
Original Article

The corporate brand and strategic direction: Senior business school managers' cognitions of corporate brand building and management

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ABSTRACT This revelatory study focusses on top *Financial Times* (FT)-ranked British business school managers' cognitions of corporate brand building and management. The study insinuates that there is a *prima facie* bilateral link between corporate branding and strategic direction. The data revealed that, among this genus of business schools, corporate brand building entailed an ongoing concern along with strategic management, stakeholder management, corporate communications, service focus, leadership and commitment. These empirical findings chime with the early conceptual scholarship on corporate brand management dating back to the mid-1990s. These foundational articles stressed the multi-disciplinary and strategic nature of corporate brand management and stressed the significant role of the CEO. As such, this research adds further credence to the above in terms of best practice *vis-à-vis* corporate brand management. Curiously, although senior managers espouse a corporate brand orientation, corporate brand management is seemingly not accorded a similar status in the curriculum. Drawing on a general embedded case study methodological approach, data was collected from eight leading (FT-ranked) business schools in Great Britain at

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Oxford, Cambridge, Durham, Bradford, Cranfield, Warwick, Lancaster and City (London) Universities. Each of these eight British business schools can be deemed ‘top’ business schools by virtue of their inclusion in the influential FT worldwide list of top business schools. The primary mode of qualitative data collection comprised the 37 in-depth interviews with business school Deans, Associate Deans and other senior faculty members and other managers.

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INTRODUCTION

Focussing on leading *Financial Times* (FT)-ranked British business school managers (Deans, Associate Deans and so on), this embedded case study has the explicit research objective of explicating their *cognitions* of their role and their comprehension of core activities in terms of corporate brand building. As such, the instrumental insights from this study shed light on senior managers’ discernment of corporate brand management responsibilities and corporate brand management activities. An implicit, albeit highly significant, dimension of this research relates to the link between the corporate brand/corporate brand management and strategic direction.

Data was obtained *via* 37 in-depth interviews with Deans, Associate Deans and other senior faculty members and managers of eight leading (FT-ranked) British business schools at *Oxford, Cambridge, Durham, Bradford, Cranfield, Warwick, Lancaster and City* (London) Universities.

Each of these eight British business schools can be deemed ‘top’ business schools by virtue of their inclusion in the *FT* worldwide list of top business schools. (The *FT* list is, arguably, the most influential list/characterisation of the world’s foremost business schools.)

The study is of significance as, having scrutinised the literature, it became apparent how issues of corporate brand building – especially senior managers’ cognitions of

corporate brand building and management – were under or unexplored. Moreover, to date, there is an absence of research on senior management cognitions of corporate brand building within FT-ranked business schools.

This study was informed by a qualitative research perspective. This article, in particular, concentrates on the instrumental insights from this study.

TOP BUSINESS SCHOOLS: PRACTISING WHAT THEY PREACH, RESEARCH AND TEACH?

Unquestionably, a key role of business schools, and more especially the world’s leading business schools, is to promulgate, as well as promote, good practice in terms of the management of organisations. A business school’s mission can be achieved in a variety of ways. Normally, the focus of such schools is on their *outputs* in terms of the quality, saliency and practicability of their research and teaching.

Consider the following section from Harvard Business School’s mission:

... the first component of the mission is educating, which we do in many ways – through our educational programs, through the ideas our faculty produce and disseminate, and through the influence we achieve by being close to leaders of all types, and of organizations all across the world. (see: www.hbs.edu/about/Pages/mission.aspx)

Also consider a similar statement from The University of Cambridge, Judge Business School:

... we achieve excellence in the quality of our research insights and our educational engagement. We develop knowledge both for its own sake and to help others make a difference. It means we train students and clients from all over the world, reward performance in our own staff and enable performance in our students and clients. It means we contribute to society by building sustainability into the heart of our business education and research. (see: www.jbs.cam.ac.uk/aboutus/our-vision/)

Few would demur from the above purposes. Arguably, however, a business school's focus on research, teaching and resultant leadership formation may represent an unduly narrow conceptualisation of business schools' roles, obligations and impact. *Why is this so?* This is because business schools are not only obliged to be *promoters* of management theories and practices but are, arguably, duty-bound to be *exemplars* of 'best practice' in terms of *input* – *input* in terms of the management of their organisations, and, of course, their corporate brands.

In the context of the above, this study focusses on senior managers' *cognitions* of corporate brand building and management within business schools and, for the above reason, the results from this empirical study are revelatory in 'getting into the minds' of senior managers of some of the world's foremost business schools.

To reiterate, *how* these top business schools conceive the management and development of their schools' corporate brands is likely to be of interest to astute MBA postgraduates, and those on executive courses will, almost certainly, compare what such institutions practise and publish with what they profess.

Ideally, business schools should be paradigms of best practice in terms of the

management of their own institutions. This is no more the case – to reiterate – in relation to corporate brand management. Clearly, it is incumbent on top business schools to practice what they preach, research and teach.

As such, this study of senior business school managers' cognitions of corporate brand building and management is therefore, arguably, of heightened import. To reprise, the study aims to shed light on how senior managers of some of the world's foremost business schools (Deans, Associate Deans, Directors and so on) *conceptualise* corporate brand building and management. By inference, too, it throws light on the strategic significance of corporate brand management as envisioned by business school senior managers.

Moreover, although not an explicit research aim of this research, this study's focus on leading (hence successful) business schools might suggest that there might be a clear link between their success and corporate brand building.

CORPORATE BRAND MANAGEMENT IN CONTENTION: ORTHODOXY OR HETERODOXY?

The last two decades have seen an upsurge of interest in corporate brand scholarship (Balmer, 1995, 2001a,b; Ind, 1997; Harris and de Chernatony, 2001; de Chernatony, 2002; Kapferer, 2002; Balmer and Gray, 2003; Hatch and Schultz, 2003; Knox and Bickerton, 2003; Inskip, 2004; Gylling and Lindberg-Repór, 2006; He and Balmer, 2007; Uggla, 2006; Roper and Davies, 2007; Balmer *et al.*, 2009; Juntunen *et al.*, 2010). From the outset, marketing scholars were especially concerned with the *management* of corporate brands. This study contributes to this vein of scholarship.

The foundational work on the corporate brand field stressed the significance and obligations of senior managers, and

especially of the CEO, in managing corporate brands, It argued that the corporate brand was multidisciplinary in scope and was based on corporate identity. The studies stressed its importance to customers and other stakeholders, and noted the importance of organisational members (Balmer, 1995, 2001a).

More recently, a veritable reformation of thought has characterised the corporate brand management with the advent of the co-creation perspective (Hatch and Schultz, 2010; Juntunen, 2012; Ind *et al*, 2013). Seemingly, the jury is still out on the precise details, merits, practicalities and efficacy of the co-creation approach *vis-à-vis* corporate brands. For some, this notion challenges the notion of corporate brand management, a marketing/corporate marketing orientation and, in some of the more zealous writers in the field, the very notion of management. The co-creation notion suggests that customers and other stakeholders are profoundly involved or – in some cases – are the major players in the re-creation and – as some of the literature suggests – even actual management of corporate brands.

Clearly, many marketing and other scholars find the above to be attractive, and several leading branding scholars from marketing and management have given their imprimatur to the co-creation notion. For some orthodox marketing scholars, the co-creation notion raises the question as to what, precisely, is wrong with the traditional notion of an organisation-wide customer/stakeholder-oriented philosophy?

In marketing thought, customers – and, more recently in corporate marketing, stakeholders – have *always* been accorded importance and have always had a voice and been considered institutional *partners* when an explicit corporate marketing approach is adopted (Balmer and Greyser, 2006). Moreover, some may find the rejection of the central management role in corporate

brand management (let alone in terms of general/strategic management) naïve and the current concern a fad.

For some, the co-creation perspective in marketing/branding thought is a reaction to the object failure of many organisations to embrace an authentic organisation-wide marketing/corporate marketing philosophy focussed on customers/stakeholders.

As such, in the context of the above debate, the results of this study are timely as it focusses on senior managers and, in particular, senior business school managers' cognitions of corporate brand management and, in effect, explores the more orthodox approach to corporate brand management as evinced in the foundational corporate brand literature.

Potentially, therefore, this study might cause brand scholars to reappraise the role of managers *vis-à-vis* corporate brand development and management. If nothing else a sense of equilibrium and objectivity is required in relation to the management, creation and development of corporate brands. Arguably, too, both the orthodox (traditional approaches to corporate brand management) and the heterodox (co-creation corporate brand perspective) standpoints are valuable in comprehending the territory.

SECTORIAL FOCUS: BRITISH BUSINESS SCHOOLS

The immediate post-Second World War period (post-1945) witnessed the establishment and rise in prominence of a number of prominent British business schools, especially in London, Manchester and Bradford. Of seminal importance in this regard was the celebrated 'Franks Report' (Franks, 1963).

Since then there has been an exponential growth in the establishment of University-based business schools to the point where, today, most UK universities have a business

school. The ‘ancient’ and collegial Universities of Oxford and Cambridge (but, not significantly, the University of Durham) were reluctant – and, it has to be admitted, late entrants in establishing their business schools but soon established sterling reputations in the sector. For the sake of balance, it is important to record that the first professorial position in commerce (business) was created in 1901 at The University of Birmingham.

Among scholars focussing on higher education (HE), there is a general consensus that British business schools have, for the last half century, been highly successful. In particular, British business schools have achieved considerable renown for the quality of both their teaching and their research (Wilson and Thomson, 2006; Starkey and Tiratsoo, 2007; Williams, 2010; Masrani *et al*, 2011).

See Figure 1, which details the archetypal characteristics of British business schools.

CORPORATE BRAND BUILDING WITHIN TOP BUSINESS SCHOOLS: WHAT DO WE KNOW?

The review of the literature revealed a scarcity of empirical insight *vis-à-vis* business schools as brands. Moreover, our scrutiny of the literature revealed that, to date, no research had taken place in relation to activities and managerial cognitions of corporate brand building and management.

In context, recently, the HE sector – as with many other industries – has realised the efficacy and strategic importance of corporate brands. Not surprisingly, therefore, scholars from the mid-2000 onwards have undertaken brand-related research (Gray *et al*, 2003; Pitt *et al*, 2006; Balmer and Liao, 2007).

In particular reference to business schools, extant research has, for example, focussed on business school programmes (Nichollis *et al*, 1995), school rankings

An analysis of extant scholarship has led us to identify the following relatively *general* characteristics of British business schools:

Schools of repute

From the mid-1950s onwards (largely influenced by the template offered by leading North American business schools) British business schools quickly acquired a reputation for the rigour of their research and teaching. They also developed an international reputation too. Their reputation has continued to be burnished to the present time.

Schools that are marketing-oriented

Notwithstanding their ostensible teaching and research integrity, British business schools, over recent times, have accorded importance to being marketing-oriented.

Schools that are diverse, competitive and transparent and operative in a complex sector

Although there are commonalities among many schools, there is also considerable diversity among them. British business schools operate in a complex and highly competitive sector. Notably, the sector is celebrated for its transparency, which, in part, is a consequence of both the research and teaching assessment undertaken by HM British Government (Quality Assurance Agency (QAA), Research Assessment Exercise (RAE)/Research Excellent Framework (REF)), accreditation bodies, and rankings, especially *Financial Times* (FT) rankings.

Figure 1: Archetypal characteristics of British business schools.

and accreditations (Siemens *et al*, 2005), marketing activities and communications (Gatfield, *et al*, 1999; Gray *et al*, 2003), institutional positioning/repositioning (Bennis and O'Toole, 2004; Pfeffer and Fong, 2004) and reputational damage (Siebert and Martin, 2013).

With particular reference to branding, extant scholarship has, for instance, examined branding, visual identity and nomenclature (Opoku *et al*, 2006; Pitt *et al*, 2006), as well as students' identification with business schools, drawing on social identity theory (Balmer and Liao, 2007; Balmer *et al*, 2010).

However, and to reiterate, to date there has been an absence of research not only on senior managers' cognitions of corporate brand building but also in relation to the aforementioned in relation to top *FT*-ranked business schools. This lack of empirical insight explains why a qualitative approach is efficacious.

METHODOLOGY

The absence of empirical insights *vis-à-vis* senior managers' cognitions of corporate brand management within *FT*-ranked business schools materially informed our choice of research approach and methodology.

Faced with a *tabula rasa* in terms of research, the case/single case design (arguably, this includes an embedded case study) has the potential to reveal important insights into unique and significant phenomena (see: Eisenhardt, 1989; Gill and Johnson, 1991; Yin, 2014).

An embedded case study approach within the inductive research tradition was appositely represented as an appropriate method. Case studies are especially useful in shedding light on previously unexplored phenomena. Embedded case studies enable multiple organisations to be examined and are efficacious *vis-à-vis* descriptive studies, adding richness to the descriptive insights (Scholz and Tietje, 2002; Yin, 2014).

As such, although this study focusses on eight leading business schools, they, in their totality, represent a single category of leading (British) *FT*-ranked business schools. Following this logic within the case study tradition, each business school represents a subunit of analysis (Yin, 2014).

The primary mode of data collection were semi-structured interviews as this is the most fundamental of all qualitative methods and involves in-depth interviewing (Easterby-Smith *et al*, 1991, p. 71). However, recourse was also made to documentary data and to a research diary. Triangulation of data was achieved by drawing on the above and *via* internal triangulation in terms of the three-stage coding of interviews.

Research stages and data collection

The field work of our study comprised several stages of enquiry, as detailed below.

Stage 1: identification of top (*FT*-ranked) business schools

Stage 2: five pilot interviews (five) undertaken within a single *FT*-ranked business school

Stage 3: gaining access to eight business schools (*Bradford University School of Management; Cass Business School, City University; Cranfield University School of Management; Durham University Business School; Judge Business School, Cambridge University; Lancaster University Management School; Said Business School, Oxford University; Warwick University Business School*)

Stage 4: data collection (37 semi-structured interviews, documentary material)

Stage 5: data analyses and resultant research insights (*using the classic three-stage coding process*) comprising first-level (*open*) coding, second-level (*axial*) coding and third-level (*selective*) coding; cross-case analyses in the study; triangulation of data (in-depth interviews, documents, research diary).

Table 1 details the positions held by interviewees. For reasons of confidentiality the names of individual business schools have been supplemented with letters.

Table 1: Positions held by interviewees within the 8 business schools

Business school	Interviewees position
A	Dean of School Deputy Dean Director of FT MBA programme Marketing and Development Manager
B	Dean of School Director of Marketing Director of MSc courses Director of Full-Time MBA
C	Deputy Dean (in charge of daily affair) Chief Operating Officer Head of External Relations and Business Development Director of Marketing/Communications
D	Dean of School Associate Dean (research) Director of Marketing Director of MBA programme Alumni Executive
E	Dean of School Director of Teaching Deputy Director of MBA Programme Corporate Relations Manager / Head of External Relations Communication Manager
F	Dean of School Associate Dean, Postgraduate programme Associate Dean, Research Associate Dean, Undergraduate programme Marketing Manager Recruitment Manager
G	Dean of School Deputy Dean, Head of External Relations MBA Programme Manager Associate Director of International Office / Alumni
H	Dean of School Director of Executive MBA / Director of FT MBA Marketing Executive for MBA Director of Centre for Customised Executive Development Marketing Executive for Executive Education

Note: For reasons of confidentiality, schools are represented by the letters A-H

RESEARCH INSIGHTS

Corporate brand management: A senior manager's concern and responsibility

The research showed that senior managers accorded considerable importance to their business school brand, acknowledged its strategic significance, accorded importance to corporate brand building, adopted a holistic (multi-disciplinary) corporate brand-building method, assumed day-to-day responsibility (as senior managers) in managing the corporate brand, and accepted the role of the Dean as the school's, *de facto*, corporate brand manager.

As such, the study clearly demonstrated that senior managers – and CEOs (Deans) – perceived *corporate brand management* as very much a part of their purview.

From the study, there was not only a general consensus relating to the above but also a commonality across the schools in terms of the key dimensions to be focussed on in relation to developing their business school brand (*corporate brand building*) – viz, strategic management, service management, leadership, corporate communication, organisational commitment and stakeholder management.

A clear inference from the data – in terms of the cognitions of senior business school managers – is that there is a *prima facie* (seemingly bi-lateral links) link between the corporate brand and strategic direction. This will become apparent in the subsequent section/s.

Earlier on in this article it was noted that, although it *was not* an explicit research aim of this study to ascertain whether there was a formal link between the success of these business schools and their corporate brand-building and management activities, the findings of this study add a degree of credence to this premise.

Key dimensions of corporate brand building in top business schools

The data showed there to be a broad consensus among senior managers *vis-à-vis* the key dimensions of corporate brand building and management. The six dimensions comprised:

1. *strategic management*
2. *stakeholder management*
3. *corporate communications*
4. *service*
5. *leadership*
6. *commitment*.

Figure 2 shows the findings in diagrammatic form (based on the final stages of coding analyses)

1 Corporate brand building: The importance of strategic management

Strategic management/guidance emerged as a key corporate brand-building/management trait. Having a clear strategy guides the whole corporate brand-building process. It encompasses, among others, a concern with a school's *distinctiveness/differentiation* (analogous to 'positioning') and helps senior managers to focus on a school's strengths.

I believe brand building and management is very important, and the school brand needs to be actively managed. (Dean, Business School G)

I think managing a school's brand is important, and I think you have to manage the brand across a vast number of channels. (Director: Business School H)

If there are any new ideas, my first thought is does it fit with our brand? (Head of External Relations and Business Development, Business School C)

The corporate brand strategy is necessarily mindful of a school's mission and vision.

I think the relation between build our brand and our mission and vision should

be absolutely hand in hand. (Director of Marketing, Business School D)

Interestingly, there was a consensus among managers in terms of key strategic corporate brand-building strategy components that aid distinctiveness/differentiation and positioning.

This encompassed, among others, internationalisation, service quality, financial stability and corporate architecture. Internationalisation was characterised in broad terms and included – among others – attracting international faculty and students, having international programmes and having international partners.

We have spent a lot of money on this campus: in the past twenty years, millions of pounds. Much of the investment has gone into how the school is visualised. (Associate Dean: Business School F)

The building isn't just a building! It is an architectural statement. (Dean: Business School B)

Having a strong service *orientation* was also seen to be important.

2 Corporate brand building: The importance of stakeholder management

Senior managers conceived stakeholder management as a key dimension of corporate brand building and management. As such, there was a concern to meet the requirements of key stakeholders along with creating a positive and attractive corporate brand image. Students, faculty, alumni, the university, university departments, the media and the business community were among the key groups identified. In relation to the above, senior managers recognised the ambassadorial role of students/alumni as corporate brand representatives, maintaining and attracting top faculty and offering competitive salaries and conditions of work,

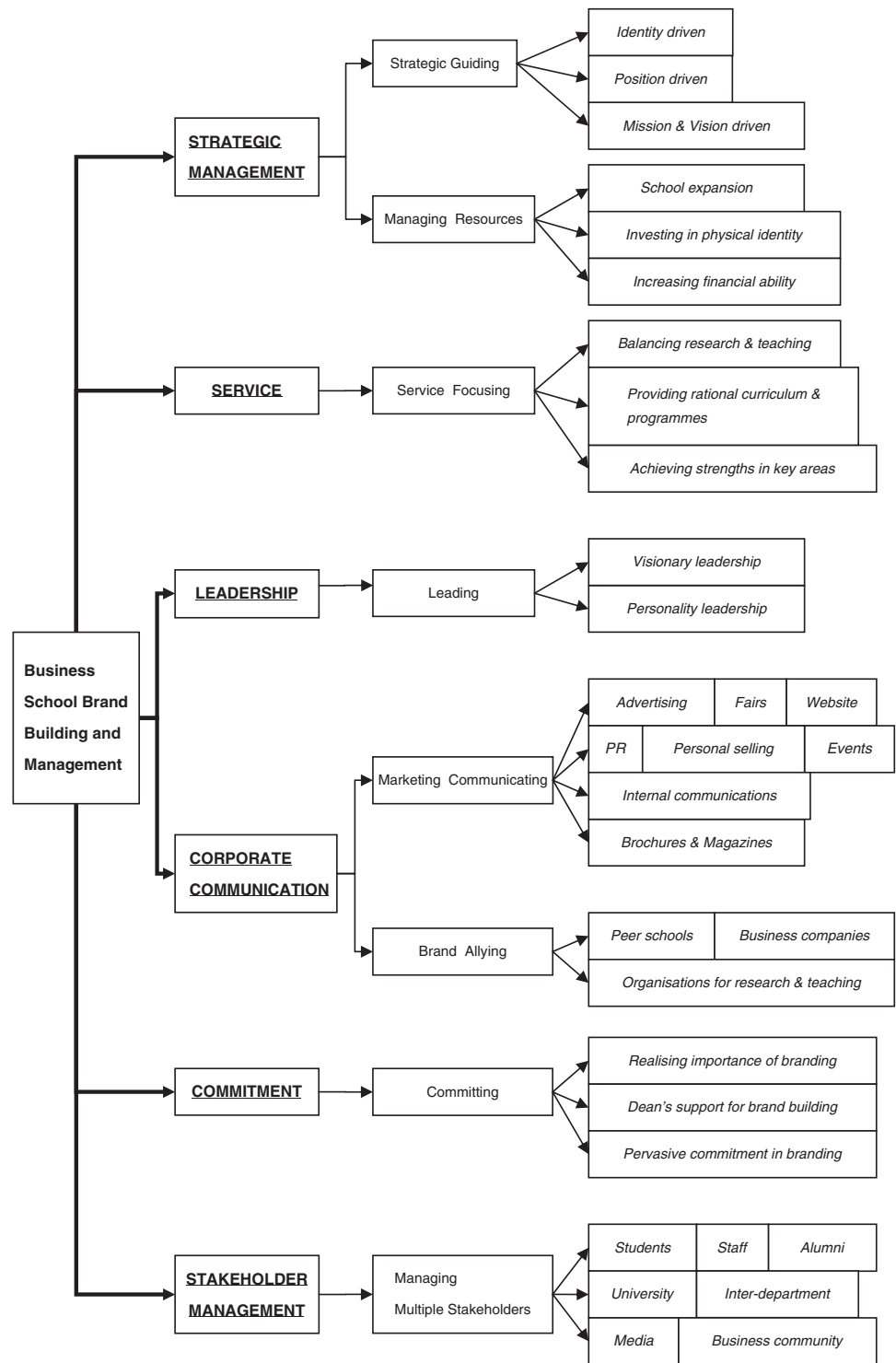


Figure 2: Data insights from study (based on coding of data).

realising the school's corporate brand was meaningfully burnished by the university's brand, and appreciating the necessity of excellent media relations, especially as some newspapers (*FT*) produce highly influential ranking lists.

We have a lot of connections with other (University) departments who are so good; it's a unique advantage for us. (Director: Business School E).

A key strategy of the school is to build long-term relationships with leaders in the business world in a way that lets them actively contribute to the school. (Documentary Data: Business School B)

3 Corporate brand building: The importance of corporate communications

The importance attached to corporate communications by senior managers is derived from two second-order categories – namely, *marketing communicating and brand allying*.

Marketing communicating relates to the corporate brand/stakeholder interface, whereas brand allying aims to maintain/acquire/improve the school's corporate brand reputation. A variety of communications (total corporate communications) are deployed to achieve this end.

I also have formed a virtual marketing group which meets every two weeks. It (involves) anyone who has any kind of responsibility for communications, external and internal. (Director: Business School C)

We now have also a PR agency and they make sure, or try to make sure that we get mentioned in the various newspapers. (Director: Business School A)

Brand allying refers to business schools' formal partnerships/alliances with critical organisations of strategic importance. Managers, in the in-depth interviews, often made reference to the importance of peer

schools (those of equal or higher standing/esteem), business companies or certain organisations. Senior managers often sought relationships with organisations deemed to have a higher corporate brand reputation. By these means, a school's corporate brand image could be burnished.

We work hard to establish our school brand internationally. We formed a relationship with one US business school so as to give us a transatlantic partnership and a partnership with a major business school in China so as to give us a stronger Asian orientation. (Dean: Business School H)

We are working very hard to establish links with international schools and we are almost in the final stages of signing an agreement with Universities in the United States of America, China, and in Europe. (Dean: Business School A)

Among senior managers, it was found that the corporate communications of leading business schools was threefold: 1 presenting the business school's identity so that it was congruent with the school's strategy; 2 reducing the gap between the actual and desired corporate brand identity and the resultant images of the business school held by the school's key stakeholders; 3 organising and controlling the implementation of the school's corporate brand communications across the board.

4 Corporate brand building: The importance of service

An important dimension of senior managers' cognitions of corporate brand building was the importance they accorded to a service. Service – as articulated here – relates to the activities and intentions (and the quality of activities and intentions) of the business school *vis-à-vis* stakeholders.

Senior managers stressed the importance of ascertaining a school's primary

(distinctive and differentiating) strengths in terms of research, teaching (or both where they are assessed to be of equal significance) and in terms of specific areas of research/teaching strengths (for instance, corporate brand management, sustainability, developing economies, public sector management). It should be noted that the service dimension also re-emerged as a category of its own.

We are research oriented. I think business schools have to be research-oriented. Research is critical and the school's brand doesn't so much come from teaching. (Our) school's brand is more associated with research than teaching. (Director: Business School B)

Delivering extremely high quality programmes is equal to building the school's brand in reality (Director: Business School E)

5 Corporate brand building: The importance of leadership

The role of the Dean (or analogous position) and issues of leadership were conceived to be of significance by senior managers. The theme of *leadership* represents the particular impact of the Dean's cognition, and the resultant impact of this on school brand. The Dean's behaviours were also deemed to be germane *vis-à-vis* corporate brand building. As one senior management mused:

There was a realisation that Deans are unquestionably the most important person in terms of business school brand building. Her or his importance is reflected in every aspect of the school's management, from the process of decision making, strategy designing to the activities of information communicating, programme launching. Therefore, the leadership of the business school becomes an essential element in building the school brand.

Business schools are highly political (in that strategy and (management) decisions are very much based on one person – the Dean. (Director, Business School B)

You then need to have a group of people because you can never do it by yourself. You need to be able to lead a group of people that will buy into your idea and then move the whole process together. (Dean, Business School A)

From senior managers' reflections, two modes of corporate brand leadership were identified: *visionary leadership* and *personality leadership*.

Visionary leadership refers to the Dean's envisioning of the school's corporate brand position (his or her vision for the brands) and the wherewithal to empower faculty and others to enact the espoused vision.

Personality leading refers to a Dean's personality traits, which, in their composite, can also have a bearing on the school brand. For instance, a Dean's personality might encompass, for instance, passion, humanity, friendliness, and an ability to recognise his or her mistakes and to rectify them.

6 Corporate brand building: The importance of commitment

Among senior managers the importance of senior management corporate brand commitment emerged as a salient and significant corporate brand-building facet. Commitment, as articulated here, refers not only (and importantly) to the obligations of senior managers to consciously build and manage the school brand but also to the critical role of rank and file staff.

I think building a brand should involve everybody. There is a conscious effort on the part of the management of this school to make sure that everybody understands that they are part of it. (Chief Operating Officer: Business School C)

Senior managers identified three dimensions of their corporate brand commitment:

1 realising the importance of brand building; 2 the Dean's support (reinforces the earlier section); and 3 widespread senior management commitment to branding the school. However it should be noted that a business school brand is *sui generis*: it is fundamentally different (in the above regards) to the traditional corporate service brand.

INSIGHTS IN THE CONTEXT OF THE FORMATIVE LITERATURE ON CORPORATE BRAND MANAGEMENT

The research insights confirm and elaborate the early foundational work *vis-à-vis* the nature and requisites of corporate brand management and corporate brand building (Balmer, 1995, 2001a). The aforementioned articles asserted the following: corporate brands are of strategic importance; they are derived from the corporate identity (by inference, shown in this study); they require support from all organisational members; they are multidisciplinary in scope; they are a senior management concern and accord the CEO, the status of corporate brand manager; requires a interdisciplinary approach and needs corporate brand loyalty on the part of organisational members. These are the key requisites of corporate brands and their management and these early articles are of seminal importance in establishing the core precepts of the corporate brand domain (Balmer, 1995, 2001a).

Subsequent scholarship in the area developed many of the above-mentioned aspects (Balmer, 2010, 2012).

PRACTICAL INSIGHTS

Early on it was observed how, ideally, business schools should be paradigms of best practice in terms of management and, more specifically, in relation to corporate brand management. From this study, the following insights can be derived, taking on board the caveat that the research insights are based on management cognitions. As such,

senior managers might usefully consider what senior business school managers claim to do and consider this as guidance in managing their own corporate brands.

Mindful of the research insights, senior managers should:

- recognise the importance of the corporate brand
- understand its strategic nature
- take responsibility for the corporate brand (especially the CEO)
- devote time and resources in building and managing the corporate brand
- adopt a stakeholder perspective
- appreciate the importance of organisation-wide commitment to corporate brands
- grasp its multidisciplinary nature
- comprehend how the corporate brand can serve as a benchmark for the organisation

Also, just as leading business schools may represent a quasi-corporate brand group/generic category the same can be true in other sectors.

RESEARCH LIMITATIONS AND FURTHER RESEARCH POSSIBILITIES

This study focusses on management cognitions of corporate brand building. As such, subsequent studies could focus on the precise activities of business school managers in relation to corporate brand building. Moreover, as this research focusses on a few selected leading business schools, future studies could focus on other leading business schools in other countries and on the very important middle-ranking (and lower-ranked) business school categories (many of which are held in high esteem for the quality of their teaching). The application of the corporate brand orientation notion (Balmer, 2013) and the co-creation perspective (Ind *et al*, 2013) *vis-à-vis* business schools could also be efficacious.

COURSES IN CORPORATE BRAND MANAGEMENT: A CURIOUS IF NOT WORRYING OMISSION?

Given the apparent strategic significance accorded to corporate brand management by senior business school managers it would be anomalous if leading business schools were not to have bespoke corporate brand electives or, as a minimum, include corporate brand management as part of the core strategy class. A failure so to do would blotch business school escutcheons.

FINAL REFLECTION

Corporate brand building and management emerged as a fundamental, and seemingly, all-pervasive, strategic concern of all eight leading business schools. Senior managers generally might take note of this. Moreover, the insights of this revelatory study are not only of instrumental value *per se* but are of pedagogical value too. To reiterate an earlier point, astute MBA scholars (as well as managers) are likely to assess senior business school managers (most of whom are prominent scholars in the field) in terms of not only what they preach, research and teach but also importantly what they practice. As such, the nature of corporate brand management of leading business schools can be of considerable pedagogical value whether they realise this or not.

Clearly, and finally, it is not only what top business schools preach, research and teach that is of importance but what their senior faculty in their role as senior managers practise too. This is especially the case for corporate brand management and development.

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