporate brand shouldn't be about a desired market position or image, but it needs to be grounded in core company values. Companies C and B have a strong heritage and company values created together with the employees. These companies need to really cherish the brand heritage and remain truthful to the values of the brand. The heritage in company A is also very strong, but the company values are not a strong basis for the brand yet. Company D has a good possibility to create company values that are guiding the brand development. The modernization of the real estate selling concept indicates the potential of the brand to change the nature of the business.

The brand identity will emerge with the discussion of the nature of the brand. The potential for the brand to be seen as organizational re-

relationships, where the meaning is created by stakeholders as Ind (2003, 22) sees it will easily be recognized if the brand purpose and vision are thought of carefully. Honesty is needed. Many companies still have a long way to go before they can adopt a collaborative branding way of operating. A realistic, ethically sustainable and authentic purpose and vision for the brand need to be identified. Stakeholders, especially employees will notice if the brand identity is not based on reality in the organization. Values are the base for the corporate brand identity. Values were seen as very important in every Multi-Client company, although company A and D had more work to do in this area than companies B and C.

In light of the experiences in the Multi-Client project I suggest that outside experts should be used for facilitating the process of challenging the existing brand knowledge and mental models. The intellectual process of questioning the nature of the brand in the company needs to be done in-house, but the process needs to be facilitated by experts in learning and knowledge creation. If branding experts are used, their perceptions of how they see the brand ought to be questioned first. If the company is willing and capable to adopt a collaborative branding process, it is important for them to find a partner who shares the same thinking. The socio-constructive learning approach is not very broadly adapted yet in Finland. It requires a fundamental shift in thinking about the way humans learn and act. The idea of how knowledge is constructed and what is the own role as a learning facilitator need to be evaluated.

The second phase in the internal branding process is the actual creation of the brand, brand definition. The internal branding process (Chapter 3.3) as Tosti and Stotz describe it (2001, 29-33) is merely about the way of enrolling the different layers of management in the process, not specifically about how the process is done. They argue for a top-down enrollment. This notion was heavily questioned in the MCP process. The idea of involving the employees in an early stage was supported. However, the actual process of doing it was seen as costly and high risk. The corporate culture in company C is very collaborative by nature. For them the idea to involve the employees is quite natural. But the motivation to participate is a challenge for many employees, especially for the engineers. They might not see the need for them to engage themselves. In company B there seems to be a collaborative culture among management, but the discussions with key account managers revealed challenges in collaboration throughout the organization. So the situation in all Multi-Client companies seem to be like the description by Majken Schultz (2003, 51) and Nicholas Ind (2001, 1043) saying that executives still see the creation of intellectual capital as their responsibility and the employees imple-

ment the wisdom of management. Company C however, has the most collaborative way of working and company B has been able to create the brand strategy and corporate strategy involving many employees. The importance of employees being engaged in the overall purpose of the organization could be improved in all Multi-Client companies. However, the perceptions of the participants seemed to change during the process and the willingness to see employees as active constructors of knowledge increased. The challenge for the participants is now to motivate the change in their organizations and to get the top management to believe in the need for collaboration.

The role of the brand organization is crucial in brand definition. In companies C and B there were strong brand managers, who had succeeded to involve the top management in branding and especially in company B succeeded to link the branding process to the strategy process. The personality of the brand manager/responsible is crucial in involving the other, sometimes even reluctant employees in the organization. The brand manager needs to be very collaborative by nature, but also consistent in the brand work. To both collaborate and lead brand management towards the vision is a demanding task. The need for inspirational language in the communication is obvious (Ellwood 2002, 281-282). The brand manager also needs to be sensitive to the feelings towards the brand. Company C's brand manager used very inspirational language when talking about the employees and the co-operation in the company. This showed an appreciation for the corporate culture and heritage. She also used a lot of her time to meet with people, this also indicate a high level of motivation towards collaboration in the branding work.

The question of control and guidance in the branding work was topical especially in company A where the branding work was in the starting phase. As Bergstrom et al. (2002, 136) discussed it depends on the corporate culture how consensus is made around the brand. Branding experts have to be very sensitive to the organizational culture in their work. Then there is an answer to the question of how tight the control should be and how much space is there for everybody's interpretations? If the brand manager can accept that the company is no more able to control the brand, instead stakeholders are building the brand in the new network society the shift in brand focus towards collaboration is easier. The control should be about the process to make sure the brand gets input from the stakeholders. Another way to see brand control in the network society is to make sure that the employees have been given a chance to make both an emotional and intellectual buy-in of the brand

(see Thomson et al. 1999). The emotional buy-in provides a stronger platform for the brand.

As Van Dijk (2006, 39) argues, in the network society media and organizations tend to be more interactive and decentralized. This growth of interactive relations will have the biggest consequences for the structures of present and future society. This change will also affect profoundly the branding work. In all spheres of the society there can be seen a shift from the supply-side to the demand-side, from the producer to the consumer and from designer to user. Businesses, government and individuals serve as the co-producers of goods, services or policies and as their consumers or executors. (Van Dijk 2006, 40.)

The third phase in the internal branding process is the acting on the brand. The role of middle and senior management is crucial for the success of branding in everyday work. Leadership by example was seen as very important by the Multi-Client participants. The support from top management was discussed a lot, and one conclusion about that issue is maybe the branding work could be done without the support as well. Jonas Roth (2003, 34) discusses the myths in knowledge sharing and the preconception of that you need to create a learning culture first in the organization before there is knowledge sharing can be seen as being the reverse. If people begin to share ideas about issues they see important, the sharing itself will create a learning culture. The same could be applied to branding, if the branding team starts to create inspirational branding work, it will likely spread and top management will more easily join with their support.

The collaboration between HRM and marketing becomes very important in brand performance. Only company C had a very close co-operation between HR and marketing, however the lack of a centralized marketing function made the branding work more difficult. The other Multi-Client companies seemed not to have any co-operation between HR and marketing, this is proven by the fact that nobody from the HR function was interested to join the learning community. In company A, a representative from HR participated in the opening discussion. The role of HR in branding is important in recruiting, compensation, training and assessment. The process facilitators for internal branding could be found in the HR department, but again the perception of learning in HR can still be very traditional. A prerequisite for collaboration in HR is an open attitude, a constructive view of learning and a realistic idea of the functions and the leadership in the company. The idea of a learning community should be adopted in the HR function as well.

The need for informal meetings and happenings in living the brand was stressed by the Multi-Client learning community. This aspect is lacking from Tosti and Stotz (2001) internal branding process. For knowledge sharing, informal meetings without an agenda can be very efficient. Sports events, cultural events all provide good possibilities for knowledge sharing. Reminders of the brand can be provided in the events, visual brand material, sharing of stories etc. All this helps keeping the brand discussion alive. The acceptance that branding is an ongoing process helps to plan the events and some clever pedagogical ideas can bring surprising results. Brand work is creative work.

Finally, the stakeholder input is important for the continuous improvement of brand performance. The knowledge existing at the stakeholder surface needs to be received and shared in the organization. Measurement criteria for brand performance need to be developed in customer feedback. Internally there was a strong need expressed by the Multi-Client participants that the brand needs to be in the Balance Score Card. Most companies are using the BSC tool for internal processes, but there are no ways of measuring brand performance.

The conclusions to the question of what are the different phases (visualized as ellipses in the figure below) in internal branding and the knowledge creation needed in each phase is summarized in figure 12. It considers both the knowledge creation needed and the leadership focus in the process.

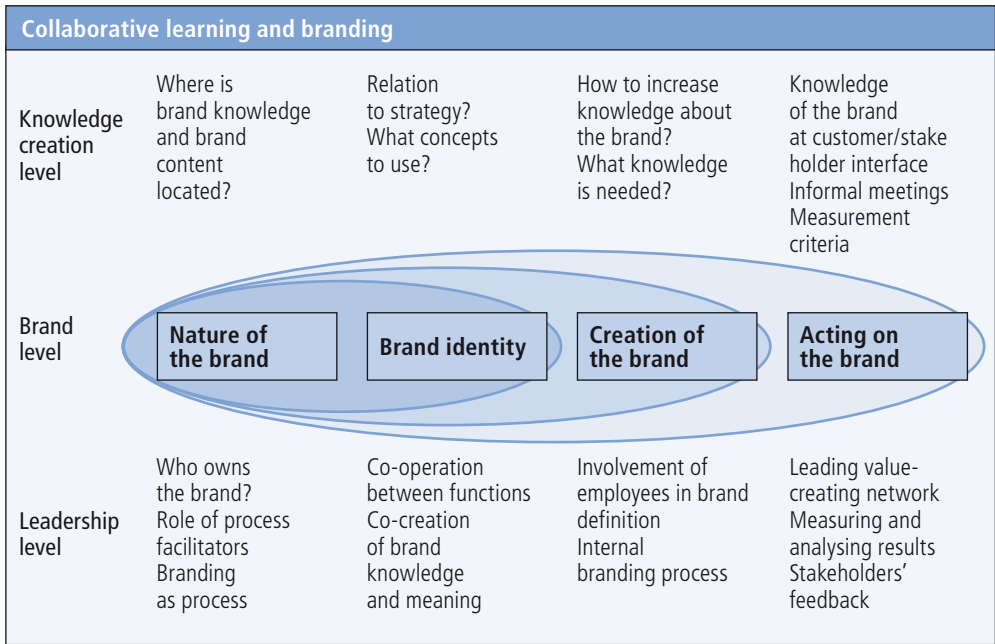


Figure 12. Phases in collaborative branding.

5.3.2 What conditions and risks are affecting collaborative branding?

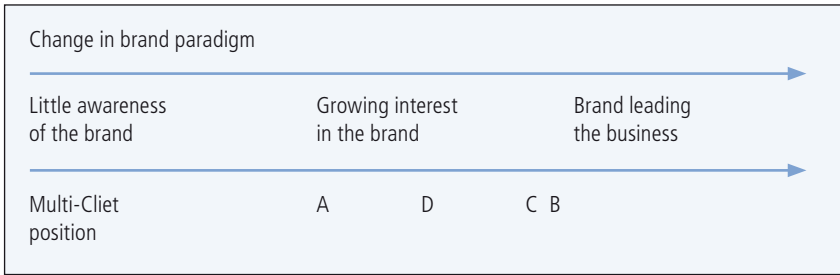
Firstly, the view of knowledge and the perceptions of the nature of the brand affect internal branding conditions. Secondly, the attitude towards the employees and the other stakeholders and their roles in internal branding affect internal branding. Thirdly, the company structure and the brand organization affect internal branding very strongly. Fourthly, the corporate strategy and the role of the brand in the strategy affect strongly the success of branding. Finally, the attitude towards collaboration and knowledge sharing in the organization can be emphasized. The risks in internal branding based on the observations in the Multi-Client companies are a narrow view of the brand, no clear purpose and vision of the brand, the lack of a corporate strategy supporting the brand, a competitive company structure, lack of top management support, non-collaborative attitude towards customers and stakeholders, lack of motivation to collaborate among functions, monopolization of the brand by marketing/communications function and lack of internal measurements of brand performance.

Collaborative branding has an impact on several functions and processes in the organization. The following table highlights the main aspects that have to change in the organization. This means a change in the

paradigm regarding how the brand should be defined and understood. I situated the Multi-Client companies to approximately locate their position on the scale towards collaborative branding. The outcome of collaborative branding is the brand leading the business.

KEY FEATURES OF BRANDING	TRADITIONAL BRANDING	COLLABORATIVE/ INTEGRATED BRANDING
Brand concept	External brand promise	Leadership practice Unique and consistent customer experience
Brand language/knowledge	Marketing concepts/jargon Brand knowledge concentrated to a few functions	Common agreed brand language across the organization, brand knowledge spread throughout the organization
Brand content	Defined by executives, outside marketing experts, static content defined in manuals and visual design	Negotiated and defined by employees, basic brand principles understood by all, possibility for redefinition, diffused into all activities in the organization
Brand process	Hidden for employees, tacit knowledge not activated	Relationship based, joint learning processes with internal and external parties, dialogue, both explicit and tacit brand knowledge agreed and acted upon
Brand context	Customer	Customers, employees, stakeholders (public, suppliers, retailers, media)
Brand communication	Top-down, information giving	Knowledge creation, brand dialogues, living the brand in leadership and every day action, leadership roles and brand behavior
Leadership	Brand check-ups/surveys, up-dating the brand, brand as a marketing cost	Shared meaning on a daily basis, value created in brand touch points, brand as an asset creating value, real-time data
Strategy	Brand strategy and corporate strategy not linked, vision doesn't give fuel to the brand, company values for internal purposes	Corporate strategy clearly supports the brand strategy, clear vision, brand values, all in line and integrated, brand as a strategic tool for creating a platform for creativity and passion
Organization	Separation of responsibilities, ownership of the brand is blurred, brand manager's role is weak, little top-management support	Learning organization, cross-functional branding teams, brand steering with clear top-management brand ownership, brand ambassadors
Marketing/communication	Focus on external communication, marketing function "owns" the brand expertise	Brand promise and a unique customer experience as a guiding star both externally and internally, constant communication and close co-operation with HR, integrated communication approach, versatile and interactive brand communication
Human resources	No interest in branding, lack of brand knowledge	Value of branding well understood, internal brand strategy, close co-operation with marketing/ communication, joint knowledge creation

Table 1. Comparison between traditional branding and collaborative branding.



5.3.3 How can collaborative learning (PBL) support internal branding?

The world view behind both the action research strategy and the problem-based learning approach is participatory by nature and to my own surprise, this participatory world view will change the way the brand should be understood in the modern network society. At the least, I can say that PBL definitely can support internal branding as it can even change the whole perception of branding towards a process as described in the collaborative branding framework. The participatory world view “brings together action and reflection, theory and practice, in participation with others, in the pursuit of practical solutions to issues of pressing concern to people, and more generally the flourishing of individual persons and their communities” (Reason & Bradbury 2001, 1). As I see it, the brand can allow all this to happen in the organization. But the prerequisite for this to happen is to reflect on one’s own world view, how do you see the role of participation? The insights required might even demand a big amount of learning away from old perceptions of collaboration and participation. The insights might even hurt your feelings as you realize how narrowly you have been thinking about participation and knowledge creation before.

Action research is aiming at working towards practical outcomes and to create new forms of understanding, since action without reflection and understanding is blind, and theory without action is meaningless (Reason & Bradbury 2001, 2). These characteristics apply to what problem-based learning aims to do and internal branding at its best can achieve the same characteristics. Then internal branding can’t be done in an information providing way, cascading the knowledge throughout the organization. Instead employees need to participate, to be active constructors of the brand reality in the organization and to constantly reflect together on brand performance. The participation should be extended to other stakeholders

as well. Then the brand becomes a platform for discovery, for creativity, for interactions and value-creation for all parties.

As Reason and Bradbury further state in their reflections on the characteristics of action research, theories which contribute to human emancipation and to a flourishing of the community can lead to new, different ways of being together as well as providing important guidance and inspiration for practice (Reason & Bradbury 2001, 2). Again, problem-based learning enable this to happen and I have seen astonishing results in how the PBL-students in the LiiBBA Programme have started to flourish and emancipated their professional skills in the PBL-processes. In company D there was a comment after the PBL-opening session that this experience will change the way how we work together in the future. All it needed was one session of PBL. The PBL students, who participated in the Multi-Client learning community, enabled inspiration to the corporate participants and their roles were significant in showing a different way of collaboration in a company context.

Jalava & Vikman (2003, 135–136) have applied PBL in companies in different development tasks and they list important starting points for successful PBL work. These will be applied to internal branding:

- 1) **Formation of real group objectives.** This motivates the thinking and the commitment to discussion in internal branding.
- 2) **Individual responsibility.** This leads to self-study and preparation between PBL-sessions, but also to see your own personal task in the group. By mixing people from different functions in internal branding, perspectives get broader and understanding increases.
- 3) **Self-regulation of the group.** Decision-making concerning the group's own activity is a remarkable way for the group to grow. Participation in planning of your own activity affects the activeness and initiative of the members and it increases commitment. Strategy provides the direction. These all affect internal branding positively.
- 4) **Amount of interaction.** The more interaction, the better results the group achieves. This concerns especially the learning objectives. The amount of group meetings has to be big enough for change in thinking to take place. In internal branding I therefore suggest a minimum of three to four PBL group meetings, to make sure the amount of interaction is enough. The time period between the meetings has to be suitable, I suggest one to two weeks. If the time period is too long, people will forget and the commitment disappears. This was experienced in company A during the research process.
- 5) **Trust and safety.** Trust means to accept your own vulnerability in interaction with others. Group members expect positive behavior and outcomes, but at the same time accept the risk that it will not happen. The basis for trust is that

people act as they speak. Strong criticality towards the ideas of others diminishes the trust. 6) **Reliable group leader/tutor.** The group trusts the leader to be benevolent, honest, competent and predictable. 7) **Agreement on group activity and principles.** Some time in the beginning of the process needs to be used for agreeing on the basic principles in the group. Schedules, division of work, absences, objectives and the role of the tutor/leader are all important issues to decide before starting the process. 8) **Assessment.** The principles of assessment need to be agreed on in the beginning. The use of an observer, who gives feedback after the completion of the discussion is useful. The value-mapping tool developed in Maria Jakubik's part of the Multi-Client project (See Jakubik 2006) enables assessment of the intangible and tangible flows in the group and the value each group member gives to the flows of interaction. The trust affects the quality of assessment in the group as well. Internal branding needs critical assessment in order to develop the quality of branding in the organization.

The PBL-process in internal branding needs to provide a chance for personal discovery of the brand. Customers and stakeholders could be invited into the group discussions or group members go out to discover the brand in reality. The triggers must be based on realistic information. The voice of the customer and the stakeholders needs to be present in the trigger texts. Participants in the Multi-Client project felt that the PBL-sessions were useful, the feedback from participants expressed that the structure in the meetings helped and facilitated learning. "The making explicit to all members why we act in this way, what we do and how we do it helped the knowledge creation process. It made us feel that we are proceeding and we will achieve some concrete results" (Jakubik 2006, 72). In the discussions during the final meeting of the Multi-Client learning community in May 2006, participants described how internal branding in the future will be done in a more collaborative way in the organizations.

The suggested learning model based on PBL is described in the figure below. The brand organization needs to be established first. Objectives need to be defined and the nature of the process must be acknowledged. The analysis phase needs to look at the branding situation in the company, the need for well-trained tutors for the group discussions and the gathering of data for the triggers. Ways to discover the brand in reality need to be planned. The PBL –groups need to be formed and planned. Groups with mixed people (8-10 people in each) are formed. The culture of the organization determines if the mixture can be made between management and employees, or if the organizational layers are having their

own discussions. The need to mix different management functions, like HR and marketing is very important. The PBL-process is suggested to contain the 8-steps described in chapter 2.3. After each group had 3-4 PBL- discussions, branding communities can be established and informal meetings for knowledge sharing can be arranged. The brand team makes sure that the brand discussions continue in the informal meetings. Stakeholders can be invited to the meetings, in order to establish direct contacts with key customers for example. Feedback is gathered from each group and summarized for management to react on. Management needs to support the process in their daily activities, by asking inspirational questions about how the groups are succeeding and proceeding.

In this way branding becomes an ongoing process, where co-creation of the brand reality is happening in interactions and dialogues inside and outside the organization.

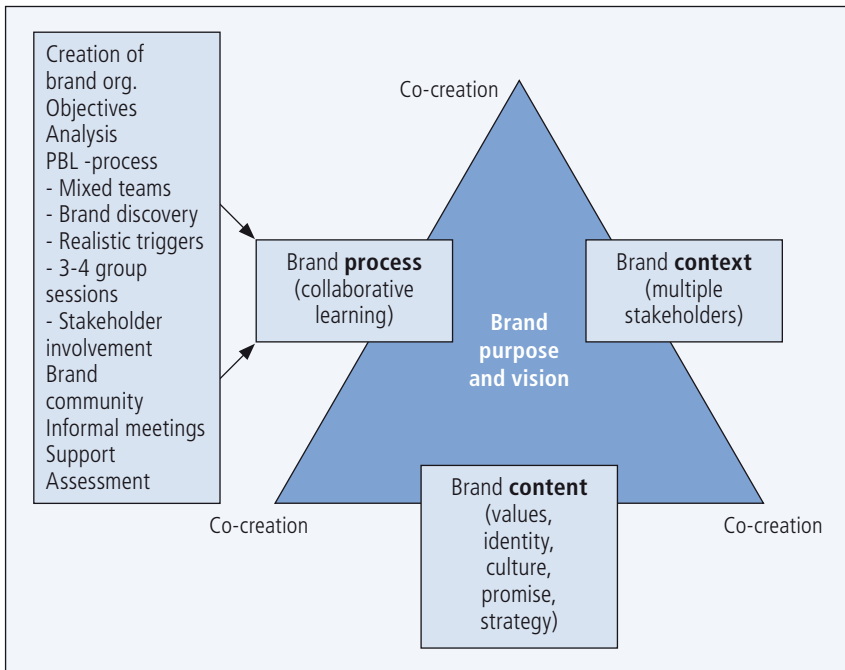


Figure 13. Internal branding process for collaborative branding.

5.4 Reviewing the research process

At this point I have to ask questions about the value of the work being done. The research strategy used in the Multi-Client project was participatory action research. The quality of inquiry and the quality of participation and relationship have to be assessed. It is not enough to say that it worked or it was helpful. The value of what I have tried to accomplish needs to be assessed. Action research has strengths and weaknesses. According to Reason & Bradbury (2001, 12) action research is best seen as an emergent, evolutionary and educational process of engaging with self, persons and communities during a significant period of time. The goal of action research is to generate activities in which ordinary people address common needs arising in their daily lives and, in the process, generate knowledge (Park 2001, 81). The need for studying internal branding was big in the four companies participating in the Multi-Client learning community. The various activities provided by the learning community, opening discussions in companies, joint workshops sessions, group work during the workshop days, thesis interviews in companies, closing discussions in companies and the final seminar all enabled ways for the participants to address their needs in finding new ways of doing and learning about internal branding. The PBL-process was experienced as a research tool for generating knowledge and involving everybody in the process. The relationships between participants became closer all the time and the quality of information and knowledge shared was very high, people also shared their problems and challenges and were able to admit their shortcomings in branding. The problems were all directly from the daily work of branding. The goal of creating a learning model for internal branding was reached through the intensive PBL-processes in the learning community. By actually acting in the PBL-process, the participants were able to evaluate themselves and their relationships towards branding and learning. One member stated during the final seminar that she has changed her way of perceiving with the help of the process. The engagement of the self as criteria of action research had come true in her case. The one year length of the Multi-Client process enabled a sufficient long evolutionary and educational process for all participants.

Reason & Bradbury (2001, 450–454) recognize five main questions about the quality and validity of inquiry in action research.

1) Quality as Relational Praxis

The questions of what decisions were made to maximize participation and what opportunities were used to allow all to feel free to be fully involved in

the process need to be assessed. As described above, the PBL-process enabled participation both in companies and among the company representatives in the learning community. The learning process facilitators aimed at maximizing the participation with an inspirational attitude instead of forcing. Trust was slowly built between members. Some challenges appeared because of lack of participation of one company in the workshop days except from their own case discussion. This affected the trust among members and minimized the participation between that company and the others. The commitment to participate from the companies was not always easy to get because of time constraint and some lack of interest in the others. On the other hand there were also two highly motivated companies, and the exchange of knowledge between them was very high.

2) Quality as Reflexive-Practical Outcomes

The issues to be assessed are whether the research is validated by participants and did new ways of acting in light of the work occur. Are the participants using what they learnt? (Reason & Bradbury 2001, 451) The PBL-process had some shortcomings in the implementation in a company context. How to motivate the people to participate and how to plan the process in such a way, that people also perform accordingly? The length between the sessions in the companies was not planned well. Reading materials could have been handed out in advance. The self-preparation part didn't happen. This was also because of busy schedules. In all companies the PBL-process per se was a new way of acting in a group. The feedback was positive, in all companies the discussions were seen as useful. The change of practices with regard to PBL demands a bigger change, so I doubt if anybody really started to use the process yet. However, the mindsets of the participants were affected by this new way of working and learning and with some guidance the process could easily be used in the companies. The explanation of the process and the goals of the research were thoroughly explained to the participants before it started. The description of the process was handed out and the participants got copies of the research report, where the process is described in more detail.

3) Quality as Plurality of Knowing

Conceptual-theoretical integrity needs firstly to be analyzed. Knowledge in action research often derives from deep knowledge of one case; how can then the findings be generalized? We have to be humble in keeping with our ignorance of all that could be known and cultivate a rigor of uncertainty. What we know is just a hypothesis of reality. Is the theory reasonable and practical? The propositional issue is always connected to

the others in the community. Good interpretations are more reasonable. (Reason & Bradbury 2001, 451) To make sure I did the correct interpretations of the internal branding problems in the case companies, I sent each company a copy of the analysis of the internal branding problems and asked for feedback if I had made a correct analysis of the data. In the final seminar I used the figure 11 as basis for my presentation and I asked for verification of the categories and themes from the participants. In this way I can rely on the fact that my interpretations are reasonable and my way of describing the reality in the case companies is correct. The integrity is good between the chosen research strategy and the way the data collection was made. The participatory approach was present in each step. A close cooperation between the two researchers and the learning process facilitators during the whole process enabled a more thorough understanding of the theoretical concepts involved. The input from the knowledge creation part to internal branding has been remarkable, but the challenge here is that some concepts from theory of knowledge creation have been misunderstood or too narrowly discussed. However, I see the positive impact knowledge creation and collaboration had on the concepts of corporate branding (a new concept, collaborative branding emerged). Another risk in the conceptual-theoretical integrity is the broad contents of the Multi-Client learning process. I hopefully succeeded in choosing the right concepts affecting internal branding from the vast amount of data collected.

Quality through extending our ways of knowing is the second issue to be analyzed under this category (Reason & Bradbury 2001, 451). The outcome can lead to a shift in ways of being in the world. The whole analysis process enabled me to adopt a new way of relating to the whole idea of the brand. The challenge is to make this transformation clear for the reader to understand. The change in perceiving the world according to the participatory world view has a profound impact on how you act and perform with this new knowledge.

Quality through methodological appropriateness is the third topic to assess. The world view of participation demands congruence between our theory of reality and our practice (Reason & Bradbury 2001, 451). The methods selected in the Multi-Client process were all relational by nature and the aim of the learning process facilitators was to build a relational world view to the participants. The explanations of why we acted and worked like we did were necessary to explain the underlying assumptions of the participatory world view.

4) Quality as Engaging in Significant Work

What is worthy of attention in research? As the inquiry groups cycle between action and reflection over time they move from surface concerns to more fundamental issues. A transition towards more self-direction both individually and in the community takes place. This is though given little attention in action research communities. (Reason & Bradbury 2001, 453) At the moment the question of branding seems to be a significant question to research for the companies. There was a clear need for new ideas and ways to do internal branding. The learning community provided a place for deeper inquiry to happen, the discussion always came back to the fundamental assumptions affecting behind the concrete actions in branding. Without the professional tutoring of the learning process facilitators, the learning community wouldn't have reached an emancipatory level of questioning. The reflection of the actions performed in the companies took place in each workshop. The atmosphere among the participants in the final seminar indicated that they felt the process had been significant for them and that practices in the companies were about to change. This indicates a higher level of self-direction. The combination of the three research areas described in figure 2 as such increased the significance of the research. At the same time it increased the level of challenge as three experts from different areas (marketing, leadership and knowledge creation) tried to find common and new views on branding. The risk of having a too broad perspective was evident, and the difficulty in presenting a brief, concise analysis of the problem is seen in my report. However, I felt that the thorough description of the whole process in chapter 4 enabled me better to see the underlying important issues affecting the success of internal branding.

5) Emergent Inquiry Towards Enduring Consequence

Action research is best accomplished when there is a new structure that allows for the meeting in a community of practice of organizational academics, consultants and managers. This rarely happens because of fragmented organizational structures, managers rarely spend time with scholars (Reason & Bradbury 2001, 453) The Multi-Client project per se is a big accomplishment when relating to the above statements. We were able to get the managers to join a one-year process, and the research group visited and made an impact on a small amount of people in each organization. The new structure provided by PBL and the learning community forced the participants to develop their engagement. This micro-engagement of people who worked on this project together could lead to a manifestation of new patterning of behaviors at a macro-level (Reason

& Bradbury 2001, 453). If the learning community could continue to meet, the macro-level change in behavior would get more support. Now the PBL research impact remained quite low in the organizations, and as I wrote earlier, the process demands knowledge about collaborative learning and it demands the participatory world view in relation to employees and stakeholders. Although I clearly support in my conclusions the PBL process as a tool for doing internal branding, I'm very aware that there are other possibilities and views to the topic. PBL however, was used as not only a learning tool, but also as a research tool and in this function it worked well. But again, PBL has many underlying assumptions like the participatory world view, the socio-constructive view on knowledge, the focus on the process and the participants as active constructors of knowledge. Without understanding these, the process implementation is likely to be less successful. When the Multi-Client participants afterwards read my report and the idea of collaborative branding it can help them realize more knowledge about what really happened during the Multi-Client process. Reflection after a period of time helps see the bigger patterns of new knowledge.

5.4.1 Further research opportunities

Knowledge creation is an intensely human, messy process of imagination, invention and learning from mistakes, embedded in a web of human relationships. Organizing for knowledge creation is very different from organizing for traditional competitive advantage. Few managers have come to grips with these distinctions. (Senge et al. 2005.) In light of this research internal branding seems to be very much as described above, it is messy, embedded in human relationships, imaginative and full of mistakes. Therefore the organization of internal branding is messy it needs new ways of organization, where interaction and dialogue are at the core.

To provide continuity for my research I want to propose new questions to be studied in the research area. To address the weakness of macro-level impact described above, I suggest a deeper study of the PBL-processes used in one company. If the process is tested with several groups and a cycle of 3–4 sessions per group, the impact of the process can be studied in more depth. The process was already tested in Helia involving all managers in 4 sessions in autumn 2005 and the results were encouraging. However, the process was not researched to find the challenges and critical questions affecting the success of it.

In action research the aim is targeted towards change and development of new behaviors. This can be studied on three levels, first-person (the researcher) level, second-person level (the partner level) and third person-level (the wider context) (Reason & Bradbury 2001, 453). The Multi-Client project was not able to reach the third level of impact, but the impact on the researchers and the partners was clearly seen. Students, researchers and to some extent the partners grew professionally and deepened their knowledge. This leads to another question for further research regarding the brand's possibility to be the identity creator for the individual. The learning community experience helped to create a participative part of the identity, but what is the role of the brand in the network society as identity builder for stakeholders? What are the prerequisites for collaborative branding to succeed? How can organizations be identified, who have a potential for adopting collaborative branding? Collaborative branding opens up a new perspective on branding and the forces affecting change in the network society are indicating the need for adopting this new perspective on branding.

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