

**The Meanings of Corporate Branding: Perceptions of Engineering
Professionals in Three British Engineering Consultancies**

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Alireza Sheikh

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Abstract

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Alireza Sheikh

Corporate branding research has developed fairly rapidly over the past fifteen years. Insights from a diversity of contexts have contributed significantly to the development of the concept. However, extant studies still, by large, remain under the purview of marketing and insights from non-marketing perspectives are very limited. Furthermore, the viewpoint of employees in engineering-intensive contexts is widely understudied. Hence, this thesis aims to shed further empirical light on the meanings and implications of corporate branding from the perspective of engineers in the context of three British engineering consulting companies. An interpretive, qualitative and inductive approach through case study research design is adopted as the methodology of this thesis. Findings revealed the meanings and implications of corporate branding as well as the reasons for engineers' disengagement with the corporate brand initiatives. Emergent themes and findings are presented through six organizing themes: the inter-dynamism and mutual implications of personal brands and the corporate brand, the tensions between the two organizing structures of professional partnership and corporation, the conduct of corporate branding and corporate brand communication, the implications of economic downturns for the corporate brand, the engineering-marketing dichotomy and its implications for the corporate brand and, last, the association between organizational culture, organizational identity and the corporate brand.

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This thesis has been presented at different conferences at various stages and scholars' feedback has been taken into account. A number of publications have also been made on the basis of this thesis. In particular, the second case study was published recently in the special issue of business-to-business branding in *Industrial Marketing Management*:

Sheikh, A., & Lim, M. (2011) 'Engineering consultants' perceptions of corporate branding: A case study of an international engineering consultancy', *Industrial Marketing Management*, 40 (7):1123-1132

In addition, the following selected papers were published in refereed conference proceedings based on the theoretical underpinnings and initial findings of this thesis:

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Sheikh, A. (2010), 'B2B Engineering Services Branding: A case-study in Britain', Proceeding of the Academy of Marketing Annual Conference, Coventry, UK.

Sheikh, A. (2010), 'Branding for Every Member: A critical reading of Nicholas Ind's *Living the Brand*', Proceeding of the 3rd Practical Criticism Conference, University of Leicester, UK.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1. Introduction

Interest in corporate branding has increased significantly over the past fifteen years (Balmer, 2010). Both academics and marketing professionals have developed their understanding of corporate brands and corporate branding initiatives adopting a variety of viewpoints and disciplinary perspectives (Schultz and Chernatony, 2002; Schultz et al., 2005b; Hatch and Schultz, 2008; Balmer, 2010). In more recent years, especially, multi-disciplinary approaches to corporate branding in less-studied contexts such as business-to-business domains have been encouraged (Baumgarth, 2010; Roper and Davies, 2010; Leek and Christodoulides, 2011).

Today, several lines of research can be identified in the corporate branding literature (see Ahonen, 2008). These include: conceptual papers (e.g. Hatch and Schultz, 2001; Harris and de Chernatony, 2001; Balmer and Greyser, 2002), branding strategies (e.g. Griffin, 2002; Vallaster and Lindgreen, 2011), corporate brand building (e.g. Wallström et al., 2008; Juntunen et al., 2010; Järventie-Thesleff et al., 2011), corporate brand management models (e.g. de Chernatony and Segal-Horn, 2003; Knox and Bickerton, 2003), internal/employee branding (e.g. Ind, 2004; Punjaisri and Wilson, 2007), business-to-business corporate branding (e.g. Ohnemus, 2009; Vallaster and Lindgreen, 2011; Kotler et al., 2006), re-branding (e.g. Muzellec and Lambkin, 2009), co-branding (e.g. He and Balmer, 2006; Erevelles et al., 2008), and corporate brand equity (e.g. Burmann et al., 2009; Baumgarth and Schmidt, 2010; Baumgarth and Binckebanck, 2011), are among the major streams in corporate branding research.

In addition to the research streams mentioned above, considerable overlaps can also be identified between the corporate brand literature and some other bodies of the literature such as corporate identity (e.g. Balmer and Greyser, 2002; Dacin and Brown, 2006; Melewar and Karaosmanoglu, 2006), corporate culture (e.g. Balmer, 2005; O'Reilly, 2005), strategy (e.g. van Riel and van Bruggen, 2002; Hatch and Schultz, 2008), brand personality (e.g. Davies et al., 2004; Chun and Davies, Spring 2006), visual identity (e.g. Baker and Balmer, 1997; Olins, 2003), integrated corporate communication (e.g. van Riel, 1995; Bickerton, 2003), corporate image (e.g. Dowling, 2001) and corporate reputation (e.g. Chun, 2005; Helm, 2005), to name some of the most pertinent ones.

Within the last decade or so, several attempts have been made to (re-)define corporate branding as a multi-disciplinary and multi-dimensional construct and approach in branding research (Schultz and Chernatony, 2002; Balmer and Gray, 2003; Schultz, 2005b; Ind and Bjerke, 2007 Hatch and Schultz, 2008). This is mainly due to the reason that corporate branding thrived in the marketing literature as a broader and more integrated discourse for product branding (Balmer, 2001a; Balmer, 2001c). Particularly in earlier stages of conceptual development, the corporate brand was deployed as a meta-narrative for product brands (Stern, 2006).

However, one of the main shortcomings is that corporate branding still remains largely under the purview of marketing both in the academic and practitioner domains (Bernstein, 2003; Ind, 2004; Schultz et al., 2005a). In other words, to date, corporate branding theories have been developed, refined and verified mainly by (pro-) marketing scholars (de Chernatony and Dall'Olmo Riley, 1998; de Chernatony and Dall'Olmo Riley, 1999); in business practice as well, corporate branding activities are largely perceived as a marketing function or, somewhat destructively, fall into the category of marketing-related activities (Balmer and Greyser, 2003; Ind, 2004).

The dominance of the marketing discipline in the corporate branding realm is to some extent problematic in that non-marketing perspectives from outside the (pro-) marketing discipline are very limited and rather suppressed. Plus, marketing domination can become a significant factor in disengaging non-marketing constituents from the corporate brand. Given that corporate branding is supposed to involve *all* – marketing and non-marketing – constituents and stakeholders for it to be a success (Ind, 1998; de Chernatony and Segal-Horn, 2003; Hatch and Schultz, 2003), more needs to be known and further research needs to be carried out on how non-marketing stakeholders perceive and engage with the corporate brand and corporate branding initiatives.

This thesis is, therefore, designed to contribute to these gaps in the corporate brand literature by shedding further empirical light on, and providing nuanced insights into, the concept and conduct of corporate branding from a largely non-marketing perspective. In the remainder of this chapter, key strands of corporate branding, as well as employee branding literatures (which is pertinent to the focus of this thesis), are reviewed and the gap to which this thesis is directed is further explained. Subsequently, additional motivations for the direction of this thesis, including my research interest and background, are briefly introduced. The chapter ends with the thesis outline, a brief introduction to the overall structure of the thesis and the content of following chapters.

1.2. Corporate branding: theories and definitions

Several definitions and theoretical versions can be located in the literature for the corporate brand. Although these various definitions are insightful and have contributed to theoretical maturity, reaching a clear consensus among them can sometimes be difficult. To briefly introduce the concept, three of the most widely cited definitions are deployed here:

Knox and Bickerton (2003:1013) define the corporate brand as “the visual, verbal and behavioural *expression* of an organization’s unique business model” (added emphasis). Balmer and Greyser (2003) define the corporate brand as an organizational identity type – i.e. ‘*covenanted*’ identity – which revolves around the notion of brand ‘promise’ and needs to be in alignment with other organizational identity types, namely ‘*cultural*’, ‘*communicated*’, ‘*conceived*’, ‘*actual*’, ‘*desired*’, and ‘*ideal*’ brand identities (Balmer and Greyser, 2002; Balmer, 2005). And, last but not least, Hatch and Schultz (2008) define corporate branding as the process of maintaining alignment among corporate brand perceptions from the three main perspectives of strategic ‘*vision*’, organizational ‘*culture*’ and stakeholder ‘*image*’ on the basis of ‘*organizational identity*’. In this definition, alignment between different stakeholder perspectives is central.

Thus, among the most widely used definitions is the concept of corporate brand as an organizational identity type – expressions of brand promise – and sustaining alignment among various types of organizational identity and stakeholder perceptions upon the corporate brand. Therefore, the corporate brand is constantly negotiated between ‘internal’ and ‘external’ stakeholder perceptions that are reciprocally influential (Urde, 2003).

The integration of all stakeholder bases in the process of building and maintaining the corporate brand has been at the core of corporate branding since its early conceptualizations (Balmer, 1995; Ind, 1997); in more recent years, this notion has been emphasised with stakeholder approaches to corporate branding (Schultz, 2005b; Ind and Bjerke, 2007; Gregory, 2007; Roper and Davies, 2007). All internal and external stakeholders are to be engaged with the corporate brand and contribute to its development one way or another (Schultz and Chernatony, 2002; Ind, 2004; Schultz, 2005b; Ind and Bjerke, 2007). Hence, the corporate brand should be deployed as a

mode and medium of ‘dialogue’ with all stakeholders (Antorini and Andersen, 2005; Hatch and Schultz, 2008).

Much corporate branding research has been done to date on the stakeholder bases which are in some ways (directly) related to the marketing discipline or constituents from consumers (de Chernatony et al., 2003; Ugglå, 2006; Madden et al., 2008) to sales/customer-facing staff (Harris and de Chernatony, 2001; Punjaisri and Wilson, 2007; Aspara and Tikkanen, 2008; Morhart et al., 2009) to marketing managers (King and Grace, 2006; Wallace and Chernatony, 2007; de Chernatony, 2009) and brand experts (de Chernatony and Riley, 1998). However, less is known about other stakeholder bases other than these, particularly those with less direct affiliation to the marketing discipline and constituencies; these include non-marketing constituents, support staff, technical engineers, consultants, and/or knowledge-intensive contexts, to name only a few.

Among the different stakeholder groups that deserve research attention, the employee base is still comparatively under-researched on the subject of corporate branding especially in light of the crucial role of employees in the formation and success of the corporate brand (Miles and Mangold, 2004; Hardaker and Fill, 2005; Punjaisri and Wilson, 2007; King and Grace, 2008; Maxwell and Knox, 2009). Although the literature of employee and internal branding has attempted to address the employee stakeholder base to some extent, extant studies have still remained by and large marketing-orientated, functional and somehow managerially one-sided (Schultz, 2005b; Kärreman and Rylander, 2008).

Many of the existing work explains how corporate branding *ought to* be articulated to the employees and less empirical knowledge is available to demonstrate as to *how* it is

actually perceived from their perspective. In other words, while one side of the corporate branding ‘conversation’ is well-explained, the other side which is how employees read, perceive, and reflect upon the corporate brand initiatives is less discussed (Punjaisri and Wilson, 2007; Kärreman and Rylander, 2008; King and Grace, 2008).

Therefore, this thesis focuses on the employee perspective to provide further empirical and nuanced insight on the meanings and implications of the corporate brand and corporate branding initiatives. In the following section, a brief introduction is provided on the extent to which the employee base has been addressed to date with respect to corporate branding under the rubric of internal corporate branding (Ind, 2004; Hardaker and Fill, 2005; Karlsson, 2006; King and Grace, 2008; Punjaisri, 2009).

1.3. Internal corporate branding: theories and definitions

As introduced earlier, the internal corporate branding literature and that of employee branding overlap greatly. The main distinction between the two is that the former revolves around the corporate branding discourse ‘internally’ whereas in the latter, the corporate brand is less central. The two have often been used interchangeably. Nevertheless, given that this thesis studies the corporate brand construct and its meanings from the point of view of employees, the term ‘internal corporate branding’ seems more suitable and better represents the approach of this thesis than employee branding.

Corporate branding can be deployed to enhance employee attraction, retention, and motivation (Backhaus and Tikoo, 2004; Dinnie, 2007; Edwards, 2010). These implications are often discussed under the rubrics of internal marketing (Mitchell,

2002), internal branding (Burmann and Zeplin, 2005; Vallaster and Chernatony, 2006; Punjaisri and Wilson, 2007) and employee branding (Ind, 2004; Miles and Mangold, 2004).

Central to the theory of employee branding is maintaining (a certain level of) alignment between the corporate brand and employees in terms of values, personality, missions, and vision. Successful employee branding facilitates employees to internalize brand values, identify with and deliver the corporate brand promises in a self-driven manner (Ind, 2004; Burmann and Zeplin, 2005). Values alignment between employees and the corporate brand enhance employees' identification with the corporate brand and leads to self-driven brand citizenship behaviour – i.e. employees go beyond their predefined obligations to deliver brand values in an autonomous and authentic manner (Ind, 2004; Burmann and Zeplin, 2005; Ind and Bjerke, 2007). Such value alignment is particularly significant in service-based contexts.

Employee branding calls for employee empowerment (Burmann and Zeplin, 2005), adequate autonomy (Ind, 2003a), brand training (Ind, 2004; King and Grace, 2008), informed recruitment (Aurang *et al.*, 2005), supportive communication (Ahmed *et al.*, 2002) and continuous surveillance (Martin *et al.*, 2005). Ind (2004), among others, recommends that employee branding should not be limited to customer-facing employees; rather it should permeate the whole organization to embrace all. Employee branding is significant – often as a means of normative control – particularly in knowledge-intensive contexts whereby the products are mainly knowledge works, employees are more autonomous, structures of control are looser and organizations are less bureaucratized (Alvesson, 2000; Alvesson and Willmott, 2002; Alvesson and Kärreman, 2004).

Corporate branding initiatives are often used as an integrated mode of communication with all stakeholders (employees included). Thus, organizations engage in employee branding consciously or unconsciously and at different levels (Balmer and Greyser, 2003). Employees are exposed to brand-related initiatives one way or another, particularly since boundaries between ‘internals’ and ‘externals’ are evermore blurred (Christensen and Askegaard, 2001).

Yet, organizations are likely to gain more from ‘conscious’ employee/internal branding activities – i.e. crafting and communicating appropriate messages to internal audiences in a coherent, consistent and strategic manner (de Chernatony, 2002; de Chernatony and Segal-Horn, 2003). However, as discussed earlier, apart from a number of anecdotal accounts of big consumer brands, there is still little empirical evidence to demonstrate as to how employees actually perceive these initiatives (Powell, 2005; Punjaisri and Wilson, 2007; King and Grace, 2008).

Among various employee types, engineers are among the least studied professions with respect to internal corporate branding or employee branding research. This is despite the fact that engineering employees are significant (potential) contributors to the engineering-intensive corporate brands. Scholarly and practical evidence show that engineering-intensive firms are becoming ever more brand-conscious and invest significantly in their corporate branding programs (Boxall and Steeneveld, 1999; Kreitl and Oberndorfer, 2004). Furthermore, engineering professionals are typically regarded as cynical upon corporate branding initiatives (Ind, 2004). As a result, the destructive likelihood is that engineers are suppressed, excluded or fragmented within their organizations as far as corporate branding activities are concerned.

Thus far, the literature has not sufficiently addressed the question of how corporate branding is actually perceived by engineers and how engineers' engagement with the corporate brand and corporate branding initiatives can be enhanced. This is also the practical dilemma in engineering-intensive and consulting engineering companies. Therefore, this thesis is focused and contributes to the engineering consultancy context and intends to address what corporate branding discourses 'mean' to engineers, what the implications of a corporate brand are and how engineers, at various grades (graduate, senior or director), reflect upon or engage with corporate branding initiatives.

1.4. Personal and academic motivations for the thesis

In addition to the above mentioned gaps and rationale for studying corporate brand meanings in engineering-intensive contexts and among engineering employees, a number of other motivations regarding the scope of this thesis can be added.

First is my personal interest: holding a BSc. in Industrial Engineering and a MSc. in Industrial Marketing, I had a personal research interest and tendency to conduct an inter-disciplinary research (combining engineering and branding) in engineering-intensive contexts. Having researched corporate branding at Masters level and having worked in a renowned international engineering company for a number of years, the meanings of corporate branding to engineers was always an intriguing question for me. I always struggled with the question of how the corporate brand affects engineering employees and how corporate branding initiatives affect engineers' attitude, engagement with the corporate brand and their daily engineering processes. My personal interest and background, therefore, not only inspired me to pursue this research objective but also helped me a great deal, later, during the collection and interpretation of data.

Second, the engineering-marketing dichotomy and separation between the two streams of research is somewhat baffling to me, particularly when corporate branding is carried out in engineering settings which necessitate the two elements to be well-aligned. There have been many debates on the relationship between engineering and marketing and each discipline appears to have a tendency to overrate its strategic significance in engineering-intensive contexts (Donald Weinrauch and Anderson, 1982; Shaw and Shaw, 1998; Shaw et al., 2003). Engineers tend to overvalue their role in bringing about competitive edge and undervalue the marketers' role and vice versa. That said, Mudambi (2008) notes that companies should (at least) centralize both¹ elements of engineering and branding in the value chain to make a success. This thesis shows how engineering professionals interact with corporate branding (initiatives) which has been classically managed by marketing departments.

The third motivation for this thesis is the general importance of professional engineering sectors to the economy of European countries (van Sante, 2008), in particular, the UK where the fieldwork of this thesis is carried out. Moreover, engineering consulting firms have shown increasing interest in corporate branding activities, particularly in more recent years, partly as a method to further distinguish themselves in today's highly competent and saturated markets. Although academic knowledge is scarce on corporate branding as such² in the context of engineering consultancies³, non-academic evidence (e.g. company websites, web-logs, bulletins,

¹ R&D knowledge (including basic and applied R&D, design, and commercialization) and Marketing knowledge (including marketing, advertising, brand management, specialized logistics, and after-sales services)

² Some scholars have discussed brand-related phenomena in engineering contexts under other rubrics such as corporate identity (e.g. Mason and Simoes, 2009) or organizational symbolism (e.g. Parker, 2000; Kunda, 2006).

³ A number of studies have investigated corporate branding in business-to-consumer engineering-intensive cases (Bergstrom et al., 2002; Borja de Mozota, 2003)

annual reports, etc) shows that many consulting engineering firms are devotedly pursuing corporate branding in practice. Therefore, more insight is needed to enlighten the scholarly literature upon the nuances of corporate branding in the engineering context.

1.5. Thesis Outline

In light of the introduction thus far, this thesis is organized to achieve its objectives in eight chapters. In what follows, a brief introduction is provided as to how each chapter is constructed:

Chapter Two provides an extensive review of the literature and is organized into two main parts. In the first part, definitions, theories and implications of corporate branding are reviewed. Building on the gap identified in the literature, the literatures of internal corporate branding and employee branding is reviewed in further detail⁴. The context of engineering consulting and some of its specificities that can yield implications for the corporate brand is also introduced. Subsequently, the driving research problem is discussed and the first research question is formulated. In the second part of Chapter Two, the focus is more on corporate brand initiatives and communication. In this regard, a review of the literature is provided to critically discuss key corporate branding notions of alignment, authenticity, engagement, articulation and corporate branding conduct. Based on these debates, the second research question is discussed and formulated. I argue that the empirical insight of this thesis enlightens these debates to some extent.

⁴ Unnecessary divide between the two streams of research has been avoided largely in this thesis and the two terminologies are often used interchangeably.

Chapter Three covers the methodological approach of the thesis. In this chapter, first, the philosophical underpinnings of this thesis and research approach are justified. Next, the choice of a qualitative approach is explained and justified. Then, pragmatic reflexivity (Alvesson and Sköldbberg, 2000; Alvesson, 2011) is introduced, in brief, as a complementary scheme for the interpretation and analysis of data. Quality criteria – including credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability – are discussed to further clarify the methodological approach of this thesis and some of its distinctions with other contingent methods. In the next main body of Chapter Three, case-study research as the overarching design of the thesis findings is explained and justified. Then, some details regarding data collection procedures such as securing access, modes of data collection and observations in the course of fieldwork are presented. Next, all the cases (including one pilot case as well as three main case studies) are briefly introduced. A concise explanation on the use of NVivo software in managing the data is also provided. The chapter ends with a short discussion on ethical considerations and the ways in which they have been addressed in this thesis.

Chapters Four, Five and Six are the presentation and discussion of three main case studies (CEB Tech., WRJ and JC⁵). These three case study chapters follow similar organization and flow of themes. In each case study chapter, following a thorough analysis of interview data, selected fractions of interview texts are deployed to present the case (story) in a thematic manner. The composition of case study chapters is as follows: first, a brief introduction is provided on each case, its background and the corporate brand initiatives in place. Then, engineers' definitions, perceived meanings and implications of the corporate brand are explained. Next, engineers' reflection on the

⁵ All names are concealed with the use of pseudonyms.

corporate brand initiatives are presented and discussed in the form of (sub-) themes. Finally, themes representing the contributions of engineers to the corporate brand as well as factors that appeared to disengage engineers from the corporate branding initiatives are presented and discussed. Each case study chapter closes with a summary of the main themes and findings.

In Chapter Seven, the findings of the three case studies are discussed thoroughly in light of the literature reviewed in Chapter Two. All the (common) sub-themes in case studies are grouped into organizing themes for the sake of clearer and more organized discussion. Six organizing themes that emerged from the three case studies and which are recurring in all the cases (although with different nuances) are primarily discussed in this chapter. An in-depth comparison is made between the (interpretation of) data and the pertinent literatures. As a result, contributions of each organizing theme and directions for future research (wherever germane) are indicated as well. In the final part of the chapter, theoretical contributions of the thesis are more clearly summarized and outlined. Respectively, six propositions are generated to be studied in future research.

I conclude with Chapter Eight. In this chapter, theories of (internal) corporate branding are succinctly reviewed in light of the findings of this thesis. Points of similarity and difference are highlighted as a result. I have attempted to begin from the theories, once more and in brief, and demonstrate what this thesis adds respectively to extant theories and pertinent literatures. Then, personal reflections, managerial implications and research limitations are explained. The chapter ends with a number of directions and suggestions for future research.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

2.1. Introduction, objectives and chapter structure

This chapter aims to provide a critical review of the pertinent literature and is organized in two main parts. In the first part, the corporate brand literature, including corporate brand definitions, specifications and implications, as well as the theories of corporate branding are reviewed. It is demonstrated that the employee base in general and engineering employees in particular, is under-studied compared to other stakeholder bases such as customers or shareholders, with respect to corporate branding research.

Therefore, the literatures on internal corporate branding and on employee branding are reviewed further to gain insight on the relationship between employees and the corporate brand. It is suggested that, given the central role of engineers in comprising and delivering the corporate brand, it is necessary to gain adequate insight as to how engineers at various grades perceive a corporate brand. This research dilemma constitutes the first research question.

The second part of this chapter focuses on corporate brand communication and engineers' reflections on the communication initiatives. Following a review of the literature, a number of critiques about the relationships of employees to the corporate brand and the way corporate brand is communicated to employees are presented. It is argued that gaining insight as to how engineers perceive, engage with and contribute to corporate brand initiatives – which constitutes the second research question – is a significant determinant of corporate branding success in the context of engineering consulting.

2.2. Corporate branding background

The corporate branding literature has evolved greatly throughout the last fifteen years and has gone through significant conceptual transformations (de Chernatony and Segal-Horn, 2003; Schultz et al., 2005b; Hatch and Schultz, 2008; Balmer, 2010). Transformations in market conditions, the increasing importance of brands and branding activities, as well as cross-disciplinary academic interest have by and large led to the development of and modifications to concepts in the corporate brand literature throughout the years.

In earlier years of concept development (1990_1995), corporate branding was mainly considered a subsidiary of the marketing discipline and theorized as a communications practice consisting of a (cyclic) series of activities mainly initiated and controlled by marketing managers (Balmer, 1995; Balmer, 2001a). Later (1995_2005), the cross-disciplinary and multi-disciplinary nature of corporate branding was more seriously acknowledged in academic debates and the corporate brand was more fundamentally re-defined as a multi-disciplinary and multi-faceted construct (Schultz and Chernatony, 2002; Bernstein, 2003; Schultz, 2005b).

In more recent years, the corporate branding landscape has been broadened further even beyond the conventional corporate boundaries, to include the whole environment within which the organization operates. This conception of the corporate brand, often termed 'enterprise branding' (Hatch and Schultz, 2008) or 'assemblage' (Ind and Bjerke, 2007) defines the corporate brand as an integral part of an organization's environment and the mind-spaces of all stakeholders, with constant inter-linkage and multi-way dynamism. Thus, stakeholder approaches towards corporate branding have been advocated in more recent years to (re-) define corporate branding as the mode and medium of multi-way

communication with all stakeholders (Gregory, 2007; Ind and Bjerke, 2007; Roper and Davies, 2007).

2.3. Corporate branding vs. product branding

Balmer (1995) was among the first to use the term ‘corporate brand’, building on the earlier works of Olins (1978) and King (1991) who had often used the term ‘company brand’ (Balmer, 2010). Before then, branding was mainly associated with (branded) products. Ind (1997) further explicated the concept and set the ground for later developments. A few years later, particularly following the publication of special issues on corporate branding in *The Journal of Brand Management* (2001), *European Journal of Marketing* (2003), *Corporate Communications: An International Journal* and *Corporate Communications Review* (2002), a distinctive and robust stream of research was established (Ahonen, 2008).

The advent of corporate brand as contrasted to the product brand was practically sound for a number of key reasons: brands and brand-related activities were becoming increasingly important in distinguishing firms in ever-more competitive markets; integrated approaches to brand communication were asserted for increased organizational efficiency and consistency; customers were becoming ever-more conscious of and informed about the corporate entities behind products and these entities’ behaviour; and, last but not least, maintaining distinctiveness solely upon production and the functional attributes of products was becoming increasingly difficult due to the easier access competitors gained to production technologies (Kapferer, 2001).

Through corporate branding, conceptual scopes and functional responsibilities were also broadened: In brief: the focus on consumers extended to become a focus on multiple stakeholders; the ultimate responsibility for the corporate brand became the chief executive's instead of the marketing manager's; it became everyone's obligation to contribute to the corporate brand not just the marketing staff; marketing communication was replaced by total corporate communication; and functional disciplines associated with corporate branding were redefined to be cross-disciplinary rather than marketing-only (Ind, 1997; Balmer, 2001a; Balmer, 2001c; Balmer and Gray, 2003; Ind, 2004).

The primary context of the corporate brand literature had for a long time been big corporations and well-established consumer brands (Kapferer, 2001; Uggla, 2006). In particular, brands with different corporate and product names (e.g. Proctor & Gamble which made Tide) had been at the heart of several corporate branding discussions (Aaker and Joachimsthaler, 2000; Keller, 2002; Aaker, 2005). In line with developments in other parts of the marketing literature, particularly in service marketing (e.g. McDonald et al., 2001; Ballantyne and Aitken, 2007; Klaus and Maklan, 2007; Zeithaml et al., 2008), corporate branding began to thrive as a 'meta-narrative' for product branding (Stern, 2006). Hence, *corporate service branding* contributed significantly to concept development in corporate branding, particularly early on (de Chernatony and Segal-Horn, 2001; McDonald et al., 2001; de Chernatony and Segal-Horn, 2003; de Chernatony et al., 2003).

2.4. Definitions of the corporate brand

'Corporate brand', to date, has been defined in several ways. To better understand the extant definitions, it is helpful to distinguish corporate branding (as a verb) from the

corporate brand (as a noun) (Stern, 2006). Table 2.1 provides some of the most widely-cited definitions.

Table 2.1. Definitions of corporate brand and corporate branding

The corporate brand	Corporate branding
<p>“...the visual, verbal and behavioural expression of an organization’s unique business model.” (Knox and Bickerton, 2003:1013)</p>	<p>“...a systematically planned and implemented process of creating and maintaining a favourable reputation of the company with its constituent elements, by sending signals to stakeholders using the corporate brand.” van Riel (2001) cited in Einwiller and Will (2002:101)</p>
<p>“a distinctive image (or imaginary picture) of a corporation, tightly anchored in the psyche of the stakeholder, that influences the behavior of stakeholders”. Meffert and Bierwirth (2005:144) cited in Fiedler and Kirchgeorg (2007)</p>	<p>“...conscious decision by senior management to distil and make known the attributes of the organisation’s identity in the form of a clearly defined branding proposition. This proposition underpins organisational efforts to communicate, differentiate, and enhance the brand vis-a-vis key stakeholder groups and networks.” (Balmer, 2001a)</p>
<p>“The corporate brand is the communication interface between the organisation and its stakeholders” (Leitch and Richardson, 2003:1069)</p>	<p>“Christensen and Askegaard (2001)...consider corporate branding as the total sum of organizational signs that are being transferred to its various audiences through the core values for which the organization stands (Ind, 1997)” (Rode and Vallaster, 2005:121)</p>

<p>“Corporate brand identity refers to a distillation of corporate identity attribution into clearly defined perceived attributes and associations that are linked to a corporate name and, secondary, to an institutional marquee...Corporate brands are born out of corporate identities, but <i>live in the minds of groups and individuals</i>” (Balmer, 2010:186)</p>	<p>“The basic principal of Vision-Culture-Image (VCI) Alignment Model – that the greater the coherence of vision, culture, and images, the stronger the brand” (Hatch and Schultz, 2008:11)</p>
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From Table 2.1, it can be inferred that corporate *branding* refers to the continuous management process of the corporate *brand* as a comparatively unified entity. The corporate brand has a certain level of stability associated with it as the image in the minds and hearts of the stakeholders (Balmer, 2010), whereas corporate branding is the continuous set of activities to deliver, communicate, transform, and enhance the corporate brand.

As can be inferred from the definitions presented in Table 2.1, in defining the corporate brand, the multi-dimensionality of the construct is evident. In other words, the corporate brand is not defined as a marketing-only tool or a transient image in the minds of the stakeholders; rather it is defined as a constellation of emotional, verbal, and behavioural elements *expressed* through an organization’s words, deeds and artefacts.

However, in the management of the corporate brand – i.e. corporate branding – the definitions might imply a more significant role for management, who ‘distil’, ‘maintain’, ‘communicate’, ‘differentiate’ and, in one word, ‘manage’ the corporate brand. The risk is that interpretations from extant corporate branding definitions become one-dimensionally managerial and ‘top-down’ since, by large, more weight is given to (top) management as compared to other organizational constituencies that

comprise and contribute to the success of the corporate brand (O'Reilly, 2005; Schultz, 2005b; Ind and Watt, 2006; Kärreman and Rylander, 2008).

Although in successive developments many authors have called for cross-disciplinary, cross-functional, and multi-stakeholder contributions in the composition of corporate brands (Schultz and Chernatony, 2002; Ind, 2004; Schultz, 2005b; Ind and Bjerke, 2007), there still remained little room in the subsequent studies for the contribution of non-management constituencies both in theory and practice. This gap calls for more insight about corporate branding from the perspective of stakeholders other than senior management.

Another noteworthy shortcoming is that, although the multidisciplinary and cross-functional nature of corporate branding had been outlined since its early conceptions (Balmer, 1995; Ind, 1997), in practice as well as in academic scholarship, corporate branding has remained by and large under the purview of marketing (Balmer, 2001a; Bernstein, 2003; Schultz et al., 2005b). In practice, for instance, corporate branding had often been reduced to an impactful PR campaign (Schultz et al., 2005a) or handsome visual projections, aesthetics or brand identity designs (Olins, 2003).

Furthermore, the corporate branding literature, to date, has been developed mainly by (pro-) marketing scholars and studies from outside the marketing realm or non-marketing perspectives are still very limited. The irony is that it is suggested that corporate branding needs to embrace marketing and non-marketing constituents to be successful (de Chernatony and Segal-Horn, 2003; Hatch and Schultz, 2003; Ind, 2004), yet, little is known as to how non-marketing constituents perceive and engage with the concept as well as practice of corporate branding.

2.5. Implications of the corporate brand

Several positive implications have been outlined in the literature for the successful management of the corporate brand. Some studies have demonstrated the financial benefits of a strong corporate brand (Kotler et al., 2006; Glynn et al., 2007; Kotler and Pfoertsch, 2007). Others have theorized its financial and attitudinal significance for all stakeholders under the rubric of corporate brand equity (Berry, 2000; Keller, 2002; Burmann et al., 2009). Some studies have outlined the role of corporate brand in attracting and retaining customers (Dacin and Brown, 2006; Gylling and Lindberg-Repo, 2006), shareholders (Gregory, 2007) and talent (under the rubric of employer branding) (Backhaus and Tikoo, 2004; Dinnie, 2007; Moroko and Uncles, 2008; Edwards, 2010; Wilden et al., 2010).

Additionally, another stream of research which has flourished in recent years is study of the implications of branding for business-to-business (B2B) contexts. Earlier studies in this stream had demonstrated the general relevance and significance of branding for B2B settings (Shaw et al., 1989; Shipley and Howard, 1993; Mudambi et al., 1997; Mudambi, 2002; Lynch, 2004). Recent studies have focused more specifically on branding in different B2B contexts, such as the creative arts sector (Powell and Dodd, 2007), construction services (Blombäck and Axelsson, 2007), property (Roberts and Merrilees, 2007), logistics services (Davis et al., 2008), and commodity products (McQuiston, 2004) and discussed the positive implications of branding.

The B2B branding stream, however, is rather disconnected from the mainstream of corporate branding literature given that B2B branding by and large is focused on the brand as a unified entity. Corporate branding, on the other hand, is built upon the idea of the brand as an identity project as well as a mode and medium of interaction with

multiple stakeholders (Schultz, 2005b; Ind and Bjerke, 2007; Hatch and Schultz, 2008). That said, insights from B2B branding literature can still provide valuable insight to corporate branding studies and vice versa.

Finally, another stream of research, which is relevant to the focus of this thesis, relates to the *internal* implications of the corporate brand for employees in terms of attitude and behaviour. This stream of thought, known as internal corporate branding or employee branding, will be reviewed in more detail in the subsequent sections.

2.6. Corporate branding theories

In this part, some of the most widely cited corporate branding theories are briefly explicated. In general, key theories of corporate branding are based on the notion of alignment between various organizational functions, stakeholder views and corporate brand attributes (Hatch and Schultz, 2001; de Chernatony and Segal-Horn, 2003; Balmer and Greyser, 2003; Urde, 2003).

Hatch and Schultz (2001) define corporate branding as managing and maintaining alignment between the three main elements of organizational culture, strategic vision and stakeholder image. In this conception, strategic vision determines management's ambitions and plans; what an organization wants and how it intends to attain its objectives. Organizational culture refers to how things are done in an organization; it is the constellation of assumptions, meanings and values that drive organizational behaviour (Hatch, 1993; Schein, 2004). Stakeholder image is the set of assumptions and perceptions held by stakeholders at any given time about the corporate brand (Hatch and Schultz, 1997).

The four elements of vision, culture, identity and image are in constant inter-relation and flux; all affect and are affected by one another, and the corporate brand is an ‘expression’ of this interplay (Schultz et al., 2000). Hatch and Schultz (2001) outlined that the gaps between the different perspectives (image-culture, vision-image, and culture-vision) are the root cause of misalignment and undermine the corporate brand altogether.

Somewhat similarly to the model referred to above, Balmer and Greyser (2002) defined corporate branding as maintaining alignment between the corporate brand promise – the *covenanted* identity – and other corporate identity types, namely *actual*, *desired*, *ideal*, *communicated*, and *conceived*. According to this conception, the corporate brand is an identity type – an enactment of the corporate brand identity – that revolves around a corporate promise or ‘covenant’ (Balmer and Greyser, 2003). Later *cultural* identity was added to this framework⁶ (Balmer, 2005) considering organizational culture the sixth identity type. According to Balmer and Greyser (2002), the better the alignment between the various types of organizational identity, the stronger the corporate brand.

Urde (2003) defined corporate branding as maintaining alignment between core values of the corporate brand, *added values* (values appreciated by external stakeholders), and *organizational values* (values ‘lived-by’ internally, through employees’ attitudes and behaviour, and products/services). This implies that values need to be constantly rejuvenated; as external values change, internal values should equally adapt. In this conception, however, customers’ values are somewhat prioritized over other

⁶ The AC⁴ID Test™ of Corporate Identity Management (see Balmer and Soenen, 1999; Balmer, 2001b; Balmer and Greyser, 2002; Balmer, 2005)

stakeholders' values – i.e. it is the corporate brand that should adapt with externally-demanded values, not the other way around.

And last, but not least, de Chernatony and Segal-Horn (2003), building on their earlier studies on the constitution of brand (de Chernatony, 1999) and service brands (de Chernatony and Segal-Horn, 2001) offered a framework for (assessing) corporate brand alignment. They theorized corporate branding as maintaining alignment between organizational culture, organizational identity, communication, relationships, stakeholder image and corporate reputation.

As these theories show, corporate branding should not be reduced to a 'function', campaign, or an intermittent activity; rather it should be seen as a continuous process of sustaining alignment between the values, perceptions, processes, products/services, communications, promises and behaviours of the corporate brand. What this means on a theoretical as well as practical level is that for the corporate brand to be managed properly, one should have adequate understanding of the different aspects and constituents of the corporate brand and the gaps between them, so that a decent level of consistency and alignment⁷ can be maintained at all times.

However, one of the shortcomings associated with the aforementioned theories and frameworks is that while extensive research is available in the literature to enlighten these frameworks from the perspectives of senior management, shareholders and customers, much less is known about the perspective of employees (Bickerton, 2003; Karlsson, 2006; Powell, 2007; Powell and Dodd, 2007). Therefore, more empirical

⁷ In the second main part of this chapter, the meaning of alignment and its distinction from (blunt) consistency is further explained.

insight is deemed necessary in order to shed light on these frameworks from the perspective of employees.

2.7. Stakeholder approaches in corporate branding

As mentioned earlier, following influential developments in the conceptualization of corporate branding, leading scholars called for an all-embracing stakeholder approach, both in the theory and practice of corporate branding (Schultz and Chernatony, 2002; Balmer and Greyser, 2003; de Chernatony and Segal-Horn, 2003; Ind and Bjerke, 2007; Hatch and Schultz, 2008). A stakeholder approach means embracing all – and not some – stakeholders in the constitution and development of the corporate brand and corporate branding activities. A stakeholder approach demands finding the ways in which a corporate brand can meet all stakeholders' interests, concerns, and long-term welfare needs. The idea is not to try to engage all stakeholders with the corporate brand similarly (Gregory, 2007); rather to not neglect other equally important – yet less considered – stakeholders while still acknowledging fundamental differences amongst them (Fitchett, 2005) and appropriating the corporate brand *dialogue* accordingly (Knox and Bickerton, 2003; Gregory, 2007).

Hatch and Schultz (2008), among others, emphasise that corporate branding can be understood, researched and practiced most clearly and efficiently via stakeholder perspective. This is because the interest of one stakeholder group does not come at the expense of other stakeholders. More importantly, one of the strength of the corporate brand as a multidimensional and multifaceted construct is providing a focal point to understand and research the meanings of brand to a diversity of stakeholder bases and, hence, manage the initiative centrally; this stance toward corporate branding research resonates well with and can be best served via the stakeholder approach (Gregory,

2007; Roper and Davies, 2007; Hatch and Schultz, 2008). Thus, in this thesis as well, stakeholder approach toward corporate branding is chosen as the theoretical underpinning and point of departure for research.

Although acknowledging all stakeholders has been at the core of corporate brand theory since its early development as a concept, most corporate branding studies to date have dealt with only a few stakeholder groups such as customers (e.g. Dev, 2008), customer-facing staff (e.g. Harris, 2001; Harris and de Chernatony, 2001) and shareholders (e.g. Ohnemus, 2009). Therefore, much more corporate branding research is required to survey less-researched or even widely neglected stakeholder bases.

In reviewing the literature, it became evident that employees are still among the least considered stakeholder groups with respect to corporate branding (Powell, 2005; Karlsson, 2006; Vallaster and Chernatony, 2006; Wallström et al., 2008; King and Grace, 2008). Whereas the literature is relatively rich on the meanings of brands to consumers (Muhlbacher and Hemetsberger, 2008:6), the literature of corporate branding is underdeveloped on the employee base in this subject matter.

Despite the crucial role of employees in the constitution and success of corporate brands, particularly those in service-based industries (Schultz and Chernatony, 2002; de Chernatony and Segal-Horn, 2003) employees' views about the corporate brand have still remained scarce in the literature; little is known about how employees actually interpret and engage with the corporate brand.

As mentioned earlier, the branding literature on the consumer base is comparatively rich and can provide valuable insight to corporate branding studies on less-researched stakeholder bases. However, there are a number of significant differences between customers and employees with respect to the corporate brand that makes replications

difficult and necessitates particular research attention to the employee base. These differences are briefly summarized below.

Whereas consumers are selective in whether and how to engage with a brand, employees are subject to the brand they work for (Harquail, 2007). Customers are also free to project brand-based behaviours whenever and however they want, whereas for employees it is a given, everyday matter (Harquail, 2006). Today's empowered customers are more inclined to stand against a brand to which they have objections while an employee would risk her or his job in so doing. Employees are not only recipients of the brand, but more importantly vehicles for delivering the corporate brand to consumers (Harquail, 2006; Morsing, 2006). And, last but not least, employees are often expected to display on-brand behaviour (Ind, 2004), while just a little portion of customers' 'mind share' is what brands fight for (Lynch and Chernatony, 2007). All these critical and fundamental differences between the two stakeholder bases encouraged this thesis to focus on the employee perspective only.

Therefore, the primary dilemma driving this thesis is: how employees perceive the corporate brand and engage with corporate brand initiatives; what does the corporate brand mean to them; and how do they respond to corporate brand initiatives? These are critical questions since employees are the main vehicle for delivering the corporate brand, particularly in service-based and knowledge-intensive industries. Providing answers to these questions not only illuminates and enhances theory, but also helps better the understanding of the implications of corporate branding in the everyday practice of employees. In the following parts of this chapter, the association between the employee base and corporate branding is discussed in further detail.

2.8. Corporate branding and employees

It has been only during the last decade that the corporate branding literature has started to explore enthusiastically the employee base (Ind, 2004; Hardaker and Fill, 2005; Karlsson, 2006; King and Grace, 2008; Punjaisri, 2009). The literatures of internal corporate branding and employee branding have attempted to identify the ways in which companies can get their employees onboard with their visions, missions and values. There have also been attempts to theorize how brand values and promises ought to be communicated to employees in a concerted, consistent, efficient and meaningful fashion (Bickerton, 2003; Karlsson, 2006; Powell, 2007; Powell and Dodd, 2007).

However, the literature of internal and employee branding has remained thin as to how employees themselves perceive the corporate brand, and how they actually respond to, contribute to, or engage with corporate brand initiatives. Existing evidence in this regard is mostly anecdotal, from big consumer brands, and can be very difficult to replicate in other contexts such as services, knowledge-intensive or B2B contexts (Bickerton, 2000; Bickerton, 2003).

Furthermore, most of the existing work on internal or employee branding has taken rather managerial, functional and ‘sender-oriented’ approaches (Kärreman and Rylander, 2008; Muhlbacher and Hemetsberger, 2008) whereby the employee base is seen, by and large, as the ‘receiver’ of corporate brand initiatives. This is made clearer in the following part of the chapter where the internal/employee branding literature is reviewed in further detail.

2.9. Internal corporate branding: Employee branding

It was mentioned in Chapter One that the two research streams of internal corporate branding and employee branding overlap greatly. In this part of the chapter, the two streams are reviewed and the commonalities are discussed in depth. In the next part, three levels of relationship between the corporate brand and employees are explained and identified as *compliance*, *identification* and *internalization*.

A review of the literature shows that the study of employee branding has enjoyed insights from various disciplines: marketing, branding, organizational behaviour, organizational identity, corporate culture and social psychology have, in different ways, informed this body of literature. Also, some authors have offered integrated frameworks that link corporate branding with employee branding and employer branding (Miles and Mangold, 2004; Punjaisri and Wilson, 2007; Edwards, 2010). However, the scopes and emphases of the different approaches have, at times, starkly contrasted. This has led to a situation where, “there is little agreement on exactly what employee branding is or how it happens” (Miles and Mangold, 2004:67).

Several concept-laden terms have been used to explain the relationship between employees and the (corporate) brand, each with its roots in different disciplines. These include, but are not limited to: ‘selling’ the brand to employees (Mitchell, 2002) or, ‘employees as brand assets’ (Jacobs, 2003) from the (internal) marketing perspective; ‘happy employee, happy customer’ (Herzberg, 2003; Kundu and Jambheshwar, 2004), self-motivation (Lewis et al., 2005) and ‘living the brand’ (Ind, 2003b; Ind, 2004) from the organizational behaviour perspective; psychological contract (Robinson *et al.*, 1994) from social psychology; self-conception and identification (Ashforth and Mael, 1989; Albert et al., 2000) from organizational identity theory; normative control (Kunda,

2006), symbolic management (Berg, 1986) and management of meaning (Smircich and Morgan, 1982) from organizational culture theory. All have, in different ways, informed and contributed to the development of employee branding theories.

All these different, yet related, themes agree that: employees are central in making a successful brand; branding is relevant to all but not some employees; brands can engage the ‘souls’ of employees; and branding is as significant to employees, if not more, as any other stakeholder base (Kärreman and Rylander, 2008). Through a holistic review of extant employee branding theories and conceptions, three levels of association can be discussed between the employees and their corporate brand, namely *compliance*, *identification* and *internalization*⁸ (Burmam and Zeplin, 2005). These are explained below.

2.9.1. *Compliance*

Compliance is the lowest level of psychological affinity and emotional devotion employees commit to the corporate brand, where they only conform to the brand ‘rules’ and ‘permission-to-play’ values (Lencioni, 2002). At this level, an employee merely complies with the very basic of brand expectations and displays on-brand behaviour. This is also referred to as ‘living *by* the brand’ (Karmark, 2005).

At the compliance level, employees deliver the minimum predefined attributes of the brand, such as service quality, delivery time and professional presentation. This level involves the least emotional engagement with the corporate brand. Employees do what they are paid for well enough but do not exceed the minimum requirements which are

⁸ These three levels – i.e. compliance, identification and internalization – are adapted from Burmam and Zeplin (2005) to provide a holistic review. Therefore, the way these terms are deployed here contrasts slightly to that of Burmam and Zeplin (2005).

determined, in part, by the mutual obligation between employee and brand (basic psychological contract), which is arguably generic regardless of the brand.

Marketing-led approaches to employee branding are also understandable at the compliance level. Some scholars (e.g. Kapferer, 2001; Kotler et al., 2006) have underscored the positive economic implications of employee branding; they stress that targeting, informing and training employees on the brand requirements can augment the business in a variety of aspects, such as turnover, employee satisfaction, service quality, customer retention and word-of-mouth communication (Miles and Mangold, 2004). The emphasis here is more on having the employees informed about the brand attributes and not necessarily engaging them with the brand emotionally. Internal marketing conceptions (e.g. Ahmed et al., 2002) in general argue that employees should be made the target of brand communication and persuasion; that the brand should be ‘sold’ to employees, just as customers should be persuaded to ‘buy’ the brand (Jacobs, 2003:26).

Nevertheless, fundamental differences between the employee and customer bases are widely neglected in the internal marketing conceptions, as discussed earlier. Thus, whereas customer preferences by and large drive external marketing or branding practices, it is unclear as to how employee preferences drive internal branding activities. In other words, employees are paradoxically considered as internal customers while their tastes, cultural orientations, individual characteristics and reflections do not necessarily determine the brand content and initiatives.

In the same way, whereas brands employ a variety of different techniques to persuade customers, it is surprising that, toward employees, companies largely follow similar (and conventional) corporate brand initiatives and patterns: embellishing offices, catalogues, collaterals with brand-related materials have all been widely applied in a

variety of different industries without necessarily reflecting the tastes, nuances and specificities of the specific employees (Harquail, 2006). In addition, as discussed earlier, while extensive effort is made to understand what the brand means to customers, much less is known about the meanings of brands to employees.

2.9.2. *Identification*

The next level of emotional association between employees and their brand can be classified as *identification*, which is a more in-depth relationship. Identification accrues when a certain level of identity congruity between the employee and the brand is formed (Burmam and Zeplin, 2005). Identifying with the brand enhances employees' self-esteem, self-concept and self-expression in social interactions (Dutton et al., 1994).

Organizational identity theorists have argued that although identity construction processes are complex, understanding their dynamics enables managers to enhance employee identification with the organization, steer employees' identity processes (Alvesson and Willmott, 2002) or create a normative control environment (Alvesson, 1993). However, it is widely debated whether it would be possible to make a desired (brand) culture (Kunda, 2006; Berthon et al., 2009) and thus directly manage identity processes as such.

Social identity theory (SIT) has also been used to explain the ways in which individuals identify with the brand. One of the implications of SIT is that the more distinctive a brand is, the more likely that employees will identify with the brand and the stronger the sense of oneness and belonging among brand members (Ashforth and Mael, 1989). SIT also explains how employees posit distinction between themselves and 'others' (e.g. non-members) through identifying with brands to maintain a shared ground of comparison for 'self-enhancement' (Whetten and Godfrey, 1998).

In this regard, the notion of internal brand communities is also informative. Brand communities are defined as a “specialized, non-geographically bound community, based on a structured set of social relations among admirers of a brand” (Muniz and OGuinn (2001:412). In this sense, intra-organizational brand communities are formed when employees identify with elements of the corporate brand on shared grounds of affinity, understanding and sense of belonging (ibid). Although brand communities have been the subject of research for a number of years (e.g. Kozinets, 2002; McAlexander et al, 2002), *internal* brand communities – i.e. the ways in which employees form and reform brand communities internally and the implications for the corporate brand and corporate branding initiatives – have only recently been researched. Schau and Muniz (2002) identified four types of identity interaction between employees within a given internal community and their brand (as ‘subsumed identity’, ‘super member’, ‘community membership’ and ‘multiple memberships’). These four types of identity works explain respectively the different levels of strength in association and identification between individual members’ identities and the corporate brand. In the same terrain, Devasagayam et al. (2010) verified the association and synergies between internal brand communities and internal branding. They confirmed the suitability of leveraging internal brand communities for enhancing the corporate brand initiatives within an organization.

Another insight at the identification level is the psychological contract between employees and brands offered from the social psychology discipline. Robinson *et al.* (1994) explain that an unofficial cognitive and affective agreement is formed between the brand and employees wherein fulfilment of financial and/or emotional commitments is assessed constantly on the basis of mutual obligations. Any breach of this

psychological contract from the brand's side can have negative implications for employees' attitudes, behaviour and identification with the brand.

2.9.3. Internalization

Internalization is the highest level of alignment between employees and brands. This is the case when an employee buys into the brand in full, internalizes its values and feels what the brand stands for is in complete congruity with her or his personal conduct (Ind, 2004). This state of emotional and attitudinal alignment has been labelled with a number of terms, for example brand 'citizenship', 'ambassadorship', 'championship' and being a 'walking brand', to name some (Jacobs, 2003; Willmott, 2003; Ind, 2004; Burmann and Zeplin, 2005; Crosby and Johnson, 2006; Chong, 2007; Morhart et al., 2009).

At this level of allegiance, an employee surpasses the conventional expectation boundaries and displays 'brand-caring' behaviours: posits positive attitude towards other stakeholders; accepts responsibilities outside her/his nominal area of activity; avoids complaining when hard times come; and advocates the brand inside and outside the business (Burmann and Zeplin, 2005).

In this field, Ind (2004; 2003b) has done extensive research explicating the idea of bringing the brand into life through employees by developing the notion of 'living the brand'. Underlying his ideas is strong value attachment and alignment between the employees and the corporate brand. He contends that brand citizenship is central in turning organizations into lively, entertaining and transformational workplaces full of enjoyment, empathy, loyalty and integrity (Ind and Bjerke, 2007).

Ind (2004:31) argues that today employees seek more meaning in life part, of which is sought in their work environments. Thus, corporate brands are significant sources by which to, “engage with people’s deeper needs and ... fill the vacuum that has emerged within the lives of many” (Ind, 2004:31). The idea of ‘situational intelligence’ is also understandable in this line of thought: when brand values are deeply ingrained in the culture of an organization, situational intuitions become a genuine inspiration and guide for brand-based organizational behaviour and decision-making (Ind and Watt, 2006).

Despite all the theoretical developments in the area of internal corporate branding and employee branding, what remains to be explored further is a detailed explanation as to how brand citizenship actually builds up and what the factors that enhance or negate brand citizenship behaviour are. Still, little empirical evidence is available to demonstrate how such value alignment is created and maintained, and the majority of extant works in this regard are anecdotal. In addressing this, first it is important to understand how brand values are interpreted by employees and second, how brand values are enacted in practice. Karmark (2005:123) also points to this gap in the literature:

“we may (re-) raise the question of what it means to live a brand or claim that the brand has a life... the terms and constructs relating to living the brand are often used in an unreflective manner, both in the literature and in practice. The brand is anthropomorphized and linked to the employee through dimensions such as commitment, involvement, passion, and ‘living and breathing the brand’ without any real attempts to relate it to what it means to be alive”

Christensen and Cheney (2000) as cited in Karmark (2005), criticized the living-the-brand notion and argued that this level of relationship – i.e. *internalization* – is more

idealistic than real and portrays only the 'rosy' side of the business. In their opinion, brands are simply not as compelling to employees as managers think they are. Therefore, this level of brand engagement only speaks to a minority of employees. Since value alignment is not constrained to an employee's working life, but also extends to their personal and family lives (Morsing, 2006; Karmark, 2005) an insufficient understanding of these aspects of the employee-brand relationship can be problematic. Hence, further empirical evidence is needed to enlighten the phenomena and the debates in this regard.

2.10. Research problem

In light of the discussion so far and in addition to the research gaps discussed above, a number of other research motivations can be mentioned that have determined the focus of this thesis.

First, some brands are more interesting and charming than others. For instance, a sports or media brand can be more appealing to many current and prospective employees whereas a purely engineering or medical brand does not have that brand charm (Harquail, 2006). We do not know enough about how employees in less charming brands perceive their corporate brands (Ind, 2004).

In addition, some employees are more interested in brands, brand-identification, or brand-engagement initiatives than others through the nature, personality and/or organizational position (Harquail, 2007). For instance, managers might be more interested in branding and brand-related activities given that, as discussed earlier, brands can often be deployed as a means of normative control by managers; similarly,

managers that are involved in work-winning activities can be more brand-conscious than their subordinates.

It has not been explored sufficiently in the literature as to how employees with less brand affiliation, more scepticism towards brands, or those not in top management positions reflect upon the corporate brand and its initiatives. Chances are that these, perhaps less brand-receptive employees are disempowered or marginalised through corporate branding activities in heavily brand-oriented organizations (Harquail, 2007; Harquail, 2006).

Ind (2004) acknowledges this issue and notes that some business functions such as engineering, finance or administration might be less receptive to internal branding programs and might find corporate branding initiatives 'irrelevant' or 'fluffy' with respect to their job and/or daily processes. Yet it is still not clear enough in the literature as to whether and why some employees might perceive the corporate brand this way and so cynically; how for example engineers actually perceive the corporate brand and its initiatives; and what the reasons for their contingent scepticism or disengagement are.

Second, we still do not know enough about the implications of brand transformations in the employee-brand relationship. This is the case when, for instance, a brand undergoes rebranding exercises, transforms through a merger or acquisition or when the corporate brand drastically changes its branding strategy and/or initiatives (Harquail, 2006). Hence, empirical inquiry into brands that have experienced acquisitions, rebranding exercises or those that have experienced drastic reforms in their corporate branding initiatives can be insightful in this regard.

Third, it is still contested in the literature whether employees necessarily need to be ‘upgraded’ from the compliance to the internalization level, as explained above, in the brand relationship continuum (Harquail, 2006). In other words, it is debateable whether a ‘branded employee’ – who well engages, associates or identifies with the corporate brand – is necessarily better than a non-branded or less-branded employee. Is it at all favourable to upgrade all, and not some, of the employees to form stronger brand engagements with their corporate brand? To this effect, more research is deemed necessary to illuminate these debates.

2.11. Research question one

In light of the research problem and gaps discussed thus far, one of the suitable contexts to pursue further empirical inquiry is the engineering consulting sector. A number of characteristics of the engineering consulting context with respect to corporate branding make it a good fit for the specification and focus of this thesis.

First, engineering consulting brands have much less brand charm, as compared to the brands of well-engineered products (e.g. Rolls Royce cars), in the eyes of stakeholders. Engineering consulting brands also have much lower brand equity (brand awareness) compared to product brands.

Second, the engineering consulting context is significantly under-researched with respect to corporate branding, despite the fact that the engineering consulting sector has, in recent years, showed great keenness in adopting brand management methods (Kreitel and Oberndorfer, 2004; Simoes et al., 2005).

Third, it is acknowledged in the organizational identity literature that the corporate brand plays a significant role in the identification and meaning processes of

professionals in consulting services (Alvesson, 2004). It has also been discussed that the corporate brand is arguably more significant to the employee base as compared to the customer base in consultancy settings (Kärreman and Rylander, 2008).

Fourth, engineers are typically characterized by less brand affinity and a higher level of cynicism towards branding activities (Shaw et al., 2003; Ind, 2004). That said, engineers' cynicism can provide a particularly insightful source by which to better understand the shortcomings of corporate branding both in theory as well as in practice.

In light of the characteristics mentioned above, the engineering consultancy context is chosen in this thesis for empirical investigation. Hence, the main research question (RQ) is formulated as:

RQ1: How do engineers at various grades in an engineering consulting firm perceive the corporate brand?

Given the central role of engineers in the constitution and delivery of engineering consulting corporate brands, it is important to gain insight on their point of view about the corporate brand. The main research question is further elaborated in the field as to: how engineers define the corporate brand; what are the implications of the corporate brand in engineers' opinions; and how does the corporate brand affect the way engineers act on a daily basis. In the next part of this chapter, a brief review of the characteristics of the engineering consulting context and its relations with corporate branding is provided.

2.12. Engineering consulting and corporate branding

Corporate branding has been used in engineering-intensive settings, although this has been little discussed in the literature (Alvesson, 2004). Corporate branding is a

significant mode of communication and management for the engineering consulting setting as a knowledge-intensive context for number of reasons.

Among other things, knowledge-intensive contexts are characterized by: loose structures with little bureaucratic control; a more autonomous employee base; lateral instead of cascading organizational structure; uncertainty and ambiguity; weak structures of incorporation (resulting in professional partnerships); a project-based approach to work (as opposed to predefined functional departmentalization); complex business processes; and higher propensity for knowledge workers to depart during difficult times (Alvesson, 2000; Alvesson, 2004; Greenwood *et al.*, 2006).

These and other features make normative control a more pertinent management option (as compared to conventional and transactional management styles) for the engineering consulting setting. In this respect, corporate branding is one of the most appreciated means and mediums of normative and value-based management (Kunde, 2002; Vallaster and Chernatony, 2006). A strong, attractive and meaningful corporate brand can have significant positive implications for employee attraction, retention and enhancement (Alvesson, 2000; Alvesson and Kärreman, 2004). Corporate branding initiatives are the grammar by which management can communicate with other employees in a normative fashion (Hatch and Schultz, 2008). Corporate branding can also be deployed as a potent medium for the management of meanings (Smircich and Morgan, 1982; McCracken, 1986; McCracken, 2005).

A review of the literature revealed that while there have been some brand studies in knowledge-intensive contexts other than engineering-intensive settings, such as management consulting (Kärreman and Rylander, 2008), health care (Kim et al., 2008) and higher education (Wæraas and Solbakk, 2008; Curtis et al., 2009; Whisman, 2009),

surprisingly very little attention has been given to corporate branding in engineering consultancy services. This is despite the engineering consulting industry sector being substantial in many aspects.

Economically, for instance, in the UK alone, the engineering consulting sector constituted more than fifty billion pounds (2.7%) of the UK gross domestic production (GDP) in 2008 making the UK the strongest exporter of engineering consulting services in Europe (van Sante, 2008). Also, the corporate brand has always been considered a strategic asset in the sector, not only in coping with market forces (Kärreman and Rylander, 2008), but also for attracting and retaining talent (Backhaus and Tikoo, 2004; Mosley, 2007; Moroko and Uncles, 2008; Edwards, 2010; Wilden et al., 2010). Last, but not least, engineering consulting firms have become progressively brand-conscious, particularly in recent years; they intend to leverage the corporate brand in today's highly-competitive markets in order to win business, gain the interest of the general public as well as attracting customers, employees and shareholders (Kreidl and Oberndorfer, 2004).

It should be noted that there are a number of brand-related studies available in the literature on business-to-consumer (B2C) engineering-intensive contexts such as the automotive (Bergstrom *et al.*, 2002) and appliances (Shaw et al., 2003) industries. Yet none of the extant works have addressed the type of question posed in this research. Furthermore, specific corporate branding research attention is deemed necessary for the engineering consulting context due to the fundamental differences between engineering-intensive B2C settings with purely business-to-business (B2B) consulting contexts.

The remainder of this chapter focuses on the notion of corporate brand communication and presents some of the pertinent debates on the ways in which employees might perceive corporate branding initiatives.

2.13. Corporate brand communication

The operationalized version of corporate branding – i.e. corporate branding in action – has often been discussed in the literature under the rubric of corporate brand communication. Several corporate brand communication frameworks and discussions are available in the literature (van Riel, 1995; Balmer and Gray, 1999; Knox and Bickerton, 2003; Schultz, 2005a; Melewar and Karaosmanoglu, 2006; Hatch and Schultz, 2008). All corporate brand communication models agree on the cyclical nature of the process, although with slight differences.

Corporate brand communication frameworks typically start with an articulation phase within which, through a comprehensive study, the attributes of the corporate brand are extracted and defined. The next phase is to make these brand attributes – corporate brand promises – known to the rest of the organization through initiatives such as values statements, branded artefacts, advertisements, meetings, workshops, and incentive systems. Next, action is taken to align all business processes with brand values, facilitate smooth implementation and apply necessary changes. Training is also supplied for increasing awareness and educating stakeholders. Finally, an all-inclusive monitoring system needs to be deployed to ensure that discrepancies, gaps or breaches are minimized in the course of delivering the corporate brand promise.

The cycles of corporate brand communication have been explicated in various, yet to a large extent similar, ways. For instance, Knox and Bickerton (2003) classify the processes involved in corporate brand communication into six stages (*context, construction, confirmation, consistency, continuity, and conditioning*) and Schultz (2005a) offers five stages (*stating, organizing, involving, integrating, and monitoring*) for corporate brand communication and management. That said, almost all authors

agree on the main thrust of the processes of corporate brand communication as briefly summarized above.

Nonetheless, issues arise mainly on the details of corporate branding conduct – i.e. the way corporate brand communication is actually conducted in practice and the way stakeholders reflect upon the initiatives. While much is said about how the corporate brand initiatives *should* be communicated to employees, less empirical insight is available to show the nuances, difficulties and failure factors of corporate brand communication in practice; what is scarce and, therefore, needs to be researched further is how employees *actually* interpret these initiatives. Similarly to the shortcomings conceptions of the corporate brand are susceptible to, as discussed earlier, communication theories are also mainly sender-oriented; much less is known about the receivers’ – e.g. employees’ – perspective.

2.14. Some critiques in corporate brand communication discourse

Following a critical review of the corporate brand communication literature, a number of relevant debates and critiques are discussed in the remainder of this chapter. The intention in presenting these debates is to demonstrate that the reception of corporate brand initiatives and employees perceptions about the initiatives is a greatly-contested realm. To that effect, further empirical insight is required to enlighten these debates; more needs to be done to illuminate how engineers perceive corporate brand initiatives, how they contribute to them and the reasons for engineers’ scepticism towards or disengagement from corporate brand initiatives.

2.14.1. Top-down conduct and value statements

As partly discussed earlier, one of the first steps in defining the corporate brand is to identify and devise (some) initiatives centred on the values, mission, objectives and distinctive features contained in the corporate brand. At this stage, the organization looks into itself as well as upon the competitive landscape (Knox and Bickerton, 2003; Bickerton, 2003) to identify *who it is* (in the eyes of internal and external stakeholders) and *who it wants to become* (Balmer and Greyser, 2002). The answers to these questions define corporate brand identity (Balmer, 2001a).

The critical issue, however, is who it is that asks these identity questions, who it is that provides the answers, and who is it that makes the final decision about the content of the corporate brand. The answer, typically, is that top strategic management and “a handful of key employees” are responsible for this process, usually in a “somewhat totalitarian” manner (Lencioni, 2002; Burmann and Zeplin, 2005:286). This somewhat top-down conduct in defining corporate brand identity is due to the assumption that “consensus building in an extensive group process makes it virtually impossible to generate a short list of words or statements that capture the essence of the brand identity” (Burmann and Zeplin, 2005:286). Therefore, practically there is little opportunity to involve the rest of the organization and include their ‘voices’ in defining the corporate brand and developing the initiatives (de Chernatony, 2002; Ind, 2004).

A number of issues can arise as a result of this top-down conduct. First, the corporate brand identity definition can be reduced and equated to a mere *brand value statement* (Schultz et al., 2005a) which also needs to meet two rather opposing traits: first, to be comprehensive and accurate enough to represent the essence of the corporate brand

identity in full and, second, to be concise enough to be memorable (Ind, 2004; Chernatony *et al.*, 2006; Jaakson, 2010b).

Therefore, brand values statements comprise usually only a few value words (no more than five) or a few lines in the format of mission, values or ‘philosophy’ statements. The risk, however, is that values statements come across as “empty rhetoric” (Thorbjørnsen and Supphellen, 2011) and “create cynical and dispirited employees, alienate customers, and undermine managerial credibility” (Lencioni, 2002:5).

Furthermore, the extent to which such statements represent the corporate brand identity and make a good guide to, or representation of, the corporate brand is an open question. Such a condensation process in defining the corporate brand identity leads to most organizations ending up with rather similar statements (Antorini and Schultz, 2005). This issue is most of the time inevitable because all organizations, particularly those in the same industry, pursue similar objectives, compete in similar markets and face similar issues (Lencioni, 2002; Antorini and Schultz, 2005; Scott, 2008). Consequently, it is likely that the distinctive elements that companies strive to underline in value statements become ambiguous or lost.

Another issue is that because of the nature of a top-down approach, the (small) handful of final decision-makers who get to define the corporate brand and initiatives might get caught up in group-thinking (Ind, 2004; Antorini and Schultz, 2005) or idealism (Christensen and Cheney, 2000) and/or fail to reflect the reality of what employees actually live up to (Kärreman and Rylander, 2008). Dissenting voices can also be suppressed. Furthermore, those ‘key employees’ or final decision-makers might not have sufficient knowledge, neither about the great body of excluded employees, nor about the implications of corporate branding. As a result, the democratic and

autonomous participation and contribution that is expected from employees in making the corporate brand successful becomes at risk due to the ‘totalitarian’ initiation and conduct of the corporate brand definition process; the chances are that people will not put in enough earnestness in defining or engaging with the corporate brand (Karmark, 2005).

2.14.2. Training and articulation

Articulating the corporate brand proposition for the rest of the constituents through initiatives such as training or workshops is one of the important activities in making the corporate brand meaningful to employees (Knox and Bickerton, 2003; Ind, 2004). The aim at the *articulation phase* is to make the corporate brand proposition relevant and clear for employees whose buy-in is crucial for the delivery of the corporate brand (Knox and Bickerton, 2003). It is important that the brand promise is clearly translated into all stakeholders’ ‘languages’ (Ind, 2004). The meanings of the corporate brand for the everyday processes of different constituents need to be thought through and be made clear for them so that the engagement and contribution of various stakeholders are enhanced.

Often organizations form cross-functional teams with the assistance of ‘corporate brand facilitators’ to evoke ‘local’ understandings as to how the corporate brand proposition can possibly be applied in each organizational section (Ind, 2004; Schultz, 2005a). Such collaboration is supposed to provide the ‘space’ for others to contribute to the initiatives, internalize brand values and specify the corporate brand further down the actual business processes (Knox and Bickerton, 2003; Ind and Watt, 2006).

During this process, however, some issues can arise: because those who ‘write’ the propositions and those who ‘read’ them usually have different (if not to say

contradictory) viewpoints, the initiatives might only lead to mere compliance, or be disregarded or even cause friction (Lencioni, 2002). The risk is that those who craft the propositions might keep pressurizing the employees to abide by the initiatives or internalize them despite employees' preferences not having been reflected and taken into consideration in the first place. In strong cases, this can have negative functional and emotional implications such as indifference, contempt, confusion or active resistance (Ind, 2004; Wallace and Chernatony, 2007).

2.14.3. 'Authenticity'

One of the crucial aspects in corporate brand communication is maintaining consistency across all corporate communication (Knox and Bickerton, 2003). It is crucial that all stakeholder audiences experience coherence in all their interactions with the corporate brand. Coherence should be maintained at different levels and in different modes of interaction. Thus, inconsistencies in communications and interactions should be minimized (Bickerton, 2000; Knox and Bickerton, 2003).

Again, a number of issues can arise depending on the definition and interpretation of consistency and coherence. Given that different stakeholders establish different forms of relationship with the corporate brand and, thus, demand different levels and forms of communication and engagement (Gregory, 2007), total consistency *per se* can yield some debates. In this regard, two levels of brand communication need to be distinguished to better understand the notion of consistency: first, the visual/verbal level; and second, the behavioural level.

At the visual level, artefact attributes and aesthetics such as logos, building design, taglines, advertisements, packaging, presentation and the like should follow a familiar and consistent pattern that is unique to the corporate brand. Consistency at the visual

level has been widely discussed under the rubric of visual identity (Schmidt, 1995; Balmer and Wilson, 1998; Schmidt and Ludlow, 2002; Olins, 2003). At the verbal level, likewise, what an organization promises and claims should be consistent with what it delivers. This has also been discussed with notions such as a promise-performance gap (Balmer and Greyser, 2003) and ‘walk-the-talk’ (de Chernatony and Segal-Horn, 2003).

The trickiest part, however, is the behavioural level, where the promises are to be met and claims are to be delivered, whereby measuring consistency is far more complex. At times, extensive consistency might bear connotations of constraining bureaucratization or lack of innovation in delivering the corporate brand. Today’s customers are less interested in ‘robot-like’ consistent behaviour from corporate brands. Instead, they demand ‘live’, dynamic and interesting responsiveness as opposed to static, bureaucratic and one-way communication (Hatch and Schultz, 2008:57). Therefore consistency in the literal sense of the term should be used with caution.

The notion of ‘brand authenticity’ can provide insight here in understanding behavioural consistency. Holt (2002), among others, argued that customers look beyond brand ‘vener’ and seek real value. Regardless of the claims or the actual value words avowed by the brand, customers expect ‘authenticity’ at every level of interaction, in every ‘touch point’ with the corporate brand. Touch points are, for instance, recruitment experiences, services and products, share price fluctuations and dividends, the brand’s responses to environmental and ethical concerns, to name only a few. All these touch points need to be managed *authentically* and not necessarily consistently (Moore, 2003; Gilmore and Pine, 2007; Charters, 2009). Sustaining authenticity is, thus, the cornerstone of corporate branding at the behavioural level. Stakeholders should be convinced that behind corporate brands, there are responsible, authentic and trustable

“companies that act like a local merchant, as a stalwart citizen of the community” (Holt, 2002:88).

Authenticity can, therefore, be defined as the responsible, sincere, and reliable ‘behaviour’ of the corporate brand at every level of interaction with its environment and all stakeholders. Thus, any breach of espoused values and/or the values of the society and stakeholders from the corporate brand comes at the risk of discrediting and undermining the corporate brand altogether. Hence, maintaining authenticity can be said to be the cornerstone of corporate branding (Balmer and Greyser, 2003; de Chernatony and Segal-Horn, 2003; Knox and Bickerton, 2003; Hatch and Schultz, 2008).

2.14.4. ‘Alignment’

The notion of alignment is one of the important and somewhat contested debates in corporate brand communication. Alignment needs to be maintained among the different initiatives, constituents and perspectives surrounding the corporate brand. As discussed extensively earlier, management should ensure that throughout the organization processes are well-aligned with the corporate brand promises (Knox and Bickerton, 2003). The alignment of business processes is crucial for the fulfilment of corporate brand initiatives.

For example, a brand proposing ‘innovation’ as its core value should not penalize (through its reward system) unintended mistakes committed in innovative endeavours; or cause ‘agility’ to become suffocated in bureaucratic formalities. The organization’s processes need to be checked for their supportiveness toward brand promises, and changes should be made if necessary. On a cross-functional basis as well, business processes should support one another in a coherent manner (Schultz, 2005a).

One of the pertinent debates here is the definition of ‘alignment’ and ‘gap’. In the conventional sense of the terms, alignment is often equated to ‘closing’ the gaps. Although this definition might seem unproblematic, in practice organizational dynamics are far more complex and multi-dimensional than would fit into this one-dimensional picture. One-dimensional readings of gap and alignment become even more deceptive when accessorized with fancy quantitative measures (Berens and van Riel, 2004). The risk is that many other important dimensions of the corporate brand are overlooked (Chun, 2005). If the whole idea of alignment is seen multi-dimensionally with all the complexities considered, then the two terms – ‘gap’ and ‘alignment’ – can evoke different meanings.

In the light of the theories of organizational culture and identity dynamics (Hatch, 1993; Balmer and Greyser, 2002; Hatch and Schultz, 2002; Balmer and Greyser, 2003), it is very difficult, if not impossible, to close any gap *per se*. This is because identity projections and cultural dynamism in organizations are too complex and multi-dimensional and cannot be managed as such by considering only one aspect of the issues at hand. To this effect, alignment, as well, should be seen multi-dimensionally with all the complexities involved; if seen this way, alignment would not ultimately be concerned with or equated to closing the gaps; rather acknowledging the (existing or contingent) gaps and gaining a rich understanding of them becomes more crucial (Schultz, 2005a). Better to say that understanding the gaps is somewhat more important than closing them. Many gaps, perhaps, should be left as gaps. Organizational gaps are often appreciated as the driving force for cultural change, a significant aspect in internal corporate brand management (Schultz, 2005a; Ind and Bjerke, 2007).

In addition to alignment in processes, another important aspect in this regard is that stakeholders in general and employees in particular *feel* aligned with the corporate

brand. It has been widely discussed that affinity between employees' personal values and those that the company embodies creates a favourable emotional bond that improves staff morale, efficiency and sense of pride (Robinson et al., 1994; Hardaker and Fill, 2005; Maxwell and Knox, 2009).

Employee alignment can be interpreted in a number of destructive ways as well. Depending on who 'manages' alignment, employee alignment can turn into the direct control, compliance or obedience of employees. Hence, defining alignment from a managerial perspective, or from that of employees', can have different implications. Whereas in the former, employees should align themselves with the wants and expectations of management, the latter calls for the reverse. Excessively top-down readings of internal alignment can lead to 'Orwellian' corporate branding whereby management exerts power to define the brand, set brand-based rules, get others on-board and assess employees accordingly.

And finally in this regard, another common misconception is equating alignment with rigid consistency and blunt sameness. In pursuit of internal alignment, the individualistic and collective capacities, specificities and cultural nuances of employees need to be appreciated, even leveraged, to enhance and encourage overall engagement (Ind and Bjerke, 2007). Different internal stakeholders should be empowered to add value and colour to the corporate brand (initiatives) in their own ways. In this sense, misconceiving alignment as sameness can do more harm than good to the corporate brand by causing disinterest in employees, suffocating local knowledge and suppressing variety.

2.14.5. *'Engagement'*

In a similar way, the notions of 'engagement' and value bond can yield different implications. As discussed extensively earlier, employee branding literature builds heavily on the notion of value engagement. The idea is that the values employees share and those that the brand advocates can be emotional driving forces that enhances employees' collaboration with and commitment to the brand (Herzberg, 2003; Hardaker and Fill, 2005; Wheeler et al., 2006). Accordingly, management should encourage and provide the appropriate environment for employees to internalize brand values.

However, the notion of value engagement can often have negative implications depending on how it is interpreted and applied in practice; for instance, as it is recommended that brands recruit and 'watch' employees according to the needs of the brand values, the chances are that companies deprive themselves of productive talent because of (presumed) value asymmetry (Morsing, 2006).

Furthermore, by praising active advocates of the brand, often referred to as 'brand ambassadors' or 'brand champions', in the strict senses of the terms, necessarily 'brand agnostics', 'brand cynics' and 'brand saboteurs' will also be identified (Ind, 2004; Wallace and Chernatony, 2007). The chances are that the latter groups will be suppressed in heavily brand-oriented firms. Such unhappy division can cause internal frictions since, presumably, the latter groups are not well-received in the corporate brand; thus, cynicism or dissenting voices can be severely suppressed.

Although Ind (2004:98) notes that, such demarcation between brand affinity and averseness should not be pushed too hard, and that such identification should not be at the expense of diluting individuality, it is still not evident in the literature as to how cynical reactions and those who do not identify with the brand should be dealt with.

Another negative implication of such interpretations of corporate brand value engagement is value ‘policing’ which can lead to homogenization, fragmentation or the despair of otherwise competent employees (Morsing, 2006). Particularly given that companies today intend to embrace extra moral and ethical values, further emotional pressure is exerted on employees (Morsing, 2006). Thus, attempts to decrease ‘value diversity’ (de Chernatony and Segal-Horn, 2003) and taking the metaphor of ‘corporate brand religion’ (Kunde, 2002) too literally can have serious negative implications for employees. In the theological sense of the ‘corporate brand religion’ metaphor, engagement can be equivocally read as ‘submission’ to the ‘corporate brand covenant’ (Otubanjo et al., 2010), which is in stark contrast to employees’ autonomy and freedom of values.

Extensive value-orientation might force employees to bend their values to meet those of the corporate brand. Hence, extensive value assessment generates more ‘brand servants’ than ‘brand champions’ (Harquail, 2007). The role of employees in such a conception is reduced to being a mere vehicle of value delivery. Even more problematically, at times, this version of corporate brand engagement does not suffice for delivering the corporate brand either; rather, brand engagement needs to be constantly displayed and proved by employees (Harquail, 2006).

2.15. Research question two

In the light of all the debates discussed thus far, it is deemed evident that more empirical inquiry is necessary to enlighten the above-discussed debates. Engineers, who are susceptible to many of the characteristics and debates discussed above, provide an insightful source and can be studied for their perceptions with respect to corporate brand initiatives to partly illuminate the debates referred to above. To this end, the

second research question intends to elicit engineers' perceptions about the corporate branding initiatives of the company they work for. Thus, the second research question is formulated as:

RQ2: How do engineers perceive, engage with and contribute to the corporate brand initiatives?

By providing an opportunity for engineers to speak about corporate brand initiatives, the shortcomings in the field, the factors that cause disinterest or disengage engineers from active engagement with corporate brand initiatives, and how engineers can contribute to the corporate brand can all be identified. Hence, engineers' contingent scepticism can be deployed as a rich source of insight to enhance the theory and practice of corporate branding. The engineers' perspective, as a non-marketing internal stakeholder base, can add value and contribute to further illuminate the theories of corporate brand and corporate branding communication.

2.16. Summary

In this chapter, the corporate branding literature was critically reviewed. It was discussed that some conceptions of corporate branding suffer from conceptual ambiguities. These ambiguities are mainly due to insufficient consideration to the multi-dimensional and multi-disciplinary nature of the corporate brand construct. Excessive weighting to one discipline or stakeholder base at the expense of other perspectives has caused some of the corporate branding conceptions to look managerial, functional, and one-sided. Therefore, it was discussed that further research attention needs to be devoted to less researched stakeholder bases.

It was demonstrated that little has been done thus far on the meanings of the corporate brand and corporate branding initiatives to employees. Therefore, given the employees' significant role in building and delivering the corporate brand, further insight is necessary as to how employees interpret the corporate brand concept and its initiatives. It is also important to know how they can contribute to the corporate brand both in terms of theory and practice.

Following an extensive review of the literature, it became evident that current literatures informing these questions are mainly anecdotal, customer-oriented, and/or managerial. Also, less is known about less charming brands, knowledge-intensive contexts, support staff at various grades, as well as the more sceptical employees where corporate branding is concerned. These shortcomings call for an extensive and in-depth empirical enquiry.

In light of the gaps and contextual specificities demanded, the engineering consulting sector – as an under-researched context with respect to corporate branding – was selected for further investigation; engineering professionals at various grades will be the source of insight in this regard. Two research questions were formulated to address the gaps referred to throughout the literature review and to partially enlighten the discussed debates:

RQ1: How do engineers at various grades in an engineering consulting firm perceive the corporate brand?

RQ2: How do engineers perceive, engage with and contribute to the corporate brand initiatives?

In the next chapter, the methodological underpinnings, orientation and means of data collection are discussed. It is explained why an interpretive qualitative approach is suitable to investigate the above-mentioned questions in the field. Further, details about the process of data collection, interpretive scheme, and specificities of the cases whereby the empirical inquiry is carried out are presented.

Chapter 3: Methodology

3.1. Introduction, objectives, and chapter structure

As explained in Chapter Two, the primary aim of this thesis is to explore and elicit engineers' interpretations and meanings about corporate brand and corporate branding initiatives in the context of their engineering consulting organizations. It was explicated in previous chapters that, among all stakeholder groups and contexts, engineers' opinions about the concept, practice and implications of corporate branding have been hitherto less researched in the literature. Considering engineers' professional characteristics, occupational specificities and engineering consultancy's contextual nuances, it was discussed that a specific research attention deems necessary to illuminate the concept and practical implications of corporate branding from the perspective of engineers in the context of engineering consulting.

To this aim, this chapter will delineate the methodological approach of this thesis, including knowledge claims and philosophical orientations, interpretive scheme, quality criteria, research design (case study), sampling, information elicitation methods, and data analysis. All facets of the developed methodology are in light of the literature reviewed and the main research questions – i.e. how do engineers at various grades in an engineering consulting firm perceive the corporate brand? (RQ1) and how do engineers perceive, engage with and contribute to the corporate brand initiatives? (RQ2).

The structure of this chapter is as follows: first, philosophical underpinnings of the methodology (including ontology and epistemology) are discussed. Following that, the selection and use of inductive and qualitative approach is justified as the overarching

methodological orientation of this study. Next, the interpretive scheme in handling data and the quality criteria upon which the findings should be assessed are discussed. Then, the use of case-studies as the research design of this thesis is justified. Rationale for the selection of cases as well as the distribution of informants in each case is explained subsequently. And finally, a brief introduction to the cases, methods of gathering insights, details about the field-work, limitations in seeking access and conducting fieldwork are discussed. The chapter ends with a brief note on how the data were managed with the use of Nvivo software along with a number of ethical considerations.

3.2. Philosophical orientations

In this section, the presumptions about the nature of reality (ontology), the ways in which reality is ‘accessed’ (epistemology) in this thesis, and the quality criteria upon which the findings of this thesis should be assessed are discussed.

3.2.1. Ontological assumptions

Claims about the nature of reality can be understood in a continuum between absolutism in objective truth on one side, and a purely altering and constructive reality on the other (Burrell and Morgan, 1979). Depending on ontological assumptions – i.e. belief systems about the nature of reality – claims about how reality can be accessed are affected (Denzin and Lincoln, 2005). While objectivism is, by tradition, associated with scientific and rigorous quantitative enquiries, relativism is commonly associated with subjective and qualitative interpretive enquiries (Denzin and Lincoln, 2005; Guba and Lincoln, 2005).

Assumptions about the nature of reality in this thesis are more towards the latter end – i.e. relativism – in that reality is not assumed to be constant or fixed; instead, reality is

considered to be fluid and somewhat relative. This ontological orientation is best represented by the *Interpretive* paradigm in conventional classifications (Burrell and Morgan, 1979; Alvesson and Deetz, 2000; Denzin and Lincoln, 2005). This ontological assumption also deviates from poststructuralism and postmodernism which ascribe zero credibility to any reality of any kind other than which is constructed in discourse.

Based on this ontological assumption, findings are not expected to be complete, absolute, right or valid (as opposed to wrong or invalid) in strict sense of the terms because no such solidity is assumed 'out there' to be objectified. Instead, findings are expected to be convincing, plausible, sincere, authentic and realistic. Findings are expected to reveal what is going on in the selected cases which are provisional upon time, context and space of enquiry. Meanings of the corporate brand are, therefore, contestable. This will be made clearer in the discussion of quality criteria in subsequent sections.

3.2.2. *Epistemological assumptions*

In line with the ontological assumptions discussed above and in light of the nature of research questions, the Interpretivist paradigm (Interpretivism) can best represent the epistemological orientations of this research as well. Interpretivism and interpretive approach is often recommended when the aim of research is to gain insight on the 'meanings' of a subject of research (Tesch, 1990; Alvesson and Sköldbberg, 2000; Gummesson, 2000). Interpretivism is typically deployed when qualitative data is at hand, analysis of data is subjective in nature, and when the subject of research is an abstract phenomenon and/or construct (Denzin and Lincoln, 2005; Guba and Lincoln, 2005). All these characteristics resonate well with the meanings of the corporate brands pursued in this thesis. Therefore, interpretive approach is adopted in this thesis for the

interpretation of data. In the next section, the specifications of the interpretive approach undertaken in this thesis as well as some points of contrast with other paradigms are explained in order to better explain the epistemological assumptions in this thesis.

3.3. Interpretivism

Interpretivism is subjective in nature (Denzin and Lincoln, 2005). Not only the researcher's interpretation is subjective to a large extent, but also interviewees' accounts are subjective in themselves (Reynolds and Gutman, 1988; Silverman, 1993; Wolcott, 1994; Silverman, 2006; Alvesson, 2011). Below, a number of specifications in the interpretive approach adopted in this thesis are discussed:

First, *preunderstanding* – which comprise the subjective intuitions, experiences and readings of the researcher or those being researched such as reviews of the literature (Gummesson, 2000) – is acknowledged and taken into account in interpretations. Acknowledgment of preunderstanding is helpful, for instance, in saving time, enhancing the efficiency of conducting field research and adding depth to the interpretations (Gummesson, 2000). Therefore, the interpretive approach of this thesis contrasts with classic versions of grounded theory (Glaser and Strauss, 1967) or ethnography (Garfinkel, 1967) which tend to minimize the influence of preunderstanding.

Recognizing preunderstanding also adds value by appreciating the intelligibility of the interpreter without exaggerating researcher's interpretive power. This means that intelligibility is bound by subjective abilities of the researcher that are not fully comprehensible either – i.e. can not be objectified fully and explicitly as an absolutely rigorous scheme. For instance, it can frequently be the case that one knows something is

plausible, but does not have enough evidence or linguistic faculty to rationalize it. Such incidents can still be accounted and presented as ‘possibilities’ during the course of interpretation (Alvesson, 2011).

Second, the constructive role of building rapport, empathy and trust between interpreter and interpreted (interviewees) is important and acknowledged. This is particularly the case when one wants to penetrate into interviewees’ accounts more deeply and go beyond the surface of socially situated utterances. Hence, a certain level of emotional understanding is a prerequisite for one to be able to do so (Gummesson, 2000; Bryman and Bell, 2007). As Alvesson (2011:14) suggests, “‘genuine’ human interaction,...rapport, trust and commitment between interviewer and interviewee...are a prerequisite in order to explore the inner world (meanings, ideas, feelings, intentions) or experienced social reality of the interviewee”. Holstein and Gubrium (2003:19 as cited in Alvesson, 2011:15) refer to this level of relationship between the interviewer and interviewees as “‘collaboration’ in the production of meaning” (see Holstein and Gubrium, 1997; Holstein and Gubrium, 2004).

Third, the autonomy of objects (such as interviewee texts) as well as subjective informants is respected and appreciated. In other words, informant texts or semiotics should be allowed to speak for themselves (Tesch, 1990). Sources of information should not be reduced to mere means to another objective end – the ultimate truth – which is the dominant assumption in instrumentalist neo-positivism (Charmaz, 2003).

Nor should information be considered as mere social encounters with no reliable backdrop as is assumed in some interpretive approaches such as *localism* (Silverman, 1993; Silverman, 2006). The interpretive approach in this thesis also deviates from poststructuralist and postmodernist approaches which see “‘reality’ as locally invented

and reject the idea that language can communicate essential meaning” (Alvesson, 2011:20); that regard sources only as inspiration or stimulation, without any association with any form of social reality (see also Rosenau, 1992; Alvesson and Deetz, 2000).

Fourth feature of the Interpretivism adopted in this thesis is the notion of ‘thick description’. Geertz’s (1973) approach on thick description includes and values both the descriptive aspects of data – ‘the surface veneer’ as he puts it – as well as the inner meanings found in qualitative data – “the rich layers of meaning and symbolism” (Alvesson and Sköldberg, 2000:95). Geertz (1973:14) contends that “we begin with our own interpretations of what our informants are up to, or think they are up to, and then systematize those”.

In thick description, the researcher should aim for “seeing things from the actor’s point of view”, think and reflect, and then tries to represent “people’s...normalness without reducing their particularity” (Geertz, 1973:14). Such contention again implies that meanings are bound by subjective interpretive capacities of actors upon social order and researcher’s interpretive capacity as well as researcher’s authorship style. This characteristic also distinguishes the interpretive approach adopted in this thesis from phenomenological approaches. Given that the focus of this thesis is not solely on the meanings of the corporate brand as a phenomenon and instead corporate brand meanings are studied within the context of engineering consultancies, phenomenology does not reflect the methodological approach in this thesis.

The main reservation, nonetheless, is that thick description demands adequate space for elaborating phenomena which is one of the limitations in this thesis. Therefore, only partial characteristics of thick description can be found in the interpretive approach

adopted here. Conventional thick descriptions are far more elaborate than what the scope of this thesis allows.

In light of the epistemological approach discussed thus far, in the following section, the qualitative approach of this thesis is explained in detail and specificities of the qualitative approach adopted here are discussed.

3.4. Qualitative approach

Qualitative research is usually adopted when there is scant research available on a particular subject matter, theoretical maturity is yet to be achieved, the issue at hand is associated with meanings, and last, but not least, when a rich, nuanced and context-sensitive account of the world is called for (Creswell, 1997; Denzin and Lincoln, 2005; Bryman and Bell, 2007). Qualitative enquiry “demands situationally unconstrained operationalizations of variables to allow cross-setting generalization and observation within natural, ecologically valid settings – “noisy” settings – where large samples, quantitative measures, and control are more difficult to achieve” (Bonoma, 1985:200-201).

Engineering consulting context is highly characterized by such ‘noisiness’ with respect to the corporate brand meanings given the variety of opinions held by consultants. The meanings of the corporate brand should, therefore, be sought from a plurality of voices. Thus, understanding and presenting the plurality and nuances is one of the main motivations in this thesis to adopt a qualitative approach. The meanings of corporate branding for employees have only scarcely been the subject matter of research to date, as demonstrated in Chapter Two. This paucity of empirical research is even more so the

case in the engineering consulting context. Qualitative approach, therefore, is suitable to begin the theorization of the opinions held by engineers towards their corporate brands.

In this regard, Bonoma (1985) explains how researchers can adopt a position somewhere on the continuum between ‘data integrity’ on one side and ‘currency’ on the other, depending on how much the theory is developed on the subject matter. Accordingly, in order to develop theory, Bonoma (1985) suggests a research continuum that is comprised of the stages of “description, classification, comparison, measurement/estimation, establishing association, and determining cause and effect”. The literature on the meanings of corporate branding for engineers is still at the very early stages of theorization as demonstrated in the literature review. Therefore, this thesis can contribute to the literature by beginning to theorize along the lines of the first stages, i.e. description and (to some extent) classification of the meanings of corporate branding to engineers in the context of engineering consultancies.

Nonetheless, as will become more evident in the discussion on the case-study approach, the ambition of this thesis is not to suffice to description, but to go beyond that (as much the interpretive skills of the researcher allows) and bring out patterns. This is often referred to as the explanatory aspect of interpretive inquiry in case-study design (Gummesson, 2000; Yin, 2003a). Therefore, by the end of the thesis it should be rather clear as to what variety of meanings are ascribable towards corporate branding, what patterns are found most predominantly and what types of associations are most plausible.

3.5. Interpretive scheme

In this part, more details about the ways in which the interpretive approach is operationalized in practice and in dealing with the empirical material are discussed as the interpretive scheme of this research.

Despite several attempts to organize interpretative schemes (Silverman, 1993; Burgess and Bryman, 1994; Kvale, 1996; Silverman, 2006; Kvale and Flick, 2007), to date, the process of interpreting interviews has by and large remained unstructured (Alvesson, 2011). This is in fact partly due to the nature of qualitative approach which merits openness and (to some extent) plurality. Nonetheless, in order to avoid sloppiness, it is beneficial to follow an articulate interpretive scheme. To this end, Pragmatic Reflexivity (PR) (Alvesson and Sköldberg, 2000; Alvesson, 2011) provides an informative interpretive scope. In the next section, it will be discussed as to how PR informs the interpretive approach adopted in this thesis.

3.5.1. Pragmatic Reflexivity

Within interpretive schemes, three main lines of thought can be ascertained. First stream, developed by Giddens (1976), embraces two perspectives: the interpreter and the interpreted (both being subjective interpreters). Another perspective is ‘critical scrutiny’ which, along the other two mentioned perspectives comprises the second line of thought. Critical scrutiny helps bringing to surface and discussing the suppressing forces, unheard voices and repressing institutions on a particular topic (Alvesson and Sköldberg, 2000:248). This line of interpretive thought will potentially open up doors to unseen, neglected or suppressed perspectives.

The third line of thought includes a fourth perspective of postmodernism (and poststructuralism). This fourth perspective, or to call it level or layer of interpretation, deals with the linguistic aspect of interview texts – the extent to which the text can be utilized to stimulate or complement interpretation on its own and regardless of the reality to which it intends to refer (Alvesson and Sköldbberg, 2000). Alvesson's idea of PR is built on and embraces all the three lines of thought. Each of the interpretive levels (i.e. empirical material, interpretation, critical interpretation and self-critical/linguistic reflection) can respectively be associated with the depth of interpretation that one can reflect and present. In other words, from the description of empirical material to critical interpretation and linguistic reflection on the data, the depth and reflexivity of interpretation increases.

Although it might appear in the first instance that adopting all the above mentioned lines of thought and interpretation, or to use 'reflexivity' in Alvesson's term⁹, is an interesting and wise option to go for due to its comprehensiveness, there are some challenges, risks and limitations involved in doing so. One of the risks is that PR, at its very philosophical core, encourages meta-theoretical reflection – i.e. shifting one's theoretical stances constantly for the sake of confrontation between theories to bring in new insights (Alvesson, 2011).

This characteristic (i.e. meta-theoretical reflection) which can bear in mind a rather free epistemological stance can become in clash with the (relatively stable and simple) epistemological and ontological claims advocated earlier for this thesis. The four layers

⁹ Alvesson's use of the term 'reflexivity', as he himself notes (Alvesson and Sköldbberg, 2000:290), is slightly different from his predecessors (e.g. Potter, 1997). Whereas others heavily and one-sidedly associate reflexivity to text and discourse analysis, Alvesson ascribes reflexivity more holistically to interpretive reflective approach only part of which is text and discourse (besides critical scrutiny, reflective interpretation and empirical material).

of interpretation referred to above (empirics, interpretation, critical reflection, and discourse analysis) can each represent a sociological paradigm in organization theory (Burrell and Morgan, 1979) within which paradigm shifts demand high levels of skill and experience. Hence, a serious reservation in adopting PR is that interpretation at all the four levels, particularly at the critical and postmodern levels demand a good degree of experience, literary expertise and academic mastery of different (sociological and organizational) theories.

Nonetheless, as Alvesson (2011) notes, scholars would better not to fully ‘box’ themselves in one epistemological paradigm, which can in itself become a bias, solely for the sake of philosophical safeness. Instead, as he contends, it is wise to ‘learn lessons’ from other layers of interpretation or approaches, without surrendering or radically shifting one’s knowledge claims, if they are found to be useful. In this regard, the prefix ‘pragmatism’ still offers a safe position and is a good indicator of the fact that researchers, depending on their limitations (experience, time, space, language, and access, to name a few) can benefit from the four levels (the third and fourth in particular) to different extents in the ‘reflexive’ approach to interpretation.

Instead of depriving oneself from the features in critical scrutiny and discourse analysis while adopting the interpretive approach, one can be open enough so that, wherever germane, all the four layers can be included and utilized as well, to whatever extent possible (which experience allows) for enhancing insights. However, although this is how PR is intended to be deployed in this thesis in dealing with the empirics, interpretation at the critical and postmodern levels is much more limited overall in this thesis than that of the conventional interpretive level.

Furthermore, ‘discourse analysis’ in conventional definitions of the method is not utilized in this thesis in the interpretation of data. Instead interpretations are made from the interviews based on general understanding (and pre-understanding) of the researcher. In doing so, however, a number of contingent situational biases – i.e. situations when interviewees’ accounts are likely to be misleading and/or do not represent ‘truth’ – are taken into account. In other words, I have tried to be vigilant upon situational biases in the interview data and take them into account while interpreting the data in order to maximize verisimilitude. These biases are explained by Alvesson (2011:77) in the form of ‘interpretive metaphors’.

Alvesson (2011:77) introduces eight interpretive metaphors to be considered by researchers in the course of interpretation, each representing a contingent bias. These contingent biases or metaphors (in PR) are inclusive of but not limited to:

1. Local accomplishment, whereby interviewee knows how to make the interview interaction a pleasant experience without necessarily referring to any plausible truth.
2. Political interests, when an interviewee plays politics saving the face of certain actors and avoiding the risks of portraying a particular figure in any negative manner.
3. Identity works, when interviewee engages in role plays, for instance, as a ‘manager’ a ‘female engineer’, or a ‘graduate consultant’ rendering only certain accounts in line with their momentary self.
4. Establishing a storyline, when employees craft a compelling story towards which everything else will be suited, avoiding any account that breaches the storyline.

5. Cultural scripts, when interviewees hesitate revealing certain aspects of truth under the influence of normative demands.
6. Moral storytelling, whereby interviewee represents the best of his/her morally and ethically.
7. Construction work, when an interviewee fails to explain reality due to his/her difficulties with language use.
8. Play of the powers of discourse, when interviewees are caught in discourse, from which they hardly find any escape, for instance by getting entangled in certain type of management speak.

All these social and situational factors come into play as threats to objective value of the interview texts and verisimilitude of interpretations. In the interpretation of data in this thesis, these metaphors have been taken into account, although not in an equal and proportional manner. Some of them were more susceptible than others at any given point of data analysis. This will be made more clear and elaborate during case discussion and analysis chapters (Chapters Four, Five and Six).

Reflection and reflexivity is an intrinsic aspect of Interpretivist approaches and takes place not only during the analysis of data, but throughout the different phases of the research – e.g. during the literature review, in formulating research questions and objectives, in the selection of appropriate methods, data collection and conducting interviews, and last but not least, in interpreting and discussing the findings (Van Maanen et al., 1982; Alvesson and Sköldberg, 2000; Gummesson, 2000; Gummesson, 2005; Silverman, 2006; Creswell, 2008).

Nevertheless, with respect to reflexivity in the interpretation of interview data, after primary (or rough) interpretation – which occurs while conducting interviews,

opportunistically observing the social setting and transcribing recorded material – the main reflection takes place during the deskwork, reflecting on and representing the case studies (Alvesson and Sköldbberg, 2000; Gummesson, 2000; Kvale and Flick, 2007).

The process of interpretation involves constant reading and re-reading of texts (transcribed and codified interviews, observatory notes, and secondary data) whereby the interpreter closes to and distances from the empirics in a cyclic manner. This process of interpretation and understanding has been represented by ‘understanding-preunderstanding’ and ‘part-whole’ dichotomies whereby understanding one part informs the other (Alvesson and Sköldbberg, 2000; Gummesson, 2000); by reading a part, the whole can be grasped better and vice versa. Equally, preunderstanding feeds understanding and new understanding becomes a preunderstanding for understanding the emerging themes (Van Maanen et al., 1982; Alvesson and Sköldbberg, 2000; Gummesson, 2000).

3.6. Quality criteria

Before explaining the case-study approach as the design of this thesis for the investigation and presentation of empirics, the quality criteria which are central in the assessment of the findings will be discussed. Although quality assessment is by and large subjective in nature in interpretive approaches, the discussion of quality criteria helps delineating the expectations from the findings in terms of quality and verisimilitude. It also serves as an informative section in clarifying the methodological differences of this thesis with that of other possible approaches.

In positivistic traditions, four criteria upon which quality and rigour have been typically assessed are: internal validity, external validity, reliability and objectivity (Lincoln and

Guba, 1985; Denzin and Lincoln, 2005). On the same rationale, qualitative methodologists have attempted to articulate quality criteria in a number of (different) ways. Lincoln and Guba (1985:300) proposed four ‘naturalistic equivalents’ to positivistic quality criteria mentioned above respectively as credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability. Creswell (1997:201), on the other hand, articulated eight conditions towards which qualitative researchers should be vigilant. That said, such demarcations are, in essence, in clash with the nature of interpretive inquiry, as shows lack of consensus between qualitative methodologists (Eisner, 1991; Creswell, 1997; Huberman and Miles, 2002; Bryman and Bell, 2007), since quality assessment is in many respects subjective.

It can be criticised that qualitative researchers reproduce positivistic merits by exposing their findings to similar measures. Nonetheless, such structured quality discussions, regardless of the positivistic counterparts and without being taken too rigidly, can be deployed in a harmless manner and can still serve as a helpful mind map in discussing plausibility and verisimilitude in qualitative research. Considering quality criteria throughout the course of research are both an indication and a means of raised self-awareness and critical sensitivity (Creswell, 1997). Moreover, it is not a deficiency for interpretive understanding to expose itself to conventional quality criteria. Instead, it is a plus in that unnecessary distance between qualitative and quantitative traditions can, to some extent, be avoided.

Hence, four main criteria of *credibility*, *transferability*, *dependability* and *confirmability* will be discussed here to elucidate the quality of interpretation in this thesis in terms of authenticity, plausibility and trustworthiness (Lincoln and Guba, 1985; Wolcott, 1994; Wagner et al., 2010).

Credibility has to do with the extent to which interpretations are plausible from the point of view of those who have provided the interview material; the extent to which the data is plausible to those who have generated the data in the first place. To enhance credibility, during the interviews, at many times, instant interpretations were being checked with interviewees, for instance by asking: “do you mean ...?” or “is it fair to interpret what you are saying as ...?”.

The reflective style of the whole interview process was also an attempt to enhance credibility. Nevertheless, absolute credibility which is heavily reliant on informants' accounts is not incorporated here since complete representability or ‘mirror effect’ – i.e. direct association between interview text and an objective truth – is not accorded for interviews in this thesis (Alvesson and Sköldbberg, 2000). Therefore, credibility (internal validity in a positivistic term), in the sense that how much interviewees agree with the findings, would be only partially helpful. Instead, subjective interpretations, influenced by holistic understanding of the case, would be central. Hence, internal validity should be replaced by trustworthiness, plausibility and verisimilitude (Creswell, 1997) which are attainable, among other things, through reflective and sincere interpretation.

Transferability deals with the extent to which the findings from these case studies can be used elsewhere. Given that transferability, in a positivistic sense of the term, is impossible in qualitative approaches (Lincoln and Guba, 1985), the aim of this thesis is to provide rich enough a description that every reader can have its own understanding from it (Creswell, 1997; Bryman and Bell, 2007). As lessons learned from other studies, not necessarily on a similar terrain of corporate branding, have illuminated the understanding and interpretive schemes applied here, findings and discussions of this thesis can have a complex and varied contribution to not only the corporate branding, but any other scholarly realm.

Dependability is whether the same result would be attained by another researcher. It is doubtful whether this would be the case since interpretations and interview texts have been produced through a largely subjective process. However, this should not bear in it a sense of arbitrariness; interpretations should pass the test of “‘click of recognition’ and a ‘yes, of course,’ instead of ‘yes, but’” (Kidder, 1982:56) on the reader’s part. Many see dependability also as a test of credibility (Gummesson, 2000). However, for the same reason that credibility cannot be tested through any absolutism, dependability is also limited. One of the main strategies used in this thesis to enhance dependability is that interpretations are reviewed and reflected upon several times by two supervisors both experts in the qualitative-interpretive method applied here.

Confirmability corresponds to objectivity of data as well as the analysis process. As mentioned earlier, this is also only partially the case in this thesis. In other words, there are accounts that refer to an objective reality and accounts that do not. For instance when an engineer explains the content of brand trainings s/he has gone through, there is little room to question the account on the objectivity criterion. On the other hand, there are other instances that the reflective interpreter can question the authenticity of a certain account and instead of taking it at face value, utilise it as a hint to understand something else.

For instance, when a manager underscores the significance of employees’ role in building the corporate brand, but then a few minutes later asserts that the main reason for stressing the significance of the corporate brand to employees is to make them aware that it is, at the end of the day, the corporate brand that matters and not the employees, and that it is not painless for employees “*to leave the firm, rent a place in the corner and start for their own*”, then the extent to which the former account can be taken as truth need to be questioned.

3.7. Justification and applications of case study approach

In this part, the rationale for adopting a case study approach is justified. Later in this section, the applications of case study research along with the ways in which case study design is being used in this thesis are discussed. Subsequently, more details about the selective sampling process, the specificities of the selected cases, sources of information and methods of eliciting information in the field are provided. Next, a brief explanation of the coding process and use of Nvivo software in managing data is provided. The chapter ends with the discussion of ethical considerations.

3.8. Case study approach

Case studies have often been used as a ‘clinical’ approach in various disciplines to study certain attributes and their associations within a context. In management studies, case study research design has often been used as an open empirical ground to study various phenomena (Bonoma, 1985; Yin, 2003b). Case study approach provides a base for researchers to embrace a diversity of informative sources while acknowledging the specificities of the context and understanding informants’ frame of reference (Gummesson, 2000; Gummesson, 2005; Stake, 2005). As Yin (1994:13) defines it, case study is “an empirical enquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident” (cited in Darke et al., 1998:275).

Case studies are used when “a “how” or “why question is being asked about a contemporary set of events over which the investigator has little or no control...allowing the development of a rich explanation for the complex pattern of outcomes and in comparing the explanation with the outcomes” (Yin, 1994:9,115 as

cited in Powell, 2005:103). Researchers can combine different methods and information-elicitation techniques within a case study strategy (Yin, 2003a); creativity in doing so, i.e. crafting methods that are not necessarily mainstream but are most efficiently helpful for the researcher and selected research context is also a plus (Gummesson, 2005).

3.9. Case study applications

A number of applications have been discussed for case studies in the methodology literature. These applications have been classified by Yin (2003a) and Creswell (1997) as descriptive, exploratory and explanatory. In addition, Gummesson (2005:85) notes two more applications, namely theory generation and initiation of change. Theory generation can be associated with the use of case study along with grounded theory (see Goulding, 2002; Bryant and Charmaz, 2007) and initiating change corresponds to action research (Argyris, 1970). Nevertheless, many scholars see these classifications difficult to be strictly adhered to in practice since researches often embody elements from all in one case study research design. That said, it is useful to clarify which of these applications are mostly subscribed to in this thesis.

The case study design in this thesis is exploratory in nature, meaning that corporate brand questions are asked in the field and corporate brand-related evidences are sought for in the case studies to understand the perceptions of engineers better. This type of data has also been supplanted with questions about the concept of corporate brand itself, as an abstract phenomenon, regardless of the context, so that a better understanding can be made more generally.

This application is in line with the level of access I was offered, which only afforded exploration and not instigation of change in any form. Furthermore, access was not unlimited and exploration was bound to the informants and their level of awareness about the concept and practice of corporate branding. Hence, grounded theory could not be pursued either according to its conventional definitions and requirements which calls for ambitious sources of information.

In addition to exploration, the application of (thick) description is another feature of the case study design advocated here; this application is, however, bound with the space available for the presentation of data. The descriptive side of case study research refers to the surface of social acts and artefacts – e.g. what informants say, what the eyes of the researcher see, and what the documents show (Eisenhardt, 1989).

Explanatory aspect, which is another application of case study research proposed here, is about depth and insight – how far an interpreter can penetrate and delve into the surface of naturally occurring talk to explore what is going on beyond the statements (Gummesson, 2000). Alvesson and Sköldbberg (2000:199) consider description and explanation as two levels of interpretation; description can be referred to as the preliminary reading and interpretation whereas explanation is a more developed and reflective interpretation. In this thesis, the main reflections – i.e. the explanatory part – have been implemented while I was away from the field during the subsequent interpretation and analysis of texts and presentation of the case studies. During deskwork it has been tried to utilise the best of accessible and available data, instead of

compensating it by bigger mass of observatory data attained by spending extensive time in the field¹⁰.

3.10. Data collection

In this part, details about the data collection procedure are provided. Four cases were ultimately selected for data collection: one pilot case study was carried out to verify suitability of questions and the interview guide as well as to check whether the questions could yield decent and meaningful answers. Subsequently, three case studies were selected and carried out as the main field work and the primary empirical sources for case discussions.

There have been several debates in the methodology literature on the most efficient number of cases in case study research (Huberman and Miles, 2002; Stake, 2005; Bryman and Bell, 2007). Perry (1998), among others, recommends that researchers should take into account key limitations particularly that of time and experience, when deciding on the number of cases in case study designs. He also underlines that, practically there is a reverse relationship between the number of cases and the level of depth one wants and affords to attain; i.e. the more cases included, the less depth of knowledge becomes accessible to the researchers due to practical limitations. Therefore, symmetry between how deep researchers (can and) want to explore cases on a subject matter and the number of cases need to be maintained.

In this regard, one of the options for addressing the research questions of this thesis was to immerse into one extended case study (perhaps in an ethnographic manner). However, having started seeking candidate firms to engage in the thesis, I realized that

¹⁰ Big mass of observatory data is often the feature of classic versions of ethnography.

the issue of access was a very serious and constraining factor. The primary reason for my prospective cases' drawback to grant unlimited access was extensive reservation about engineers' time. Engineers' work-hour is the major asset of engineering consulting firms. Expensive hourly charge-out rates is a good indicator of why firms often tended to hesitate to trade their employees' times with brand conversations that, in the first instance, might appear not to yield certain financial (or tangible) outcomes for the firms. Another noteworthy reservation was the fear of information leak of any kind given the heavy reliance of engineering consultancies on all sorts of knowledge base including their human resource.

Therefore, I decided to spread the empirical sources into three case studies. Given the access that was ultimately offered to diverse contexts which was very inspiring, I finally decided to include three (rather than two) cases. Four cases, on the other hand, would have diluted the focus of research. Hence, out of all the five candidate firms that declared interest in participating in the research three main case studies were selected to proceed with in subsequent stages.

3.11. Data sampling

In this part, various aspects of the selective sampling process including the selection of cases as well as the participants in each case are explained. A number of observations in the process of seeking access are also shared.

3.11.1. Participating Engineering Consultants

The process for securing access was initiated using the directory of Association for Consultancy and Engineering (ACE)¹¹. Contacts were collected from selected categories of consultants (e.g. structural, electrical, energy and power). In the ACE list of companies, some consulting firms appeared in more than one category due to their versatile and cross-disciplinary expertise.

Initially for every prospective case, phone calls were made to identify the best person to negotiate access with. Following phone calls, usually a written brief proposal was sent to the point of contact (Appendix I). This method in securing access appeared to be an efficient approach. Key decision makers in the firms, namely human resource manager, marketing executive, senior manager, director or board member were sought to negotiate access with.

The amount of engineers' time asked in the first place was an hour long interview with a dozen of engineering consultants at various grades. This appeared to most of the firms as still too much. Thus, the initial time demanded was reduced to a 30-40 minute interview. Later and in practice, particularly during the pilot case study, it became evident that this interview length was sufficient to cover the main thrust of both research questions (except for a few interviews which exceeded an hour slightly more) since the interviews were all semi-structured and, therefore, the main research questions were usually addressed in the first 20-30 minutes of interviews. In excess to that, time was usually spent in a complementary manner within the topic. It was my role to keep the conversations within the boundaries of relevance. In those interview that time limit

¹¹ <http://www.acenet.co.uk>

was exceeded (near to one-fifth of interviews exceeded an hour) there was no hesitation on the interviewees' part in general.

Another reservation I found on the companies' part was 'what is in it for them' participating in this research. For instance, one senior manager in a prospective case reflected on my request of participation as 'dead money' investing time in a majorly research-oriented project. So, the beneficial business and managerial contributions to the firms had to be articulated and somewhat highlighted. This was partly done in the letter sent to firms (Appendix I) at the early stages of access negotiation.

In this letter, the use of marketing and branding jargon was minimized particularly given the uncertainty about the extent to which the term 'corporate brand' would equally be meaningful for engineering consultancies as it (perhaps) is for marketing scholars. But, it was acknowledged that prospective firms were all engaged in some sort of corporate branding, although they themselves might not term what they do as such. Size of the firm was an important indicator of the extent to which they were engaged in conscious practices of corporate branding. As Hatch and Schultz (2008) note, bigger firms are more likely to deploy conscious practices of corporate branding as an integrative managerial tool.

Another observation I made during access seeking was that, after explaining the idea of research to the very first point of contact in a prospective participating firm (receptionists or clerks for example), in most cases, I was referred to the Human Resource (HR) department to follow my request of access. Interestingly, however, in all cases but one (which led to only partial success) all access efforts via the HR channels were unsuccessful. In all the three final cases, it was the marketing channel that accelerated, forced and resolved access issues and not the HR. It appeared that, despite

significant overlaps between the ideas of corporate branding with the typical functions of HR management in theory, the two concepts still do not connect well in practice.

3.11.2. Sources of Information

Interviews with engineers at various grades were the main source of information. As Kvale (1983:175) notes, “[t]he qualitative research-interview seeks to describe and understand the meaning of central themes in the life-world of the interviewee. The main task in interviewing is to understand the meaning of what is said”. Interviews were planned to be complemented by secondary data either available through websites or to be provided by the participating firms. Some of these corporate brand-related materials were also deployed during the interviews to serve at times for enticing reflection and enriching discussion during the course of interviews (Hancock, 2005). For instance, interviewees were being shown a piece of corporate mantra, logo, or value statement to reflect upon it openly. Although some semiotics was in part leveraged to enhance insights and stimulate interviewees’ reflections, the methodology used cannot be termed as semiotic approach in conventional definitions of the term (Hancock, 2005).

Observation, of any kind, is also an inseparable part of fieldwork (Burgess, 1984). Nonetheless, the type of observation facilitated in the field differed from that typically prescribed in ethnography (Tedlock, 1991; Creswell, 1997) in that it was limited to the amount of time granted during field visits. In all the cases researched, I was given a rather comprehensive tour all over the different sections of offices by a senior manager who provided introductions about the departments and their tasks as well. Apart from that, interviews all took place in a dedicated venue. This kind of observation has often been termed as ‘opportunistic observation’ in contrast to the ‘complete observer’ in ethno-methodological approaches (Reimer, 1977; Corsino, 1987).

After having sorted out the issues of access, the next stage was for me to organize field visits and conduct interviews. Fieldwork was carried out based on four to five interviews per visit throughout a full working day.

A consideration at this stage was conducting one case investigation at a time. Dealing with no more than one case at a time possessed several benefits: not least, it was important for maintaining focus, helped learning enough about one case before moving to another and made possible refining and sharpening interview questions while proceeding. Fieldwork was inclusive of conducting interviews, having them all transcribed (simultaneously commenting and reflecting upon the transcriptions while still fresh about the undertones and atmosphere) and collecting additional information in the next visits if necessary.

Fieldwork commenced in April 2010 with the pilot case. The first main case study was subsequently conducted from April 2010 to May 2010. Second case was covered from May 2010 to July 2010. And the third case commenced in July 2010 and ended in August 2010. Fortunately, access granted by participating engineering consultancies allowed such a sequential organization of fieldwork. In all the case studies, the organization of interviews and field visits were fully dependant on the participating firms' schedule and availability of informants. Therefore, I was by and large dependant on the schedules offered by the participating firms.

Key senior managers in all the cases were informed about the type of diversification of engineering grades required. Three levels of seniority were demanded and consequently provided: junior (e.g. graduate or field engineer/consultant), senior (e.g. design or chartered engineer/consultant) and management (e.g. director or partner). Sampling process was, as became apparent later, on the basis of an open call sent out internally by

the senior management to prospective sections of the firm (or to all if applicable) asking each section's manager to return with a list of participants. Only in a few cases (in pilot case especially) engineers had been involuntarily selected for interviews – i.e. were appointed for interviews by their senior managers instead of volunteering themselves for interviews.

The voluntary participation was in one way fruitful for including informants who had interest in the topic, but on the other hand can be seen as a threat for excluding cynical voices. The latter risk, however, did not become very much the case as cynical voices in the sample were not few. Plus, interest in a topic and cynicism do not go head to head necessarily.

Top management commitment was a central driving force in the whole access seeking process without the power of whom it would have been extremely difficult, if not impossible, to gain engineers' attention and contribution. Given that no particular specifications was demanded other than interviewees being engineers, a diversified selection of informants in all criteria – age, gender, grade, tenure, and ethnicity – was achieved. Hence, the selection of respondents was satisfactory in all cases.

3.11.3. Interview Guide

A guide was crafted beforehand as the basis of semi-structured interviewing approach. The interview guide was used more strictly in the pilot case. Once verified and modified in the pilot case, the interview guide served as a mental structure and reminder rather than a physical guideline as such. In the main cases, interviews were usually started with a short description about the main ideas in question and intentions of research, an ice-breaker as well as an assurance, and then interviewees were asked to state in their own terms as to what corporate branding in general and the corporate

brand that they are part of in particular mean to them. This was usually followed by another question as to what is their role in the process of corporate branding, what do the corporate brand initiatives mean to them, what are the implications for their (everyday) working practices and in what ways they think the corporate brand and the initiatives are significant. These two main interview questions were intended to address the two main research questions respectively.

A number of complementary questions were also asked on the corporate brand initiatives in particular wherever germane. Complementary questions were mainly on the line of, for instance, 'how do you think it (corporate branding initiative) can be made more efficient? Where are the shortcomings? Is it interesting to you? Does it engage or relate to you (or your profession) and in what ways? If not, why and in which ways? And how should the disengaging factors be resolved if they should be resolved at all?' In addition, when new themes were appearing during the interviews, appropriate follow up questions were asked for additional information and clarification.

In the next part, brief introductions about the cases are provided. More details about the distribution and specifications of respondents in each case can be found in Table 3.1. All names (including company and interviewee names) are disguised with pseudonyms for ethical reasons.

3.11.4. Pilot Case: TIM Consulting

A pilot case was conducted in order to verify the comprehensibility, applicability and flow of questions in the field. One of the first two firms that agreed to participate was TIM consulting (the other case became the first main case study), a company of a few hundred employees, with near to a dozen regional and offshore offices, the main expertise of which is civil, structural and geotechnical engineering. Executive

management of TIM offered very limited access – only a day visit covering twelve engineers (he himself included) in the form of six graduate engineers in one focus group plus five senior engineers on a one-to-one basis.

This limited access, although was contingent and expandable upon request, made the TIM case appropriate to be used as a pilot; an opportunity to not only pursue a serious scrutiny, but also to verify the suitability of methodology and the type of interview questions. My first supervisor also accompanied in this field visit to check the process in depth and make corrective advises wherever necessary. By conducting this pilot case study, it became evident that the research and interview questions were, first, meaningful to engineers and, second, could yield meaningful answers. Subsequently in the three main case studies, the same type of questions was pursued with slight modifications.

TIM consulting had gone through three re-branding exercises over the last two decades, the last one of which had recently been fully implemented; this rebranding program included the launch of the new logo, a minor alteration in the brand name and more rigorous branding campaigns nationally as well as internationally. Executive management was particularly keen to gain a better understanding of the perceptions of employees upon these trends through our study.

Although a case analysis section is not dedicated to the pilot case in the subsequent analysis chapters (Chapters Four to Six), still valuable lessons were learned from it. All interviews were transcribed and served as a precious and insightful source of (pre)understanding for the thesis altogether.

3.11.5. Case One: CEB Tech.

CEB Tech. was another engineering consultancy firm to participate very enthusiastically early in the process of access seeking. The senior marketing manager of CEB Tech., as the main point of contact throughout the field study, demonstrated keenness by outlining that they were just half way through their brand training program for staff; the first group of engineers had just had their first training session by the time I approached them. It took the marketing manager no more than two weeks to get the agreement of more senior executives to participate in this research.

CEB Tech. is a power engineering expert, with near to 200 employees, headquartered in the UK with a number of national and international offices. Its core consultancy sections consist of analytics, certification, training, safety inspection, assessment and maintenance for a variety of industries that use medium- to high-voltage substations such as panel builders, distribution facilities, or high-voltage electrical equipment builders/users.

Interestingly, CEB Tech's senior management (and equally many of the more junior employees) were very serious and decisive about their corporate brand and the related corporate branding activities (e.g. trainings, initiatives or incentives). Hence, CEB Tech. had acquired a PR company, named EH consultants, to drive its corporate branding activities in-house and in a more concerted, specialized, and professional manner. The PR subsidiary was, however, somewhat detached from the main body of the firm partly because of its geographical distance from CEB Tech.; they were located in different, yet rather close, cities. EH also provides PR, marketing, and branding consultancy to other business-to-business companies.

Fieldwork was carried out in the UK headquarter of CEB Tech. among two directors (one of them being the marketing manager), four senior engineers and four graduate engineers. In addition to respondents in the head office, one of the key members of EH subsidiary, who was mainly responsible for and directed the corporate branding program at CEB Tech., was also phone-interviewed in order to provide further insight on the corporate branding initiatives in place and her experiences about engineers' reflections upon the initiatives.

3.11.6. Case two: WRJ-UK

The second case study is WRJ-UK, the UK subsidiary of the WRJ engineering consulting group headquartered in the Nordic area. WRJ group is involved in a variety of engineering sectors including structural, infrastructure, energy, construction and telecommunication; a group of nearly ten thousand employees spread in several offices worldwide.

An interesting case background which later formed strong themes in interviews was the acquisition that WRJ group had gone through whereby the UK subsidiary – SMB consulting – and many of its international dependants had been acquired by the WRJ group. Before the acquisition, SMB was an already well-established UK-based international consulting of nearly a thousand employees. While WRJ was mainly active in the infrastructure, energy, construction and telecommunication, SMB was known for its excellence in building and design.

Despite its large size, the WRJ Group had by and large remained a Nordic player prior to the acquisition of SMB. Following the acquisition, WRJ managed to break through its Nordic image and enhance its international presence, mostly by leveraging on the established international presence of SMB. Similarly, SMB has enjoyed much larger-

scale projects ever since the acquisition by WRJ and have been engaged in more diverse engineering expertise.

Hence, the UK arm of WRJ consultants was studied as the second case study. After the acquisition, SMB was rebranded as WRJ-SMB for two years and then the SMB sub-brand was eliminated. Currently, the merged entity is known simply as WRJ-UK. As a way to diversify in sampling, WRJ-London supported me in achieving the agreement of two other regional offices in the UK as well.

Interviews and site visits were arranged for three interviews in London (with one regional director and two senior engineers), five interviews in Manchester (with two regional directors, two senior and one graduate engineer), and five interviews in Bristol (with one regional director, one senior and three graduate engineers). Part of the motivation to contribute on the WRJ-UK's part was to gain a picture of what engineers think about the brand overall and particularly post-acquisition. Engineers' perceptions and reactions about the corporate brand after the acquisition were one of the main concerns of senior management at the time of the study as well.

3.11.7. Case three: JC consultants

The third case, which again officially declared interest while I was half way through the second case study, was JC consultants. JC is a group of a few hundred employees in several offices in the UK and a few offices recently opened offshore. The company is engaged in a variety of engineering disciplines (e.g. civil, aerospace, rail, marine, petrochemical, power and energy) but by and large active and reputable for its experience in the defence and nuclear sectors. With its long heritage, JC has gained reputation for quality, reliability and precision in the engineering consultancy sector. Its reputation has enabled JC to spread over other sectors. JC has also tried to diversify in

recent years in several new industries as a counter strategy to its over-reliance on the defence and nuclear sectors.

JC's approach to marketing and branding was slightly different as compared to other cases. For instance, the company is not listed in the ACE, where almost all famous engineering consultancies are listed, but instead it has invested quite efficiently in the optimization of search engines. It later became evident that internally as well JC's approach to corporate branding is in many ways unconventional. For instance, top management had deliberately removed some of its internal initiatives such as values or mission statements after having perceived that these initiatives are less meaningful to engineers or do not yield considerable impact.

A strong motivation for me to include JC in this thesis was to explore the meanings of corporate branding among its engineering employees given the (heavy) association of JC's brand; such (negative) brand association with the defence sector has been least studied in the branding literature in general. All these characteristics made JC case in many aspects interesting to look at.

Fieldwork was carried out in two of the JC's UK regional offices: in London head office among one senior marketing executive and board member, one director, one senior engineer and two graduate engineers; and in Bristol office among one senior marketing director, two directors, two senior engineers and one graduate engineer.

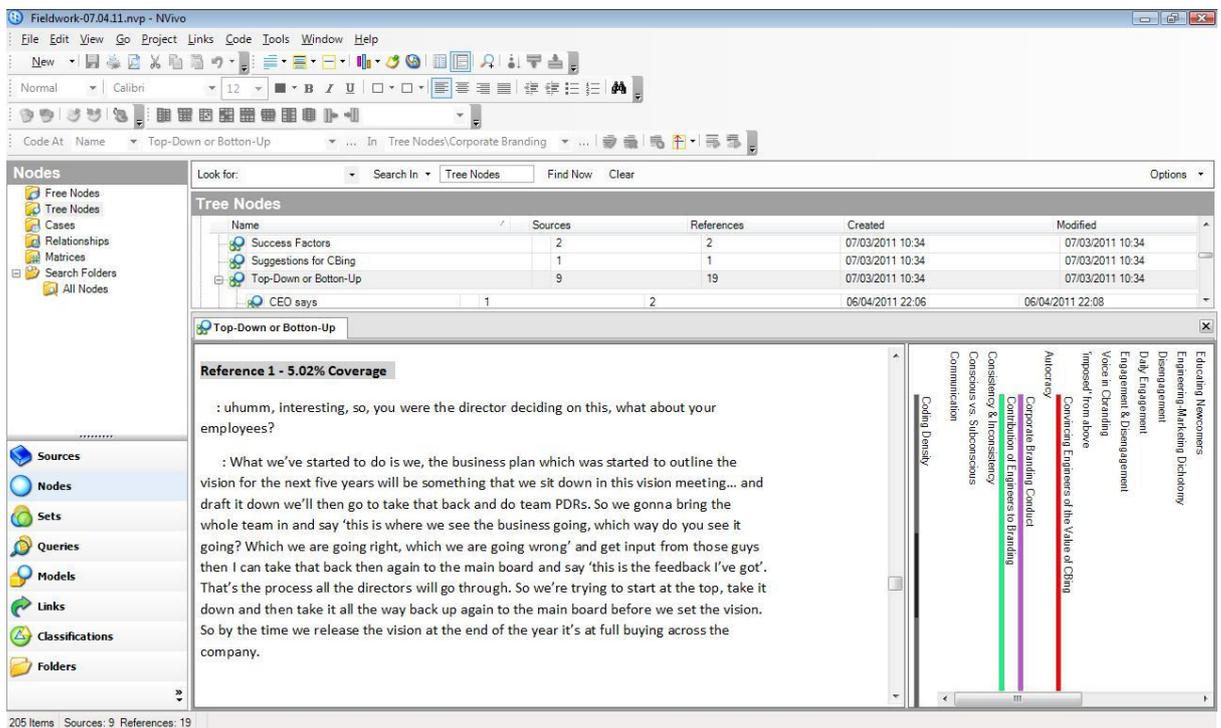
3.12. Data analysis software: Nvivo 7.00

All interviews were transcribed and codified thoroughly with the aid of qualitative data analysis software Nvivo 7.0. One of the limitations in using qualitative data analysis software, as Tesch (1990) notes, is the risk of imposing rigid codes on interview

accounts and, thus, suppressing multiplicity of interpretation. To minimize this risk, multiple codes were assigned to interview texts. Also, codes were further interpreted and verified by both supervisors.

During the coding process, excerpts from the interviews were used as code titles as much as possible to let the data speak for itself instead of imposing structures influenced by pre-understanding from the theory (Tesch, 1990). An example of the coding procedure is given in Figure 3.1. Using the software facilitated efficient management of rich source of data and helped better integrating and presenting the multiplicity of themes emerged from the data. It also made subsequent interpretations easier through its advanced search, reporting and comparison features.

Figure 3.1. An extract of coding procedures using NVivo



NVivo software was also deployed as a database. The use of software was mainly to manage more tidily the massive volume of information elicited. With its advanced and user-friendly features of search, coding, memo writing, *free* and *tree* nodes,

management of large sum of information – a crucial prerequisite for subsequent interpretation – were made possible.

Although all data were coded, the ultimate objective was not obsessive and strict codification as is often the case in grounded theory. Instead, it was utilized to help better dealing with information and carrying out interpretation more efficiently. Several retrievals – going back and forth closing to and distancing from data – needed to be made during the interpretation process and presentation of data in the form of case studies; all these were made much easier with the advanced features of Nvivo.

Tape-recorded interviews were first transcribed and initial interpretation was made in the form of comments (next to interview excerpts) in Word files. According to Alvesson and Sköldbberg (2000:261), this phase constitutes the *primary* (or rough) interpretation. Then, texts were imported into the Nvivo software. Comments and field notes were also imported and linked to the specific parts of the text in the form of footnotes and memos. Next, all texts were codified thematically according to the main idea of each part.

Therefore, the majority of codes overlapped – i.e. most of the extracts were assigned to more than one code. At this level of coding, in total, near to 300 free nodes were created across the three case studies. Then, tree nodes were made out of free nodes for even more meticulous management of data. Neither of these nodes was definite in any sense; as interpretation is a continuous and altering process, the codes assigned to text were being constantly reworked during the course of interpretation. Patterns or themes, at different levels, were easier to follow and discern with this thorough approach.

In the subsequent phase, themes were revisited several times, during the writing and presentation of case studies, in order to group similar and related sub-themes together

and form organizing themes. Thus, organizing themes and sub-themes constituted the organization and presentation of cases studies. Overall, the common sub-themes across the three case studies could be categorized under six organizing themes. This can be discerned more evidently in Chapters Four to Seven.

3.13. Ethical considerations

As mentioned earlier, participating firms were insured about the total anonymity of research both prior to and during the data collection phase. All information collected in the field was only related to corporate branding and not to any other type of information such as technical, financial or business process activities. Equally throughout the research, only corporate branding-related data was included and deployed for the presentation, analysis and discussion of case studies.

On top of that, all names (including company and employee names) were concealed with the use of pseudonyms and codes. Consent forms were handed and signed prior to all interviews in order to assure interviewees that the material and content of interviews will be used only for research purposes – i.e. writing the thesis and publishing academic journal articles – and that all names would be anonymised (Appendix II). Particularly in case three, a confidentiality agreement was signed by both parts. During the field visits as well, security and confidentiality considerations were taken into account at the utmost level.

Furthermore, it appeared during the fieldwork that strong cynical reflections or complaints could bear a certain level of risk or hesitation for interviewees in terms of their job security or their everyday works within the firm. Thus, in the presentation of case studies, the code of the interviewee were concealed even further in accounts that

beard connotations of strong cynicism or objection to the corporate branding or other related activities of the firm given that the seniority of the respondents could be discerned from the codes.

Table 3.1. Case Studies and Interviewee information

Criteria	Pilot Case: TIM Consulting			Case 1: CEB Tech.			Case 2: WRJ-UK			Case 3: JC Consultants		
Area of Activity	Construction			Power Engineering			Diverse – Mainly Energy, Infrastructure and Building/Design			Diverse – Mainly Defence and Nuclear		
Number of Staff	+200			-200			-10000			-400		
Status	British with International presence			British with International presence			British body recently acquired by a Scandinavian Holding Engineering Consulting with International presence			British with National presence – Just started to develop internationally		
Corporate Branding	About to expand. Presently doing it at primary levels – i.e. rebranding, international development, limited branding initiatives			Fully done in-house and quite professionally. Recently acquired a PR company for this purpose			Mainly managed centrally from headquarter. Conducted quite professionally			Done quite professionally and unconventionally; About to extend.		
Management structure	Rather Bureaucratic			Incorporated with 5 subdivisions			Professional Partnership still in place but increasingly moving towards Incorporation			Incorporation with significant autonomy provided for subsidiary groups		
Engineering Grades	Graduate	Senior	Director	Graduate	Senior	Director	Graduate	Senior	Director	Graduate	Senior	Director

Interviewed	6 (focus group)	5	1	4	4	2	4	5	4	3	3	4
Marketing/Branding	1			1			1			1		
Total	12			11			14			11		
Average Interview Length	38 minutes			42 minutes			31 minutes			35 minutes		
Gender Distribution	Female		Male	Female		Male	Female		Male	Female		Male
	4		8	2		9	3		11	3		8
Age Distribution	20-30	30-40	40-50+	20-30	30-40	40-50+	20-30	30-40	40-50+	20-30	30-40	40-50+
	6	5	1	5	4	2	5	5	4	3	3	5
Interviewee Ethnicity	White		Other	White		Other	White		Other	White		Other
	11		1	10		1	13		1	10		1
Years in the Company	0-5	5-10	15-20+	0-5	5-10	15-20+	0-5	5-10	15-20+	0-5	5-10	15-20+
	6	3 2	1	3	2 4	2	5	3 2	4	3	1 2	5

3.14. Summary

In this chapter, various aspects of the methodology were discussed. The points of difference and rationale of the approach adopted in contrast to other possibilities were explained. The chapter was organized in two main parts:

In the first part, the *Interpretivist* paradigm, as the philosophical orientation and foundational knowledge assumptions of the qualitative approach adopted, was justified and its various aspects were discussed. It was argued that the qualitative approach is suitable to elicit meanings of corporate branding held by engineers in the context of engineering consultancy. Given that no particular hypothesis drives research questions, an inductive approach is undertaken. Then, ‘pragmatic reflexivity’ and the ways in which it can inform the interpretive approach of this thesis were explained. The first half of the chapter ended with an initial self-assessment on the quality expectations in the form of a debate on quality criteria.

In the second part of the chapter, the use of case study strategy as the research design was covered. It was discussed that the application of case study method in this thesis is both descriptive and explanatory in order to provide width and depth to the concept focused – the meanings of corporate branding held by engineering professionals – in the context of three British engineering consultancies appreciating the specificities and nuances of the cases. Then, the interview process, as the primary source of data elicitation was explained. More elaborate “how” and “what” questions in the field that intended to answer the two main research questions – first, the meanings of corporate branding to engineers and, second, the contribution of engineers to the practice of corporate branding – directed by an interview guide in the form of semi-structured interviewing were introduced.

A number of observations during the course of access seeking as well as during fieldwork which had methodological relevance were also shared in this chapter. Issues of access, mainly being engineering consultancies' reservation on engineers' time was outlined as the main constraining factor to unlimited access. Next, the sampling process was introduced. About a dozen of engineering professionals (except one or two marketing executives) in each case at various grades of seniority constituted the sample of informants. Interviews ranged from half an hour to nearly an hour each carried out during field visits. A brief introduction about the pilot case and the three main cases was also provided. Next, the case analysis procedures and the ways in which NVivo software was utilized as a database as well as a coding, node setting and search tool to better facilitate interpretation was explained. The chapter ended with a brief note on ethical considerations and the ways in which these have been addressed.

Chapter 4: Case Study One

4.1. Introduction, objectives, and chapter structure

As explained in Chapter Three, primary data were elicited from three engineering consulting firms and subsequently structured as case studies. The first case study examined here is that of CEB Tech.¹², an engineering consulting firm in the (medium- to high-voltage) electrical engineering sector with nearly two hundred employees, nationally and internationally. The case study interviews were all carried out in CEB Tech's UK head office.

In this chapter, the CEB Tech. case study is presented in a thematic manner. The following key sections constitute the organization of this chapter: first, definitions and implications of the corporate brand (meanings) are presented in CEB Tech's engineers' words; next, engineers' perceptions of corporate branding initiatives are discussed; finally, the contributions of engineers to corporate branding are investigated and the factors that appeared to disengage engineers from corporate branding initiatives are explained.

The themes presented in this chapter (as well as with the other two case studies in Chapters Five and Six) are revisited in the discussion section (Chapter Seven) and in light of the literature. The contributions of the findings are discussed more thoroughly as well in Chapter Seven.

¹² All names, including those of interviewees, are anonymised with pseudonyms and codes (respectively) for ethical reasons.

4.2. Case One: CEB Tech

As briefly introduced in Chapter Three, CEB Tech. is an international engineering consulting firm of near to 200 employees, headquartered in the UK, and mainly active in the area of electrical power engineering. Its range of services varies from designing test equipment to providing consultancy services such as analytics, maintenance, installation and assessment of medium- to high-voltage power installations. The company was founded nearly four decades ago as a publicly-funded research centre. In the 90s it was privatized and several substantive changes such as a new management and ownership style¹³ were put in place.

Some years ago, CEB Tech. acquired EH consultants – a public relations (PR) and marketing consultancy firm – to (among other reasons) manage its corporate branding activities in-house. Ever since, the company has devoted particular attention and resources to its corporate branding program in a rather professional manner. The EH subsidiary also continues to offer corporate branding, marketing and PR consultancy to the outside market. In more recent years, the company has formed five subsidiaries as sub-brands and set up a number of international offices. Several corporate branding initiatives have also been implemented internally and externally.

The EH subsidiary is located far from CEB Tech's headquarters, in another city, and operates rather autonomously. Nevertheless, it is still managed by, and reports to, the top management at CEB Tech. EH has managed to gain a good reputation in the market over the years for its range of marketing and branding consultancy services. Nearly ten employees work for EH consulting.

¹³ No shareholder can own more than 5% of CEB Tech's shares. This ownership style, as will be discussed later in this chapter, proved to have positive implications for employees' commitment to and engagement with the corporate brand.

As explained in Chapter Three, twelve interviewees participated in one-to-one semi-structured interviews out of which ten were selected for further analysis. Two were excluded, the first because of their non-engineering background and occupation, and the second due to insufficient relevant insight. The interviews were recorded, transcribed, and imported to Nvivo software for subsequent analysis and easier management of the data. In the remainder of this chapter, interviewees are referred to with codes, and comprised two directors (CD1_2), four senior engineers (CS1_4), and four graduate engineers (CG1_4). Apart from CD1, all the respondents were male. The ratio of female to male employees in the firm was 30:70. The engineering directors interviewed for this study were aged approximately around 41_50, senior engineers were aged 31_40 and graduate engineers were aged 21_30.

4.3. Engineers' perceptions of the corporate brand

In response to the question “What does the corporate brand mean to you?” (the first research question), engineers' responses were varied and gave rise to a variety of different, yet to a large extent related, themes. Different definitions, perceptions and implications were among the answers provided by the engineers on the concept of the corporate brand. These themes are discussed below:

4.3.1. “Branding as a concept isn't something that means a lot”¹⁴

To begin with in the interviews, some engineers started ambiguously and somewhat sceptically. In verbalizing their perceptions, most of the engineers experienced some difficulty in articulating their definitions. Nevertheless, those who had attended the

¹⁴ Judiciously selected excerpts are used as headings for sub-themes here and in many other sections throughout the three case studies.

brand training workshop conducted by one of the EH consultants (the PR and branding subsidiary) were more able to begin expressing themselves clearly and discuss the issues). At the time of study, half of the respondents (CD1, CD2, CS2, CS4, CG1, CG3) had participated in the brand workshop.

In these branding workshops, engineers were given some brand-related briefings on topics such as: the general importance and relevance of the brand for the engineering consulting industry (facilitated by some examples of FMCG products – e.g. Cadbury chocolate); the consequences of a strong brand in the engineering consulting sector; brand-related initiatives in place at CEB Tech. (e.g. brand book and branding instructions); and, last but not least, the ways in which engineers can represent and contribute to the brand of CEB Tech. in practice.

Part of the reason for engineers' difficulty and unfamiliarity with the concept of a corporate brand, as outlined by CS4, is that engineers do not "readily use" the term 'branding' as such or very often. In other words, the term 'brand' and other related terms were not part of their routine conversations on a day-to-day basis. Some justified their difficulty in understanding branding, stressing that 'brand-consciousness' both as a concept as well as a practice were rather recent experiences to the engineers at CEB Tech. (e.g. CD1).

In this respect, the brand workshop was among the initiatives to make employees more conscious of the term: "*that is the first time I came across these branding things...and I find it very useful, because you never think about these branding things*" (CG3). Others blamed engineers' educational backgrounds for unfamiliarity with the concept; that engineers by definition do not go through any type of brand training in the course of their normal education. In another reflection, CG2, like some others (CS3, CS1, CG4),

believed that it is out of their job scope to know about and engage with the corporate brand;

“Branding as a concept isn’t something that means a lot to me. So what it exactly means in reality I’m not entirely sure I guess. So, yes... EH is there... to look after the branding of the company ...” (CG2)

Engineers like CG2 were not convinced enough at the time as to why they should be involved in branding or why it is relevant to them. There seemed to be a disconnection between engineers and the corporate brand (initiatives) whereby another constituent, particularly the EH subsidiary, was perceived as responsible for and articulate about the corporate brand.

CS1 asserted that corporate brand as a concept was “somewhat abstract” to him; *“I’m not used to think about these sorts of things. As you know I’m an engineer {laugh}... It feels somewhat abstract”*. Being an engineer was his justification as to why the concept of the corporate brand was ‘abstract’. In this sense, it was perceived as typical: being an engineer and thus being unfamiliar with the concept of the corporate brand.

It also became evident that the younger engineers were more brand-conscious than the older ones, generally speaking. Younger engineers were also more active in engaging with and debating the concept, whereas older engineers appeared to be somewhat passive (and to some extent indifferent) with respect to corporate brand discussions.

4.3.2. “Softer look at things”

Many engineers conceived and defined the corporate brand as the ‘softer’ side of the business. CD1 conceived of the corporate brand as the “softer look at things” and a “touchy feely” phenomenon:

“I think generally it’s a bit [of a] difficult concept for engineers and scientists to grasp because it’s a bit more ‘touchy feely’; it’s a bit more ‘softer look at things’ really and engineers don’t get that so much.” (CD1)

In contrasting the ‘hard’ and ‘soft’ sides of things, many associated the corporate brand with presentational aspects, such as colour codes, values statements, brand book/instructions and the like, whereas engineering and quality were associated with rigid codes of conduct. Others, for instance CS4, associated branding with “style and form” and related engineering with “function”. He asserted that engineers and engineering customers, *“conceive the brand being a bit more style and form really than function and most of them are engineers and are interested in function, that’s why they’ve become engineers in the first place {laugh}”*.

Thus, such a hard-soft dichotomy was a dominant mode in defining the corporate brand and distinguishing it from the engineering practice. The hard-soft dichotomy was also a considerable determinant of engineers’ interest in or engagement with the corporate brand in that engineers were reported to be keener on the harder sides of the business – e.g. engineering-related activities – at the expense of the softer sides – e.g. corporate branding.

In the same perspective, corporate branding was often compared to engineering in a way that concluded the former was generally perceived as ‘easier’ – and not necessarily any less significant – than the latter (CS2, CD1, CG1, CS1). Corporate branding was also criticized for lacking rigour as compared to engineering practices, and for being ineffectual in that branding initiatives made little difference to engineering practice would change if branding initiatives alter; *“having seen them re-design the logo twice in the time I’ve worked for them {laugh}... I’m not convinced the logo and that side of the*

graphic end of the brand is quite as irreplaceable and vital to the operation of the business as it's sometimes made out to be" (CS4).

Thus, CEB Tech.'s conduct in its branding initiatives, for example changing branding artefacts drastically, and in a number of different ways, without due explanation or justification to engineers, had contributed to engineers' disbelief in the importance of the initiatives; they perceived that the branding side of the business can change without a great deal of distress and, therefore, perhaps it is not very important.

With respect to the lack of rigour associated with corporate branding, a number of cynical reflections emerged as well. Some engineers criticized the authenticity of branding activities – i.e. the extent to which branding initiatives such as promotions reflect the 'real' characteristics of the brand behind the products; they related branding with customer-oriented promotional skills which do not have to be necessarily authentic or sincere. For instance, CS4 distinguished and to some extent opposed the two concepts of 'branding' and 'engineering' in this regard. To him, while the former was about the ability to convey not necessarily true messages about price and quality, the latter was about a promise of reliable quality which, unlike branding, has to be authentic:

"To me it has a lot to do with the sort of consumer end of brand where it tends to mean paying more for the same goods just because it's got a name on it...but actually you can buy the same thing unbranded from the same factory, and it's just as good {laugh}.The only thing you haven't got is the name. That's a very cynical reaction. But to me engineering is working the right way to solve the problem, and technically 'the right way' is not about flash and finish at the end." (CS4)

Despite such cynical reflections, some respondents appraised the role of the presentational aspect of the corporate brand in attracting customers' attention. In this regard, CG2 perceived corporate branding as a 'new money making' technique for the company; "*my personal opinion of brand is that it is another job for our company to make money...a company this size, you need a brand to get recognized by big [customers]*" (CG2). This view was corroborated by others (CS1, CG2, CS3), who defined corporate branding as a branch or a subsidiary of marketing: "*I think branding is just one aspect of the whole marketing kind of thing*" (CS3).

With respect to the presentational function of the brand, the role of the corporate brand was said by some to be to convey a high-profile image of the firm, which is particularly significant in winning new markets, attracting new customers, attracting talent and sustaining growth: "*you take away the brand, you take away how quickly we can get new customers*" (CG2). Another engineer referred to the role of the corporate brand for reflecting the non-engineering – i.e. human – side of the business, both internally and externally; to convey a human image about the employees beyond/alongside that of engineering services to all stakeholders; "*it's a reflection on saying something about us as individuals*" (CD1).

On the other hand, however, many of the corporate brand initiatives, particularly the printed versions, were perceived by some engineers as insignificant. For instance, CS4 reflecting on the corporate brand values and 'how we do things around here' statements said, "*once you see something printed on the wall, you know you are in trouble because it means it's not being done {laugh}*" (CS4). He associated the extensive efforts of the firm in articulating and communicating certain behavioural elements with the lack thereof in the everyday life and culture of the organization.

In another account, CS4 outlined the insignificance of the presentational aspects of the corporate brand by remarking that customers are in collaboration with the firm on a remote basis most of the time, and deal with the firm through emails and phone calls. Equally in the field, engineers and employees of the two (or more) firms (i.e. CEB and its client(s)) are in collaboration at a personal and face-to-face level. Therefore, clients are not normally exposed to the presentational aspects of the corporate brand *per se* very often and, to that end, the presentational aspects are much less important than “they are made out to be”, not least from the point of view of customers: “*Half the customers say ‘oh you again’ {laugh} rather than actually recognizing the brand image, because they deal with emails which is in text anyway {laugh}*” (CS4). In this account and the others like it, engineers gave more prominence to the personal brands and inter-personal relationships between the firm and clients (“*oh you again*”) than the presentational aspects of the corporate brand, such as taglines, colour codes, or values.

4.3.3. “Who we are”

Some engineers (CG4, CS1, CG2, CD1) defined the corporate brand as the portrayal of the company’s identity, the people who work for the company and, in general, the notion of “who we are”:

“... It means so much more than just a name. It’s the way that we portray ourselves and the way that we do things. It’s all part of ... who we are” (CS1)

CS4 defined the corporate brand as “*the way we do business, the sort of business we do, and the sort of solutions we aim to give out to our customers*”. He was sceptical of focusing the corporate brand to presentations such as packaging, ‘official’ colour schemes, and the like; “*I wouldn’t necessarily wrap them up in the label brand, because*

it brings connotations with baggage with brand elsewhere that I don't want to bring to the company I work for {laugh}" (CS4).

In this regard, the importance of CEB Tech's people to its corporate brand was highlighted. Given the knowledge-based nature of the consulting business, individual (and groups of) professionals, who over time become brands of their own (personal brands), were reported to play a key role in the composition of engineering consulting brands (CD1, CS4, CS2, CS3). Synergy between personal brands and the corporate brand, therefore, was said to be a significant determinant in the success of the overall corporate brand; *"for some other customers, you actually know them personally. And it's partly about wanting what you do for them as a company to reflect the kind of trust you have in them as an individual"* (CS4).

4.3.4. Organizational culture

In some accounts, the relationship between the corporate brand and the culture of the company was outlined. It was mentioned by some engineers (CD1, CG2, CS4) that the corporate brand is rooted in the company's culture and history. In this sense, some engineers were sceptical of branding initiatives being able to exert considerable change to the culture; this group of engineers believed organizational culture to be much more stable than to be changed considerably by corporate brand initiatives. Some questioned the cultural implications of values statements or 'how we do things around here' statements by saying, for instance, that *"you can't by writing rules change a culture, not quickly anyway"* (CS4); or *"there is no quick fix I don't think"* (CG2).

Some engineers (CG2, CG4, CS3) believed that the actions of management are more important than corporate branding initiatives in instigating cultural change. One manager acknowledged that it is difficult to make substantive cultural and behavioural

change through corporate branding initiatives alone. Yet, he believed that small but significant change is still achievable; *“the change can be small; but small changes can be very important”* (CD2).

The historical roots of the corporate brand were also highlighted as important in defining and determining the corporate brand. In this regard, CS3 perceived the history of the firm as the most important aspect, and the source of the strength of the corporate brand. From the same perspective, CS4 criticised the PR subsidiary (EH consultants), who had crafted most of the corporate branding initiatives, for having insufficient insight on the history of the firm¹⁵. CS4 associated EH’s lack of understanding of the history of CEB Tech. with an increased likelihood of failure of any initiatives developed by EH consultants, and with engineers’ disengagement with the initiatives.

One engineer had mixed feelings on the effectiveness of brand training or corporate brand initiatives that briefly summarize the corporate brand in a few words or sentences, for educating engineers about the culture of the firm. He asserted that engineers should learn the culture by themselves and over time and, therefore, summarizing the culture in a few words or in a slogan-statement would be of minimal (if not to say zero) effect; *“in a sense, brand is more about how you think and it’s quite difficult to teach people how to think. It’s even harder to change the way people think or teach them to think differently”* (CS4).

CG3 and CS1, among others, stressed that learning about the company’s culture and aligning with its corporate brand values is a time-dependant process, and that training workshops and official corporate branding initiatives were only partially helpful in

¹⁵ This was partly because it had only been two years since EH was acquired by CEB.

accelerating it. CS4, for instance, remarked that corporate brand values shape personal values and vice versa over time:

“it’s a little bit hard to separate my values, my ethics from those of the team I work in or the company I work in, because a lot of them overlap and because I’m here for a long time, it shaped my personal values. The way CEB does business has shaped my personal values, so the two are going to overlap and then there is feedback in both directions.” (CS4)

A lack of alignment between personal values and the CEB Tech’s corporate brand values was also said to increase tensions among employees. Equally, some described how the misalignment of personal values between engineers, i.e. between each other rather than with CEB, can also be a source of tension among employees; *“it annoys me that sometimes other people don’t have quite the same standards that I do”* (CS4).

Engineers also appeared to hesitate before complaining or concealed explicit criticism of the corporate brand values, perhaps of the kinds of risks such as comments posed to their job. Plus, in several cases it was reported by engineers that they would not have got their job with the firm if their personal values had not been in line with those of the corporate brand or they were demonstrably not complying with them; that their value alignment with the corporate brand has been ‘checked’ in the first instance – e.g. during the recruitment interview – and therefore they no longer needed to be concerned with corporate brand values and alignment thereto as such; *“as long as you are the right type of person that would fit in the company, then you don’t need to bother about the brand anyway”*.

Some engineers acknowledged that some corporate brand initiatives, such as values or ‘how we do things around here’ statements, can be a good means for explicating, and thus to some extent ‘stabilizing’, the culture of the firm:

“...it’s useful to then reflect some of what the culture is in a more formal form, because it does give the culture some sticking powers to stability. It helps stabilize the culture against external faults and changes, change in personnel or whatever” (CS4).

Given that the company was expanding at a substantial annual growth rate of about 25% in number of employees (CD2), corporate branding was also said to be helpful for training new employees about the culture of the firm and accelerating their adaptation to its organizational culture (CS2). Also, corporate branding (initiatives) was said to be deployed as a means to manage growth in terms of integrated communication (CD2).

4.4. The significance and implications of the corporate brand

After having tried to define the corporate brand and articulate its relationships with other concepts (such as organizational culture and identity), further discussions with the engineers gave rise to more nuanced implications and points of significance for the corporate brand in engineering consultants’ opinion. The general significance of the corporate brand was acknowledged by most of the engineers interviewed. Even those who expressed some sort of disengagement with the corporate brand did not fully deny the important role of brand and branding activities:

“I must admit, I have an engineering background, etc. so I don’t get quite all of the concepts of branding; but I do understand the importance of taking notes of that and trying to work towards a brand” (CD1).

The perceived implications of the corporate brand from the engineers' perspective were diverse. Some engineers noted the implication of a strong corporate brand for attracting talent (CD2, CS3). Others referred to the positive and reciprocal impact of a strong corporate brand for enhancing employees' sense of pride; *"there is a pride factor in there. It's the same when you play for like a football team or anything like that, you got to have pride in the team or pride in what you do"* (CG2).

In particular, engineers highlighted the importance of a strong corporate brand given that CEB Tech. builds its reputation in the market on the premium quality and price of its services. Many compared the corporate brand of CEB Tech. with the best engineering brands available; *"this is the Rolls Royce of this type of test equipment"* (CS2); *"we have got some of the most technical people in the world"* (CS3). For that reason, the corporate brand was said to be important to conveying such a professional high-quality image.

On the other hand, some engineers were slightly dubious about the overall significance of the corporate brand. They argued that while the corporate brand can be important for attracting talent and gaining the attention of new customers in emerging markets and the private sector, it is no longer important for clients in the public sector who already have already been in a relationship with CEB Tech. for decades. These customers account for the majority of its market share; *"our big customers, they wouldn't care if our logo was red, black, green, blue, because they know us; they know the people that work here, and branding, I guess, is not that important to them"* (CS3).

This group of engineers (CG2, CS3, CS4) gave much more prominence to the personal relationships that had built up over many years rather than the corporate brand *per se*. They considered the corporate brand to be more relevant and significant for new clients

or the private sector as compared to the public sector and existing customers. They also believed that the corporate brand becomes less important over time as compared to people (personal brands) and the technical proficiency of the company due to the esoteric nature of the consultancy services offered.

Among the more strongly cynical reflections, one engineer completely questioned the impact of the corporate brand for engineers inside the firm: *“I think engineers are engineers and they go and do what they do. I can’t think why branding would have any impact on engineers, particularly”* (C¹⁶). Another noted that the significance of the corporate brand for the consulting sector is still widely debatable, yet, companies still commit to corporate branding activities just because all other companies and rivals do: *“If you ask people why branding is important, they wouldn’t be able to tell you...you’ve got this brand, so what is the impact on the business...nobody knows”* (C).

Participating in business fairs was noted as an example of companies being *“frightened not to be seen there...just because the competitors go”*. This criticism was partly corroborated since the two directors interviewed, particularly the one who was more in charge of the corporate branding program (CD2), relied heavily on famous consumer brands like Apple – and not on any engineering brand – to justify the importance and relevance of corporate brands, and in support of their commitment to corporate branding activities. This shows that there is still scarcity of proper benchmarks for engineering consultancies in corporate branding; or that the directors were lagging behind the latest corporate branding advancements; or they wanted the validation of the largest cool product-based company they could think of.

¹⁶ As mentioned in Chapter Three, strongly cynical comments appeared to bear some risks for engineers, and were something that engineers tried to control and conceal as much as they could, even though they all had been assured of the anonymity of the research. Therefore, the codes attached to such strong accounts are anonymized even further for ethical reasons.

4.4.1. “Little but important”

CD2, among others, mentioned that the kinds of internal corporate branding initiatives in place at CEB Tech. were “*not too many*” at the time of study, and that there were “little” things that the company was doing under the rubric of corporate branding. But he still believed those “little things” to be very important. He further outlined the difficulty of measuring results for the corporate branding initiatives. Yet, he believed that these initiatives are the kind of management act that is not justifiable with rigid figures such as return on investment, instead, there has to be a certain level of “faith” in them; “*when you come to something like a brand workshop...it’s almost an act of faith {laugh}*”. Using the metaphor of “having a meal with one’s wife on their anniversary”, he believed that the impacts of initiatives should be sought in the morale, attitude and, consequently, the behaviour of employees in the long-term:

“I would take my wife out for a meal when it is our wedding anniversary; I don’t sit there and think what’s the measure {laughter} of success on that; I can afford to do it; it’s a good thing to do; every year you take the stock of one’s relationship and it’s a fun thing to do. The brand is important to us, we gonna put some money into it...if you did [not do] that, we wouldn’t have what we’ve got. We wouldn’t have a feeling of belonging, togetherness, ownership...” (CD2)

His opinions about corporate branding, “I can afford to do it” and “it’s a good thing to do” demonstrate that although the firm was not investing a huge sum of money in corporate branding activities, it was believed by management that corporate branding could yield significant, although not necessarily measurable, implications for the attitudinal wellbeing of the firm overall and in the long term. It is worth mentioning, nonetheless, that with respect to the resources devoted to corporate branding, although

the actual budget allocated to corporate branding activities appeared to be insignificant initially, it became evident through the interviews with top management that the resources spent were not insignificant either, having considered the man-hours consumed on corporate brand-related activities.

As outlined by management, corporate branding activities, as a comparatively recent set of activities throughout the firm, had been carried out rather subtly in general, partly in order to lessen engineers' reactions and resistance: "*we've been relatively subtle on doing this. If we did make a massive thing about this, I think their reaction would have been massive*" (CD2); this signifies the management's presumption about engineers typically being sceptical of corporate brand initiatives.

Many corporate branding initiatives were said to be in place to raise awareness and underline the significance of the corporate brand and corporate brand values among employees. Among others, CD1 noted this point about the values and 'how we do things around here' statements, "*it's the fact that they are visible on a wall that we are taking these kinds of values seriously*".

Some initiatives were also said to be fulfilling multiple functions and were reported to have practical applications as well as carrying the messages that were intended to be conveyed through them. For instance, as CG3 acknowledged, the field outfits serve security and identification purposes. These outfits also conveyed connotations such as 'being here to help' while helping the field engineer to look appropriate before the client; "*you are showing a spirit of a service provider... 'I'm here to help' ...*" (CG3)

4.4.2. *“There is value in brand and not just in the people”*

Being critical, it became evident from management accounts that top management also intended to deploy its corporate brand initiatives as a power discourse towards employees. This mode of communication was two-fold.

First, as outlined by CD2, by raising employees’ awareness on the importance of the corporate brand, management intended to send the message to everyone, but particularly to the more experienced engineers, that ‘at the end of the day’, it is the corporate brand that is the most significant asset, the one which leads to overall success, rather than the individuals (personal brands), services, or products alone; *“that there is value in brand and not just in the people and products and services”* (CD2).

Given that the consultancy business is heavily knowledge-based and dependent on its personal brands, the corporate brand was deployed as a normative means by which to warn knowledge-bearers about the risks involved in leaving the firm. In a sense, by means of corporate brand initiatives, management tended to downgrade personal brands compared to the corporate brand:

“if [John] and two of the other guys set up a business of themselves, which they could do, which is one of the weaknesses of this consultancy business, all your assets can walk out {laughter} very easily. But they hopefully recognize that actually being part of [CEB Tech.] is a value. They can go and set themselves up and rent an empty room around the corner, but they will struggle far more; ok they might become millionaires {laughter}, but they might not. And it’s trying to get the idea that there is value in brand and not just in the people and products and services. So, that’s the message we are trying to get internally.”
(CD2)

Therefore, management was using a corporate branding narrative to retain talent. By highlighting the significance of the corporate brand and the difficulties of personal brands without the corporate brand, management intended to reduce the likelihood of professionals' leaving. This indicated a particular type of normative control whereby instead of association with the values, the corporate brand was deployed to control personal brands normatively.

Second, as outlined both by directors (CD1, CD2) and lower-tiered engineers (CS4, CG2, CG4), employees could be held to account against some of the corporate brand initiatives, for example the values and 'how we do things around here' statements, if their conduct was inappropriate: "*at times it is a safe-guard that you feel if someone is really acting out of turn, it might be difficult to pull them up against the culture because that's subjective. But you can pull them up against those because they are written down*" (CS4). In such cases, the corporate brand initiatives could serve as a more direct mode of control.

4.5. Engineering consulting and corporate branding

Among the engineers' accounts, some themes emerged that referred to the specificities and characteristics of the engineering consulting context that should be taken into account with respect to corporate branding. In this regard, some engineers noted that the characteristics of the engineering context are critical when conducting corporate branding activities, and that corporate branding should be in accordance with the characteristics of the engineering consulting setting. These themes and characteristics are discussed in this section.

4.5.1. *“This is a different sort of company”*

Some engineers (CG3, CS1, CG2) outlined the significance of a ‘sharing’ attitude in all aspects of the engineering consulting business: *“here engineering is very much about sharing the problem”* (CG2). In the same way, corporate branding was said to be a shared responsibility: *“especially when you work for a small company...the brand is everyone’s responsibility and everyone does look after it to a certain extent”* (CG2). It was highlighted that engineers in the field should share the responsibility of presenting, delivering and maintaining the corporate brand (CS2, CG2, CG3, CD2); and that engineers are critical contact points with clients and play a key role in customers’ decision processes and perceptions about the corporate brand of CEB Tech.; *“we are all in this together... so it’s our employees doing our brand...they are the people who are selling the brand”* (CD2).

In contrast to many other service sectors, e.g. financial services, two main types of client-facing personnel were identified in the engineering consulting business: those who carried out engineering practices in the field; and those who prepared proposals in the office. Both were equally regarded as client-facing employees and were said to be highly influential on the perceptions of customers about the corporate brand. However, in many accounts, the role of engineers in the field was said to be somewhat more important in selling the corporate brand than that of those who were based in offices providing proposals or bidding for projects (CS2, CG2, CD2).

Whereas field engineers usually had face-to-face interactions with the client’s personnel, office-based engineers were more in contact with clients via phone, email or through a few formal meetings. Field engineers were said to be delivering the corporate brand on a day to day basis. Therefore, field engineers were said to be considerably

affecting the decision-making of clients since they have a significant impact on the clients' field personnel, who in turn ultimately influence their managers and decision making superiors.

4.5.2. *“The workforce here is an intelligent, rational workforce”*

Meticulous attention to detail, a drive for perfection, and total commitment to promises were also mentioned as other characteristics of engineers and the engineering consulting context: *“this is a power engineering company; if you say something, you mean it”* (CG3). Therefore, respondents said that corporate branding should be equally authentic in delivering its promises. Given the high levels of standards and strict codes of conduct which need to be adhered to in engineering projects, corporate branding was perceived by some engineers as no exception in abiding by genuine standards; that corporate branding, like their other (engineering) activities, should be more than nice words or fancy claims and instead has to be authentically deliverable.

Moreover, it was underscored that corporate brand initiatives should sound logical and reasonable to engineers and should be rationally justifiable in detail. Engineers appeared to scrutinize the initiatives more on a rational basis. Some engineers criticized the colour codes or the details of the corporate brand rationally, as referred to earlier; this behaviour is consistent with the rational tendencies of engineers.

In the same way, it was reported that engineers are inclined to engage with corporate brand initiatives more on a rational rather than an emotional basis. Some engineers indicated that initiatives should be rationally-sound to engineers if they are to make any impact. Engineers noted that the ‘rationale’ of doing corporate branding is more important than the ‘means’ – i.e. how the initiatives are presented and communicated: *“It’s about providing the rationale behind what you are trying to achieve, and the*

rationale being much more important than the means” (CS4). Therefore, engineers highlighted that in corporate branding matters, engineers should be convinced of the rationale at the outset, and only then be educated about the actual corporate branding initiatives; otherwise they are likely to ‘dispute’, ‘disagree’, and finally disregard the initiatives:

“The workforce here is an intelligent, rational workforce. If you make a rational argument, they may dispute it, but they will do so rationally...it’s a bit different...they’re much more likely to believe that argument presented like that, than they’re just given the end actions...” (CS4)

In line with their inclinations to rationality, engineers were also reported to prioritize and better engage with the technical aspects of corporate branding as compared to the others, such as the presentational aspects: *“I suppose one of the ideas that I do engage with is that when we send out something with our name on, it should meet our standards.”* (CS4)

In another assertion, the brand was considered to be “polluting science” when branding initiatives were not aligned with the utmost technical specifications. In other words, if the two elements of branding and engineering collide, it ought to be the engineering and technical standards that should be prioritized: *“if brand says it must be painted blue, and actually that’s very inappropriate, because it makes reading it very hard in the substation, then I’ll be going against the brand”* (CS4). Thus, although brand and engineering technical requirements go hand in hand in many aspects, many engineers reported that it is the brand that needs to be aligned with the technical aspects and not the other way around.

4.5.3. *“It’s very conservative”*

Another characteristic was noted to be that engineering consulting and engineers in general have ‘conservative’ inclinations. Therefore, corporate branding activities that bear connotations of abrupt change are more likely to fail:

“this is a different sort of company...it’s very conservative...It’s very slow...we don’t change that quick...It’s not like a fast moving consumer goods thing, FMCG, it’s not like that, we don’t need to keep re-inventing branding and other things.” (CS3)

In this regard, it was reported that, in the past, some initiatives which had borne connotations of change were, to some extent, resisted or had created tensions, anxiousness and friction among employees. This was the case when, for instance, a few years back, management decided to create (or split the firm into) five subsidiaries as sub-brands, each being responsible for a specific line of the business in a more specialized and concentrated manner. This transformation, as reported by some engineers, had raised some concerns and tensions among employees at the time: *“some people said it’s great; other people saw a bit of risk because splitting it to small companies, ‘you can easily sell us off!’” (CG2).*

Corporate branding initiatives, at times, were associated with ‘new changes’ and were perceived by some engineers as a threat. Resistance to those initiatives with connotations of change were reported more strongly from engineers who owned shares and from those with long tenures in the company.

Another significant specification of engineering consulting brand strength was reported to be the ability to provide solutions for atypical problems; *“part of the brand is*

actually about answering hard questions. What we do is what we solve, in a sense” (CS4). Thus, the corporate brand should convey the ability for providing versatile and innovative solutions.

Furthermore, it was highlighted by a number of engineers (CS1, CS4) that ‘independence’ – i.e. having no formal or informal interest in or inclination towards other manufacturers or consultants – helps the consulting firm of CEB Tech. to provide unbiased solutions. Independence and niche expertise, therefore, were reported to contribute significantly to engineering consulting corporate brand reputation and reliability.

4.6. Engineers’ perceptions of corporate brand initiatives

In this part of the chapter, the engineers’ perceptions about corporate brand initiatives (rather than the corporate brand itself) are presented and discussed. The corporate brand initiatives at CEB Tech. came in different forms: statements and posters communicating such things as values, ‘how we do things around here’, and the mission were hung on office and factory walls; rather elaborate brand book; cups and pens with values written on them; and several other branded artefacts such as shirts, helmets, covers, and instruments, to name a few, were among the brand initiatives in place at the time of the study. Moreover, blue, as the main logo colour, was noticeable in all the artefacts from instruments and vehicles to office and factory designs.

Despite all the above-mentioned, visible initiatives, almost all engineers reported to have difficulty, e.g. in remembering the contents of their corporate brand’s values statements. Engineers reported that such initiatives hardly even remind them about CEB’s values and the like, given that the engineers by and large overlook them (CG2,

CS3): *“writing them or putting them on the wall, it just helps with the daily remind...Having said that, I can’t remember last time I read them”* (CG2).

The values statement indicated ‘integrity’, ‘respect’, ‘teamwork’, ‘high quality’, ‘innovation’, and ‘sharing’ as corporate values. Interestingly, however, ‘professionalism’, ‘integrity’, and ‘customer care’ were amongst the most widely mentioned values in engineers’ accounts; that engineers believed were ‘lived’ on a daily basis, and that are crucial to the success of the CEB Tech. corporate brand. This contrast indicated a sort of mismatch between what the company was communicating in terms of values and what engineers perceived as significant to the operation and success of the corporate brand and believed to be ‘lived’ on a day to day basis.

4.6.1. *“You don’t have to sit down thinking about the brand”*

On reflection upon the initiatives, almost all the engineers underscored that engagement, subscription and/or abiding by the corporate brand values is a subconscious, rather than a conscious, process:

“You don’t have to sit down thinking about the brand. It’s something that is there.” (CG2)

“I’m not sure if I consciously think about values a lot, but I’m constantly exposed to them in other people and in the way business happens internally... so it’s not a very formal process or a conscious process, but it’s going on all the time.” (CS4)

These accounts also indicate that engineers are exposed to the company image every day in their interactions with internal and external stakeholders. It is through these

interactions that the values are manifested and authenticated. All this happens in a predominantly subconscious, rather than conscious, manner.

It was noted, nonetheless, that although attentiveness to the corporate brand and values are mainly subconscious, training on and talking about corporate branding initiatives makes part of such subconscious processes conscious and clarifies them (CS1, CG2). It was also said that brand training and other similar initiatives help affirm the corporate brand values in the minds of engineers (CS4).

4.6.2. *“Utopian kind of vision”*

A number of engineers’ accounts implied that some corporate branding initiatives, particularly values statements, are reflections of how management wants the company to be instead of how it actually is – a kind of ‘idealism’. For instance, CS3 reflecting on the values statement and a ‘how we do things around here’ poster said:

“All it tells me is how [John], who is our MD, wants this company to be... and those values and statements are a summary of...how he wants the company to be...what is the word...‘Utopian’ kind of vision of how the perfect company would be, and it doesn’t always work like that, but he strives to have that...”
(CS3)

By using the term ‘utopian’, CS3 again reflected on a gap between the values avowed by the ‘top’ management of the firm with those that the employees actually ‘live’ day-to-day. In this respect, it also appeared that corporate branding initiatives that do not reflect the reality of the firm are more likely to be disregarded by engineers: *“it’s just the words, isn’t it? I mean any brand new company can come up with this”* (CS3). Most of the engineers considered behavioural aspects of the corporate brand – the ‘reality’,

the people, and the history of the firm – to be much more important than the presentations and promises of the corporate brand.

Some perceived corporate brand initiatives as direct messages from the top management – particularly the managing director (MD). Hence, management’s support and commitment was said to play a key role in encouraging engineers’ buy-in to the rationale of the corporate brand. In this respect, management’s failure to subscribe to the values was reported to equally undermine the corporate brand. In the same way, failure of the corporate brand in the past was associated with managements’ failures to subscribe to the values of the corporate brand: *“a few of the previous management didn’t really subscribe to it or their actions didn’t bear out subscription to it”* (CS4).

In other cases, some perceived corporate brand values statements as broad and ‘commonsensical’ (CD1, CG2); *“commonsense in respect to branding is that they are just all sort of ‘do what you want’; ‘doing them to yourself’. It’s all how to treat people nicely”* (CG2). “Nice” treatment and “good thing to do” were mentioned as well about the corporate brand initiatives (CD1, CS4). These perceptions implied that the corporate brand initiatives were somewhat benign – i.e. did not cause any significant reaction on the engineers’ part.

4.7. Engineers’ contributions to the corporate brand

After exploring the perceptions of engineers of the corporate brand, the implications and the initiatives, as explained in the previous sections, the second research question was inclusive of the contribution of engineers to the corporate brand and the initiatives. In response to the question “How do you think you, as an engineer, contribute to the

corporate brand?” engineers articulated a variety of ways in which, in their view, their work contributes, or can contribute, to the corporate brand.

As mentioned earlier, engineers reported that they were exposed to the company image day in, day out, in their interactions with external stakeholders. This was reported to be the reason why client-facing engineers thought the corporate brand had direct implications for them on a daily basis: *“when we speak to a [client] you very rarely hear any negative feedback”* (CG2). Another engineer underscored the impact of the brand on his daily activities in that he was constantly exposed to customers’ reflections on the corporate brand image; *‘I do testing off-site throughout the UK...I go abroad now and again to represent the company, so it’s very important to me.’* (CS2)

In this sense, engineers (particularly those in the field) perceived themselves to be at the sharp end of client contact. Thus, these ‘contact points’ were mentioned by a number of engineers as critical opportunities for contribution to the corporate brand as a ‘good’ representative: *“I think every person should be a representative of the company”* (CG3). Another engineer asserted that appearing ‘properly’ in meetings or on site is important to convey a proper brand image: *“I go to see a client and I’ll wear a company shirt with a company name on it and a smart tie; I won’t go in shorts and T-shirt. It’s all part of branding...”* (CS1).

Furthermore, many engineers mentioned their contribution to the corporate brand as doing some kind of marketing on top of engineering. Hence, part-time marketing was said to be one of the most direct contributions engineers believed they could make. This view, to a large extent, builds on their perception of the corporate brand as a marketing phenomenon: *“when you go out as engineers to do the task, you are on the front-line of marketing at that point...so you got to be aware that’s what you are doing”* (CG2); *“if*

you go to a single job...you can be asked 'what else you do'...you can tell him about the company..." (CG3)

Apart from that, engineers generally believed that they could contribute to the corporate brand by doing their best in their engineering jobs individually as well as collectively: “[if] you as an engineer strive to the best you can do...then...you are contributing to the [CEB Tech.] brand” (CG2). Nevertheless, no direct contribution to the initiatives as such was mentioned. Lack of interest and poor conduct of corporate branding were said to be among the reasons why engineers could not see how they could contribute directly to corporate brand initiatives. These issues are further explained in the next section, which discusses factors that can disengage engineers from corporate brand initiatives.

4.8. Disengaging factors upon the corporate brand initiatives

As discussed in the previous section, the engineers’ engagement with the corporate brand initiatives appeared to be a determinant of their contribution to the corporate brand and related activities (second research question). In this sense, factors contributing to engineers’ disengagement with the initiatives are likely to lessen the chances of engineers’ active engagement and direct contribution. For instance, in response to the question, “Do you think you can contribute to corporate branding directly?” an engineer said, “*I could if I wanted to; if I was interested enough... and yeah, if I felt strong enough about it*”.

Factors that reportedly disengaged or discouraged engineers from the initiatives were identified in the engineers’ accounts. In this regard, sceptical accounts were particularly insightful. That said, sceptical reflections were not unconditionally interpreted as a sign of disengagement from the initiatives. At times, sceptical opinions could also be

interpreted as a sign of engagement; that engineers do think about the initiatives and their implications; to some extent this is a sort of engagement, as CD2 commented about ‘cynical’ engineers: *“they were very sceptical...but if they are saying that then they are thinking about it and I think they do recognize it”*.

4.8.1. *“The language is not my language”*

Some engineers asserted a degree of unfamiliarity with corporate branding initiatives due to the language that was used in crafting them. For instance, CS4 reflected on the values statement, saying *“I couldn’t spell them out in the right order, particularly in the language that’s used because the language is not my language”*. Many engineers criticized the corporate brand initiatives for their use of ‘marketing’ language.

The language barrier could perhaps have been mitigated if more engineering-based initiatives had been deployed, or if elements from both engineering and corporate branding were mixed and used in crafting the initiatives. For instance, CG2 mentioned that had engineers been invited to the brand training workshops to share their success stories of doing some sort of branding on site, then it would have been much more engaging and efficient. By doing so, an engineer would speak to other engineers (and not a ‘marketer’), which would mitigate the language barrier to a significant extent.

Others were slightly critical of the distance between the initiators and the receivers of corporate brand initiatives in terms of mindset and understanding: *“I think part of this comes because branding is done by the people who don’t understand where it’s going”* (CS4). Given that EH consultants, who were mainly in charge of corporate branding initiatives, were located in another city, the physical distance between initiators and ‘receivers’ was also raised as a factor contributing to the distance between the initiatives and engineers. It could be agreed that this issue could equally be the case if

any other external corporate branding consultant had been recruited to drive corporate branding activities forward at CEB Tech.

Brand workshops were equally criticized for being carried out by ‘pro-marketing’ consultants who “*just lose the interest of the guys in the second word of the mouth*”. Although this statement about the training was rather strong, it signals a difficulty in making corporate branding an interesting phenomenon for engineers. Among the suggestions for improving the initiatives, it was said that further inclusion of engineers in the communication of the initiatives could be an effective strategy. Interestingly, one engineer believed that brand training could be enhanced with the help of sceptical engineers; those who have experienced a constructive corporate brand-related encounter with clients and are willing to share their experiences with other engineers:

“I think if you had got someone like me or someone who is a bit sceptical about it...to come from their background to say: ‘look I was out there the other week, I had this conversation, two weeks later this customer came in and bought this, it works...’ and to present that from that direction ...” (CG2)

That said, in response to the question as to whether engineers would volunteer to contribute to corporate branding training workshops or the like, CG2 referred to engineers’ contingent lack of interest in doing any sort of marketing-related activities: “*an engineer could do it if you found someone who is interested. The hard bit is finding engineers interested in marketing...; it’s not a tangible problem that most engineers are interested in*” (CG2). Hence, this account referred to a much more fundamental disconnection between engineers and the corporate brand-related activities.

Some engineers had presumptions about marketing activities in general. To that effect, as corporate branding was often perceived as a subsidiary of marketing, such negative

opinions or disconnections surfaced at the engineering vs. corporate branding as well; and in order to offset this effect, as CD2 explained, management had to dissociate corporate branding from marketing and take a subtle approach.

4.8.2. *Top-down conduct*

Some engineers criticized the top-down conduct of the initiatives; that “*there is a bit of a feeling that the brand is being advertised down from the top*” (CS4). The main issue raised by such a top-down approach was said to be the lack of voice in the initiatives for engineers. Many believed that part of the reason for the disengagement of engineers from corporate branding initiatives was that engineers had not been consulted in the first place, when the initiatives were being developed: “*you haven’t been consulted. You haven’t been told why; you just have been told you shall...and there is no opportunity to actually make any comments on them*”. Reflecting on initiatives like the values and ‘how we do things around here’ statements, one engineer used the metaphor of ‘Moses and the tablets of stone’ to explain (and criticize) the one-way conduct and communication of the initiatives:

“Certainly you shouldn’t write those in a dark, concealed room and then arrive with them like Moses with the tablets of stone {laugh}. I don’t know how Moses got away with it {laugh} but then {laugh} that is not the right way to manage people.” (CS4)

4.8.3. *Static conduct*

It was noted that corporate brand initiatives that remain static for a long time are more likely to disengage engineers. The initiatives appeared to be disregarded after a while as they remained unchanged for a long time. Most of the initiatives, e.g. values statements,

had remained unchanged for five years or more at the time of the study. This was reported to lead to engineers' disregard. Such negligence appeared to be an unconscious process (whereby the brain filters out unchanged items¹⁷), however, and happened naturally over time within office and work environments. Thus, in the daily activities of engineers, the items that remain unchanged for a long time are by far the likeliest to be neglected subconsciously.

Hence, more dynamic types of initiatives appeared to be needed to keep attracting the attention of employees. Or, the initiatives needed to be revisited and rejuvenated more often in order to be effective in gaining the mind-space of employees. Remaining unchanged also appeared to run the risk that employees begin to think that perhaps those initiatives are not as important as they are made out to be.

4.8.4. Misaligned processes

Business processes not in line with corporate branding initiatives were reported to undermine the corporate brand and increase engineers' disengagement. In explaining engineers' evasion from living by the corporate brand values (a kind of disengagement with the initiatives), an engineer remarked, "*when it does happen it's generally a part of a wider problem. It's not just the problem of not living by the values; it's part of 'I didn't do that because you didn't do this, because this has been wrong'...*" (CG2). Thus, corporate brand initiatives appeared to be sacrificed at times in internal conflicts or due to misaligned business processes.

Similarly, some engineers reported disengagement with the initiatives because, according to them, they were too 'busy' with other obligations: "*I am too busy to*

¹⁷ Neuro-scientific studies support such subconscious filtration by the brain (Barry, 2002).

generate business to worry about brand'. It appeared that in these incidents alignment between their defined job obligations and their engagement with corporate branding was either not thought-through in advance, or not had been articulated convincingly enough for them. It suggests that corporate branding is an integral part of every organizational activity. Therefore, the two affect one another, and there should be consistency, support and alignment in both directions between corporate branding and other business processes.

4.8.5. *Excessive uniformity*

It was emphasised in engineers' accounts that corporate branding activities should not dilute engineers' individualities and pursue uniformity. Excessive uniformity was said to run the risk of disengaging engineers from the initiatives and undermining the corporate brand altogether: *"if we get pressured to be uniform for the sake of a uniform brand, then I think we have lost the point of brand"* (CS4). Thus, respect for the autonomy and individual specificities of partners and individuals in the creation, development and communication of the initiatives was underlined.

A sort of sub-brand engagement at the expense of disengagement with the corporate brand was evident in cases where corporate branding activities and incorporative efforts had been excessively exercised in pursuit of uniformity. It appeared that, at times, engineers identified with their subsidiaries – the sub-brands – more than they did with the corporate brand. Such engagement with the sub-brands at the expense of corporate brand identification can be associated with a number of factors (e.g. internal conflicts and/or uncertainties). Nevertheless, excessively integrative efforts that had happened in pursuit of greater uniformity in the past appeared to be one of the significant disengaging factors in this regard.

4.8.6. Disengagement due to part-time work

Working from home or part-time also appeared to increase the likelihood of disengagement with corporate branding initiatives. One engineer who worked from home most of the time mentioned that because he was not normally in the office, he was much less exposed to the corporate brand initiatives. This appeared to be similarly the case for employees who work in the field away from offices/factories most of the times, or those who work on part-time or short-term contracts and are not exposed to initiatives as often as full-time and office/factory-based employees.

To this effect, exposure to the initiatives appeared to be a determinant of engineers' (and equally other support staff's') engagement, or otherwise, with the corporate brand and the initiatives. There appeared to be a lack of consideration from senior management on the extent to which employees are exposed to initiatives on a daily basis. Thus, all employees were treated the same way with respect to the amount of brand training they received, regardless of how much exposure they had to initiatives. Perhaps employees with less exposure were more in need of compensatory training, and vice versa.

4.9. Summary

In this chapter, the first case study was examined in a thematic manner, exploring the perceptions of engineers on their corporate brand. Engineers' definitions of the corporate brand (as part of research question one) were discussed first. It was demonstrated that the corporate brand as a concept and corporate branding as a set of activities were not readily and clearly comprehensible for engineers, due to a number of reasons, among which daily engineering engagement, educational background and

recency of brand consciousness were outlined. Some engineers defined corporate branding as the ‘softer’, easier, less rigorous, less essential (“*style and form than function*”) and marketing side of the business. In other cases, corporate brand was associated and defined with notions of organizational identity and culture.

The implications and significance of the corporate brand was discussed next as part of the meanings of the corporate brand (research question one). It was shown that while some engineers were supportive of the importance of a strong corporate brand generally, others were sceptical of the total importance of it and questioned the extent to which the role of the corporate brand should be praised. These critical engineers believed that while in some respects the corporate brand can play an important role, e.g. in attracting new markets and the private sector, in other cases, e.g. dealing with current clients and the public sector, the role of the corporate brand *per se* is minimal; and instead the personal and organizational relationships developed over time are central.

In other accounts, some engineers underlined that corporate branding activities, however minimal, play an important role in boosting employees’ morale, ‘cohesion’, and sense of pride. In another critical reflection, the role of corporate branding initiatives was outlined as a mode of normative control – raising awareness among employees and professional partners in particular that, “*there is value in brand and not just in the people*”. In other words, corporate branding ‘grammar’ was deployed by top management as a power discourse to praise the importance of the corporate brand while downgrading (or suppressing) the role of personal brands; such means of normative control was also intended to retain talent and raise the barriers for the departure of knowledge bearers.

The implications of the corporate brand with respect to the characteristics of the engineering consulting context were also discussed, as part of the first research question. These characteristics were mentioned to yield implications for corporate branding in the engineering-intensive setting. In this regard, a number of characteristics were highlighted: the importance of a ‘sharing’ attitude; the important role of field and client-facing engineers in delivering the brand image; engineers’ rational, cynical and conservative inclinations; the criticality of abiding by strict codes of conduct and practicality; strong adherence to promises; and, last but not least, the prioritization of ‘technical standards’ over brand-related considerations – if the two collided – was indicated and reported to have implications for the corporate brand.

How engineers perceived corporate brand initiatives and activities was further explored (as part of research question two). It appeared that almost all respondents had difficulty remembering CEB’s avowed values or the contents of the related statements and initiatives. They questioned the extent to which such initiatives do the job of reminding people of the values since engineers by and large overlooked them.

There also appeared to be a mismatch between the values communicated through the initiatives with those that engineers believed to be ‘lived by’ on a daily basis. Moreover, it was indicated that abiding by the values and the like is a subconscious rather than a conscious process. Some perceived the initiatives as a message “from above” – i.e. top management. In such cases, initiatives were regarded as ‘idealism’ and a ‘utopian’ ambition for the organization that top management strives for, rather than the present situation (the ‘reality’) of the firm.

In the next part of the chapter, the ways in which engineers thought they could contribute to the corporate brand (part of second research question) was explored.

Answers in this regard were two-fold: in one sense, engineers believed that doing one's best is the most evident way to contribute to the corporate brand. In another series of responses, engineers referred to doing a sort of part-time marketing wherever possible and in their daily encounters with clients – on top of their everyday engineering duties – as a way to contribute to the corporate brand. This latter articulation appeared to be rooted in their perception of corporate branding as a marketing sub-discipline.

Given that engagement with the initiatives was reported to be a significant determinant of engineers' contribution to corporate branding, in the final part of the chapter, the disengaging factors from the initiatives were discussed. The main disengaging factors were identified from the engineers' viewpoint as: the primarily marketing-led language and conduct in the crafting and communication of the initiatives; the top-down and 'static' conduct of corporate branding; misaligned business processes with the general orientation of corporate branding activities; excessive attempts at uniformity through corporate branding; and, last but not least, disengagement due to part-time working or otherwise limited exposure to the initiatives (which is the case for second- or third-tier employees and support staff).

The next chapter presents the second case study, wherein the answers provided to the research questions are again presented and discussed in a thematic manner. The general structure and formation of Chapters Five and Six are similar to the structure and organization of this chapter.

Chapter 5: Case Study Two

5.1. Introduction, objectives, and chapter structure

The second case study is WRJ-UK: the UK division of an international engineering consulting group of nearly ten thousand employees, active in many diverse of engineering sectors (e.g. structural, geotechnical, energy and telecommunications). WRJ-UK is most focused on the building and design activities.

This chapter has a rather similar structure to the other two chapters presenting case studies (Chapters Four and Six). The WRJ-UK case study is presented and discussed in a thematic manner. The key sections comprising this chapter are: definitions and implications of the corporate brand; perceptions of engineers on corporate branding initiatives; contributions of engineers to corporate branding; and factors disengaging engineers from corporate branding initiatives.

In the discussion chapter (Chapter Seven), the sub-themes of this case study along with the sub-themes of the other two case studies are revisited in light of the literature (as reviewed in Chapter Two). The contributions of the findings are consequently discussed more thoroughly there.

5.2. Case Two: WRJ Consultants

As explained in Chapter Three, the second case study was carried out at the UK subsidiary of an international engineering consulting firm WRJ Group. A few years ago, this UK subsidiary, which was then itself a well-established international consulting of (SMB) employing a few hundred people, was acquired by WRJ Group –

another established consulting group then employing a few thousand people and headquartered in Denmark.

Following a strategy of “*local know-how by global knowledge*”, as one manager expressed it, the WRJ-UK subdivision, like many other divisions (e.g. WRJ-Russia), remained autonomous in many respects, such as bidding for projects and in its reporting systems. Recently, however, some changes in knowledge management systems and financial procedures have been implemented in the pursuit of further integration and incorporation. Management of corporate branding initiatives had by and large remained in the hands of a communications team based overseas (to WRJ-UK), in Denmark. Hence, at the time of the study corporate branding activities were mainly coordinated centrally, from Denmark.

After the acquisition, all artefacts with SMB’s name or logo had been replaced by WRJ Group’s logo, following their codes and styles; brochures, catalogues, statements, advertising materials, guidelines and the website were fully rebranded according to the codes and policies of WRJ Group.

Interviews for the case study were carried out in three main UK offices of WRJ-UK, one of which is the WRJ-UK head office. All in all, fourteen respondents participated in one-to-one interviews out of which thirteen interviews were deployed for analysis. One was excluded because of the interviewee’s non-engineering background and occupation as well as his insufficiently-deep insight. Interviews were recorded, transcribed and imported to Nvivo software for subsequent analysis and more efficient management and interpretation of data.

In the remainder of the chapter, interviewees are referred to with codes. They comprise: four directors (WD1_4); five senior engineers (WS1_5); and four graduate engineers

(WG1_4). WD1, WG2, and WS1 were female. Director-engineers were aged approximately 40_50, senior engineers were aged 30_40, and graduate engineers were aged 20_30.

5.3. Engineers' perceptions of corporate brand

When asked, "What does the corporate brand mean to you?" (first research question), engineers' responses gave rise to a variety of different, yet related, themes. In this part of the chapter, the engineers' definitions of the corporate brand are explored. Then, engineers' perceptions about the implications of the corporate brand are presented and discussed.

5.3.1. Ambiguous but meaningful

Some ambiguity about the concept of a corporate brand could be identified in engineers' responses. Ambiguities, however, hardly led to meaninglessness as such. One engineer referred to the ambiguity of his perceptions about the corporate brands of WRJ and SMB, yet believed that the differences between the two corporate brands were still meaningful and understandable: "*whatever their brand meant was very different to what our brand meant...they are very different animals*" (WS5).

In this regard, and among other accounts, several differences between the two corporate brands of WRJ and SMB were identified and expressed. Whereas WRJ was perceived and explained as 'Scandinavian', 'conservative', 'safe', 'able', 'competent', 'grown-up', 'mature', 'multidisciplinary', 'less glamorous' and 'less exciting', SMB (now WRJ-UK), was recalled as having been 'agile', 'energetic', 'innovative', 'international', 'risk-taker', 'creative', 'questioning', 'challenging', and 'willing to try things'. WRJ-UK was also described by characteristics such as extensive 'knowledge sharing' and

‘open dialogue’ whereas WRJ was described as “*far more looking at themselves*” (WD3).

Thus, cultural tensions between the two entities, WRJ Group and WRJ-UK, were still in place and widely evident in engineers’ accounts. WS5, among others, raised the concern that either SMB will affect WRJ by turning its culture to become more innovative, or WRJ will impact SMB, making it a straightforward engineering company.

5.3.2. “*Outward projection of culture*”

Many associated and defined the corporate brand in relation to the culture of the organization. WS5, for instance, defined the corporate brand as, “*an outward projection of culture*”. In this regard, the central role of ‘people’ in the consultancy sector – as a ‘people-facing industry’ – was highlighted; “*consultancy is about people*” (WS5). It was also mentioned that the culture of the organization is a crucial determinant for retaining engineering talent: “*the way you make people tick, is either by paying them huge sums of money {laugh} or by making them feel good and having the right culture*” (WS5).

In this respect, it was asserted that corporate brand values should actually be sought out “in how people feel” and in the culture of the organization. Reflecting on the corporate brand values, WS5 stated:

“If you talk to our communications team...they would say...‘our brand is innovation, challenging...ideas, young, dynamic’...but...all those words come out of people and how people feel. You don’t get a young dynamic innovative business with people who aren’t happy. They don’t sit there coming in pissed off

and say 'let's do something different'. They'll go 'well I do the same thing I did yesterday; that's what I have been paid for'' (WS5)

Another engineer, with reference to the cultural roots of the corporate brand, remarked that as the culture of the firm changes, the image of the corporate brand can be equally affected. By referring to the motivations driving the acquisition, she raised concerns about cultural shifts post-acquisition that might obliterate the edges that SMB was acquired for: *"if they were after that sort of rawness, they'll lose some of it by bringing us into shape"* (WD1).

Another group of respondents touched on the notion of organizational identity and defined the corporate brand as a representation of "what we are" as an organization and "what we stand for": *"...any company needs to have a brand or an identity so that people looking into the company can see what we are and what we stand for"* (WS2).

Another engineer compared 'people-facing industries' (engineering consulting included) with manufacturing industries and argued that, given the associations of the corporate brand and company culture, the corporate brand can be a significant determinant of employee behaviour ("*manner*"), which is perhaps much less the case in a manufacturing-based industry:

"...a car manufacture... It's not about manner, it's a car. What happens behind the doors is, you know, you've got a factory and everyone is pissed off; it doesn't matter; you just got to get the design right and fix it right and then that's it. Whereas when you got these people-facing industries...my belief is... it's one of the challenges..." (WS5)

In another reflection, WD3 perceived considerable overlap between the corporate brand and the 'business plan'. WG1, on the other hand, saw the corporate brand (values) as

the business ‘philosophy’, whether the business is about quality or “about money”. In this sense, the corporate brand was associated with higher-level values.

5.3.3. “*He was the brand*”

In some accounts, the corporate brand was associated with the founders of the firm. It was indicated that top management, and particularly founders, can ‘personify the brand’. CS5, for instance, assimilated the corporate brand with one of the founders of SMB prior to its acquisition: “...*he was the brand, [James] personified brand. So clients would often say ‘you’ve got the job, but we want to see [James] in the meetings’*”. The founder was also given the credit for the innovative, “raw” energy of the firm.

In another reflection, an engineer indicated that he used to know the founders of SMB in person, whereas the founders of WRJ had never been more than a name for him as he had never had the chance to meet them personally. He identified this issue as part of the reason for his sense of disengagement with the WRJ corporate brand: “*I felt with [SMB]...there was that personal connection straight away*”. He further outlined the importance of the corporate brand being developed out of its people over time and distinguished the two corporate brands of SMB and WRJ in this regard; to him, while the former had grown out of people, the latter was “imposed from the above”:

“the [SMB] reputation sort of grew out of the people; it just sort of happened and obviously it was steered and guided and inspired by the people at the top; but [WRJ] is sort of ‘this is what our company is about’; it’s an umbrella sort of thing...”

5.3.4. “Business” side of things

Some respondents referred to a sort of marketing-engineering or business-engineering dichotomy wherein the corporate brand is more likely to be associated with the ‘business’ or ‘marketing’ sides of engineering services. For instance, WD1 explained that SMB had not been advanced enough in terms of its management facilities and the ‘business’ side of things prior to the acquisition. She noted, for instance, that the accounting and IT systems were not advanced enough given the level and scale of engineering projects SMB used to take on. In other words, SMB had matured in engineering terms, but not in the management or business side of things. She perceived many of the post-acquisition initiatives, corporate branding included, as advancements on the business side implemented by WRJ Group which, according to her, was very advanced in business skills in addition to engineering skills¹⁸.

Nonetheless, it was suggested by most of the engineers that an engineering corporate brand should first and foremost rely on the technical proficiency and quality of its services. WS1, for instance, outlined that, given the types of projects that WRJ has been involved in, technical quality and sustainability of work are the kinds of image that the corporate brand should convey. She further clarified that, because there are no “nice buildings or infrastructures” as such in WRJ’s projects to signify the corporate brand, technical proficiency and quality should instead be highlighted: “*we don’t really have the nice building to show off at the end of the day...so we are really reliant on the quality of the work*”.

¹⁸ WRJ’s activities in the management consulting sector lend support to this argument.

Interestingly in this regard, many engineers used mechanical or engineering examples and metaphors to explain the corporate brand. For instance, at times, comparisons with Rolls Royce were used to denote a first-class engineering brand. In other cases, mechanical metaphors were deployed by engineers to explicate the way they perceive the corporate brand. For instance, one engineer remarked that he saw himself becoming more a part of the ‘WRJ machine’ over the course of time: *“I feel ...part of the [WRJ] machine now”* (WD2).

5.4. Significance and implications of the corporate brand

In this part of the chapter, some of the accounts which refer to the significance and implications of the corporate brand, from the engineers’ perspective, are presented and discussed. In attempts to explicate the corporate brand, at times engineers referred to the general importance of it: *“to me the corporate brand is important because it partly differentiates us bringing on board things such as sustainability, you know, integrity, all those things...”* (WD3).

In response to the question “Where does the corporate brand stand in your priorities”, a director-engineer considered the corporate brand values to be the second priority after finance, but above the technical aspects:

“Finance is always number one; because it needs to be, to keep the business going. I would say the values are number two as we see things and that we see that the other things, the technical side of things ... can fall out from the values; they’re influenced by the values.” (WD3)

This account, as was clarified later, was not necessarily about prioritizing different elements of the engineering consulting business as such, but more importantly to

signify that technical excellence is included in the corporate brand and, therefore, “can fall out from values”: “*one of our visions is to be technically excellent in all we do*” (WD3).

The significance of the corporate brand and its elements, such as values, vision and missions, were said to be particularly more significant at the director level and above (e.g. CEO or Board). Managers perceived the corporate brand and its elements as a means of normative control. Equally, top management commitment was considered more important when it comes to certain corporate brand elements such as vision and values; “*vision is something you need full director buy-in to*” (WD3).

It was also described how the corporate brand is more critical and perhaps more attended to in the UK as compared to Nordic markets. In this regard, WS5 explained the differences between the two markets. He stressed that, while the UK market is heavily competitive with hundreds of engineering consulting firms, in Denmark there is only a handful of massive engineering consultancies. He noted that whereas competing in the UK demands a high level of competitiveness, and thus brand consciousness, in Denmark business agreements centre on ‘handshakes’; hence perhaps the role of the corporate brand as such is much less significant in Nordic countries as compared to the UK: “*they don’t need to have a brand...they’re just [WRJ] and that’s what they are and they just do it and then you got us as [SMB]; we are very brand conscious and very pushy because its competitive*” (WS5).

The importance of a high-profile corporate brand image for attracting clients, winning interesting projects, and subsequently retaining talent was also outlined. As one senior design engineer noted, “*You need to have the good brand image, otherwise no-one is*

going to give you interesting work and people like me aren't going to stay in the company” (WS3).

Furthermore, alignment of perceptions about the meanings and implications of the corporate brand was reported by some engineers to be important for maintaining coherence throughout the organization. One engineer referred to a serious friction between the two communication functions – the communications team at SMB and that of WRJ Group – at the time of the acquisition, whereby the tensions between the two heightened to such an extent that the SMB communications team was ultimately forced to leave.

5.4.1. Personal brands

One of the themes which emerged from considering the implications of the corporate brand was the role of professional engineers who, over time, develop brands of their own (personal brands) in parallel with the corporate brand they work for. One engineer, among others, raised the significance of personal brands and relationships, over the corporate brand *per se*, by referring to repeat business which constitutes the majority of the engineering consulting business. He associated repeat business mainly with the trust that clients develop in individual or collective (personal) brands over time:

“...people are coming back to us saying ‘we know you are not the cheapest, but we know we don't have any problems with you; we like you, and you'll deliver what you say you'll deliver’. And now I don't know if you call that brand or not, [but] that's more about [the] person.” (WS5)

It was further outlined by other engineers that the role of personal brands is more significant than the corporate brand for smaller-scale projects wherein inter-personal

relationships and familiarity is a significant contributor to repeat business. The UK market was also said to be known for ascribing extensive importance to (inter-personal) relationships. On the other hand, for large-scale projects (such as airports), it was said that the corporate brand is more significant than personal brands; that even if key personal brands leave the corporate brand, customers still rely on the reputation of the corporate brand and not the personal brands.

In the same area, it was noted that complementarity between personal and corporate brands can create synergy. Equally, alignment between the corporate brand and personal values can lead to enhanced engagement with and commitment to the corporate brand and make employees 'go the extra mile' with the company. For instance, with reference to the sustainable projects and humanitarian activities carried out by WRJ-UK in under-developed countries, WD3 noted, *"that's what keeps me here for so long and I think that's what makes a lot of people feel it's worth going extra mile on a project for"*.

In another reflection, WS3 explained his motivation for participating in a marathon held by WRJ Group by saying: *"it's a personal thing for me"*; that his personal value of staying healthy resonated well with the values espoused by WRJ Group in holding marathon events. WG3 similarly reported to have been *"impressed with...things like the charitable foundation...the voluntary work that was being done by people in the company"*.

It was discussed, nevertheless, that full alignment between the corporate brand values and employee values is not practically achievable. WD3, among others, outlined that as the business gets bigger in size, it becomes more difficult to reach total consensus among employees, not least on beliefs such as values and visions. It was also mentioned

that not all engineers ‘fit’ with the corporate brand values. Many engineers are ‘good’ (enough) human resources to deliver the engineering services, but:

“...when times are very busy you can take on people who are good; you don’t necessarily have the choice of taking on people who you feel fitted.” (WD3)

Another director outlined that, although having full alignment between personal and corporate brand values is “*a real winner*”, in real terms, this should not be pushed so hard since the company equally needs a sufficient number of employees who can ‘deliver’ regardless of the absolute value or brand alignment: “*you might not like drinking Coca Cola, but you might work at that company*” (WD2).

5.4.2. Incorporation

Incorporative activities embedded in the corporate brand or corporate branding activities were also reported to yield considerable implications. One engineer referred to the implications of incorporation, as a significant transformation post-acquisition, on the corporate brand. She associated incorporative tendencies with becoming “*less about people and more about the end figures*” – i.e. becoming more finance-centric. Although this issue was partly associated with the 2008 economic downturn, more importantly these shifts were associated with becoming more ‘corporate’ in the minds of many engineers: “*I think we have become a little bit more corporate*” (WS1).

In this regard, a sort of positive engagement with WRJ-UK at the expense of disengagement with ‘WRJ-Denmark’ could be perceived in some engineers’ accounts: “*I don’t consider myself [WRJ], I consider myself [WRJ] UK*”¹⁹. Motivations for such

¹⁹ The position of the respondent within WRJ is disguised for ethical anonymity reasons here and in other similar cases throughout the chapter.

identity reactions could be traced in two things. First, British engineers tended to assert their characteristic qualities in differentiating themselves from their Danish colleagues in this way. Second, some expressed some unhappiness with the acquisition and used such identification to pursue a revival of the lost SMB identity – i.e. they expressed some sort of resistance. On top of that, a director-engineer reported that perhaps “being a UK operation”, or more specifically speaking, given the characteristics of “English engineers”, engagement with the ‘bigger’ corporate brand can be entangled with difficulties which can only be resolved over time: *“English engineers...tend to follow their own [star] a little bit”* (WD2).

Another negative implication of incorporation was reported to be the loss of engineers’ individualities: *“I think we’ve lost a little bit of our individuality”* (WS1). Being one out of many thousands of employees was said to be an unfavourable ‘feeling’ to some engineers: *“I personally don’t want to be just kind of a number in a huge company”* (WS1). One engineer criticized extant initiatives, and particularly the brand book, for being extensively definitive and lacking room for individualistic contributions. He believed that such initiatives filtered out the personalities of engineers, which is one of the most important aspects of corporate branding:

“...the worry is that in a big chunk of the presentation, your personality is sort of taken out of it because I think...some of the slides are quite definite. You don’t want to joke about them or undermine them in any way and so it’s quite difficult to get your personality across and I think a lot of what we do is about providing a personal service and is about how people respond to you because quite often...they just happen to like the person who came to the interview and think ‘I would trust that person to do my building’.”

It was, however, outlined that this negative implication was partly offset with the implementation of rather autonomous business units. For instance, many engineers referred to SMB as WRJ-UK (and not WRJ) after the acquisition. It was also said that the creation of business units helped enhance employees' sense of being valued:

“we’ve been lost; we’ve been diluted a little bit; [yet] I think...defining the business units as [WRJ-] UK and in various bodies has helped keeping it on a smaller scale and a more manageable scale that you don’t feel that you are part of a huge corporation; that you still feel quite important and quite valued within your [WRJ-] UK” (WS1)

Similarly, WD3 outlined the significant role of brand identity in business success. He perceived WRJ-UK's local or regional corporate branding activities as a means to revive the (partly obscured) identity of SMB: *“when it’s small, you’ve got that initial passion for what you’re doing; you’ve got ... your own brand identity. When you become a multinational... you have to fight keep the ethic of what the business is”*. He further outlined the role of values meetings and staff gatherings for clarifying the identity of the organization, its values, the rationale behind the corporate brand, and the role of engineers in these regards:

“to succeed as a business both internally in terms of staff morale, but externally as a differentiator, you need to be quite clear about what you are, where you’re coming from, what you’re giving back...so that’s really why we sit down and have these things. So we can maintain the belief in who we are as engineers, why we think this is a good place to work, why we think people should work with us and if we don’t do that;...if you loose the values side of things, then what draws people to you, both internally and externally?” (WD3)

On the other hand, some engineers referred to the connotations of ‘bigness’ as one of the aspects and implications of incorporation that can yield significant consequences for the corporate brand. One of the positive implications of ‘bigness’ was said to be the ability to win ‘enormous’ projects thanks to the size of WRJ:

“Because we are a big company, we have got a lot of mouths to feed...we go for enormous projects because we need to...and suddenly the brand thing is a bit different...how do you win that project?...because people know about this big [WRJ] idea and they know that they can do anything; they’ve got all the different services that can be offered.” (WS5)

Some engineers also said that it has been quite interesting for them to join a ‘big’ corporate brand like WRJ. On the flip side, nonetheless, it was indicated by others that while becoming ‘big’, organizations are susceptible to losing their core innovative capabilities unless there are still some innovators, particularly founders, staying with the company. In such transitions, unless innovators were kept in the business, the corporate brand was said to *“tend to become more of the organization, more of a delivery body rather than something that’s changing and thinks a lot” (WS5).*

The distinction between ‘management’ and ‘leadership’ was also outlined in this regard. Some engineers referred to the shifts in management style after the acquisition whereby a ‘dynamic leadership’ was replaced by a ‘formal management’ which had impacted the employees and subsequently the corporate brand: *“we are becoming from a very very dynamic leadership to a much more formal leadership and almost more of management leadership rather than a leader leadership” (WS5)*

The notion of ‘bigness’ was further criticized given that engineers had to be informed of and deliver much more information about WRJ’s track record, which not only was

unnecessary when bidding for many small-scale and local projects, but also at times created extra ‘stress’ for engineers. Because WRJ was not as famous as SMB in the UK, front-line engineers had to put in a lot of effort to introduce WRJ to their prospective clients when bidding for projects or attending project interviews – i.e. to do the initial marketing for WRJ on top of their engineering duties:

“So, you have sort of this big, big thing sort of floating around like a big airship or something just hovering there and you have to...sort of acknowledge it all the time...it’s completely benign...and if anything it’s probably good in a lot of ways because it does give people confidence at their strengths and certainly from like a financial point of view, and we’ve got plenty of access to lots of skills; [but] you do feel a bit like a hammer trying to crack a nut.”

Thus, another concern was said to be some clients’ contingent suspicion about consultants’ undue interest in their small-scale projects; *“that people think ‘well you’re too big, you won’t be interested in our job’”* (WD1). Despite all this, the financial support of WRJ, particularly during the recent recession (2008) was acknowledged by many engineers: *“I think they deserve a lot of thanks for the support they’ve given us and maybe that’s helped us to get the work we have got because we know we’re secure”* (WD1).

5.4.3. *Economy*

Economic conditions – both at the micro and macro levels – were also reported to yield significant implications for the corporate brand. Many referred to the recent economic downturn, which started in 2008, and its effects were still in place at the time of the study; that the economy had by and large overshadowed the role of culture and hence the corporate brand. In this regard, it was noted by WS5, among others, that many

consultants would have left their companies because of lack of consideration of staff morale were it not for insecurities the job market heightened during the recession. WS5 described the situation in this way:

“And so the culture is let to sleep. Because it’s not something you have to worry about everyday, you know. I don’t have to worry about how you’re feeling. I just have to worry about making enough money so that you can stay alive. And as soon as the economy turns the corner, all the people who now I’m not looking at, you know, just gonna go ‘see ya {laugh}, there is a nicer culture around the corner’ and so that then challenges, I think, the brand...because ultimately consultancy is about the people; happy people...” (WS5)

Equally, an inspiring culture and corporate brand that employees identify with happily were said to be significant factors for retaining human assets particularly in times of financial downturn:

“If you can’t maintain that culture, in challenging times what happens is that you say to me ‘[John], you know, last few years have been really hard here, frankly I need to change’;...I’m not gonna persuade you saying everything gonna be different now, because you’ll say, ‘well, I’ve just experienced two years of this, and frankly, it should have changed earlier’. I could persuade you perhaps by saying ‘ok I’ll pay you ten grand more then’, and then you are stuffed because in consultancy the margins are so tight; you haven’t got that; you can’t do that, unless the economy is booming.” (WS5)

More importantly, some engineers reported that economic downturn can suppress the corporate brand – make the corporate brand a second priority – for employees as well as

customers. With respect to customers, for instance, the price of a service can become the foremost priority in customers' decision processes in financially hard times:

“I think it’s an interesting time to ask about brand, because does brand really matter at the moment? Well for some developers it would, some marketers it would, others it’s just money; it’s just are you cheaper than him...so then brand doesn’t matter anymore...but when the economy turns, it will; because people start to discern about quality again.” (WS5)

Some associated the corporate brand, in part, with *“the reason why you come to work”*, and described how the economy can, to some extent, suppress this emotional side: *“I think in difficult times, which we’ve had over the last year and a half, you sometimes lose sight of the fact that’s the reason why you come to work”* (WD2). Another manager said that because *“things are not rosy”* economically, many answers about the implications of the corporate brand have become *“so different”*.

Several of the respondents in the study, from all grades, emphasized that the business would have not taken on many of the projects it was involved in at the time of the survey were it not for the economic pressures faced by the company. Because the company did that, all employees faced a conflict between those projects and their current corporate brand values and image. Simply put, it was very difficult for top management and key decision-makers to turn down projects that did not really mesh well with the brand image. *“Having a lot of mouths to feed”*, according to WS5, had made the company go ‘hunting’ in places it would have not gone before, something which only exacerbated the likelihood that the company would continue to breach its own corporate brand values:

“I know that [WRJ] have an ethical policy and they won’t work in certain sectors, for example, weapons, so on and so forth. I think they would still refuse to work on those, regardless, but probably there are other projects where maybe in better times we would say ‘that doesn’t really fit with our brand’” (WS4)

“We’ve taken on projects that are frankly not very sustainable at all in order to survive through the recession.” (WG3)

Despite all the negative implications, some engineers indicated that the economic downturn could be a critical opportunity as well for the corporate brand to prove its commitment to its values/ethics to stakeholders; that stakeholders can rely on and trust the corporate brand at all times: *“the test of a successful organization of any sort is how they deal with the times like this” (WS5).*

5.4.4. Societal values

The corporate brand was also said to be influenced greatly by the values of society. In other words, the corporate brand should adapt itself with its environment and societal context in terms of values, ethics, and objectives. For instance, in response to the question as to whether corporate brand values are a recent requirement for engineering consultancies, WD3 remarked:

“I think it’s always been the case, but I think that the values may have shifted. So now at the moment values are very much on green and I think that’s the case in business; but that’s also the case in people’s home lives as well; that people think a lot about recycling and everything else. If you go back twenty years, you might find that the values were on personal relationships with clients, but you may also

find that was the case in society at that time. So a lot of words they do reflect what the society is.”

5.5. Engineering consulting and corporate branding

Within the discussions, some accounts referred to the specificities of the engineering consulting context which yielded implications for corporate branding and vice versa. Hence, it was noted that corporate branding should be in accordance with the characteristics of the engineering consulting sector. In this regard, one of the most colourful themes was the distinction between engineering practice and emotions. In other words, engineers seemed to separate technical engineering aspects from those of the corporate brand; in this sense, engineers associated engineering with ‘hard’ and rigorous procedures, whereas they associated the corporate brand with ‘soft’ emotions and feelings. It was, however, indicated by a number of engineers that the two aspects of engineering and the corporate brand are interconnected and mutually influential: *“the two are obviously intrinsically linked. But I don’t know if you could quantify or clearly state how they are linked”* (WS4).

One engineer, on the other hand, said that most of the perceptions about either the corporate brand of WRJ or SMB were emotional and did not necessarily affect the ‘engineering side’ and the way engineers ‘function’:

“It’s just something I can feel. But I can compartmentalise it away from what I do...I do as good a job as I did before and I am still as interested and engaged in my work as I was before...because you feel something it doesn’t mean it has to affect the way you function.”

In one case, an engineer used the metaphor of ‘music’ to refer to his perception about the corporate brand of SMB. In a nostalgic manner, he outlined that the corporate brand can simply imply a positive emotional feeling, memory or nostalgia, regardless of what the content of the corporate brand (e.g. logo type, taglines, values, etc) actually is. While remarking that emotional connection with the new WRJ corporate brand might need time, he stated:

“maybe in time I will get to feel as close to it, but it might be just as I say when you are in your formative years...like, you know, the music you listen to when you are a teenager, regardless of whatever music it is, it stays with you and that sort of defines your generation and you know it’s quite difficult to sort of sometimes get out into something new.”

In this sense, some respondents raised the ‘professionalism’ of engineers and defined it as engineers’ ability to distance themselves from emotional factors and proceed without letting emotions interfere with their engineering ‘functions’:

“I think people are very focused and professional and they wouldn’t...you know, because we deal with very sort of tangible things and steel and concrete and big things and they’re sort of quite serious safety issues going on, on site, you know, we’re not going to get upset by a few words. You know, it’s sort of not that important at the end of the day and I think there is a bit of humour there, as well, possibly.” (WD1)

This account also implied a relative insignificance of the presentational aspects of the corporate brand or corporate branding initiatives and the ‘humour’ that, at times, can be associated with the merging of brands. Other engineers equally recalled the humour

element in their experiences with the corporate brand, particularly at the early stages of the acquisition and shared their stories (WG2, WG4, WS5).

Another aspect was said to be that the reputation of the corporate brand impacts the type of projects the company is most probably offered: *“if you’re known for doing exciting buildings, then the type of projects you work on will be exciting buildings”* (WS4). This indicates the mutual influences of corporate brand reputation and engineering practice.

5.6. Engineers’ perceptions of corporate brand initiatives

In this part of the chapter, the perceived intentions of managers and corporate branding executives in conducting corporate branding initiatives, as identified in managers’ and engineers’ remarks, are explored. Also, engineers’ views about the initiatives are presented and discussed.

A manager outlined that depending on one’s organizational level, perceptions and priorities might vary. In this sense, for more senior or director-level engineers, corporate branding can be, *“very much in [the] spot light and you filter it through to everything that happens”*; whereas at more junior levels, engineers might not *“necessarily see the headline”* or *“grasp what the overall picture is”* (WD3). This was corroborated by another graduate engineer’s remark which criticized engineers, particularly at more junior levels, for being extensively and one-sidedly engineering-oriented:

“...we just attack; we approach problems; we get problems from A to B. We don’t always kind of realise the other things, the other sides of the business...I think that’s just the personalities of engineers...we are sometimes unaware

whereas we are head down and being engineers sometimes miss the bigger picture of a corporation which is to set a good brand image.” (WS3)

Hence, one of the intentions of the initiatives – e.g. the [WRJ] *Experience* which, “*brought together four thousand people from different countries and then got people talking and sharing ideas and celebrating things in one place*” (WD3) – was to make employees realize that they are part of a ‘bigger picture’. Some integrative systems, such as the (new) knowledge management platform, were also intended to encourage engagement with the corporate brand and raise awareness among experts “*that they’re part of a global knowledge share and growth process*” (WD3).

Another manager outlined one of the intentions for some of the initiatives, particularly the values and ‘philosophy’ statements, to portray a human image above “just steel and pipes and wise engineers”: “*it’s key that clients and people who visit, see that we’re not just steel and pipes and wise engineers, but there’s more to our makeup*” (WD2).

5.6.1. “Them and us”

From the engineers’ perspectives, a number of themes could be identified in relation to the corporate brand initiatives. First, a sort of disconnection – “a bit of a ‘them and us’” – was evident in engineers’ reflections on engineers and corporate branding conduct. One engineer, among others, compared the corporate branding conduct of WRJ and SMB (in the past) and argued that whereas in the WRJ approach, engineers are *told* ‘what the business is about’, in SMB, it used to be more ‘self-generating’:

“I mean, [WRJ], they do make an effort to tell us what the business is about. I suppose in doing that, there’s a bit of a ‘them and us’ in there, in that some people over there are telling us what our business is all about, whereas maybe

in [SMB] it was a bit more self-generating, you know; you individually, you all contributed to that willingly and it just sort of came out of everybody's ability."

One engineer used the phrase "pushing their identity on us" and another engineer used the term "imposed" to explain the way corporate branding was carried out by WRJ Group. WG4 used terms such as "thrown at" or "they would try and drum them into you" to refer to the way most of the initiatives were communicated. The root of such detachment, in part, appeared to be in British-Nordic differences as well. Some referred to the differences in the characteristics of British and Nordic people in explaining such detachments:

"I think they are quite Denmark-centric...they're in Denmark; they're in Sweden; they're in Finland. But they're all Nordic countries and I didn't realize how different we are in the UK to them; but we are very different...they haven't...they don't really get us yet"

Nonetheless, despite the cynicisms about the one-way conduct of corporate branding, some senior engineers perceived the top-down element in corporate brand initiatives as necessary in order to sustain alignment and 'oneness' between various constituencies (WS1, WD3). One of the managers (WD3), while acknowledging that "there has to be [always a one-way element in it]" explained that he had been trying to include engineers' opinions in vision-setting. He explained further that after the initial vision meetings by directors, he and all other directors (are supposed to) take the visions to their subordinates and do team PDRs (Performance Development Reviews) which elicit their opinions: "*this is where we see the business going, which way do you see it going? Which we are going right? Which we are going wrong?*". A number of engineers as employee representatives are consulted in these meetings and their opinions are sought.

Engineers' reflections are then taken back to the main board through the directors. WD3 believed that by including engineers in the process of vision-setting, when the vision is finalised, automatically "*it's at full buy-in across the company*".

Similarly, some referred to the bottom-up element in corporate branding by referring to maintaining alignment right from the stage of recruitment; that potential employees are checked for their value alignment with the corporate brand at a very early stage of recruitment. To that end, everybody is aligned to a certain extent with the values of the firm as they have been accepted by the firm at the time of recruitment:

"So, I think a lot of the corporate brand is not necessarily fed down from above...if you work for the firm you have probably chosen to work for them because that kind of already aligns with who you are and what you want to do and likewise when you are being interviewed and so on and so forth they probably wouldn't take you on if you didn't align" (WS4)

5.6.2. *Insignificance of presentational aspects*

Another theme concerned the presentational aspects of the corporate brand and the initiatives. Many engineers raised doubts about the extent to which the presentational aspects of the initiatives are significant. WS1, for instance among others, questioned the extent to which the initiatives, as they stand, can affect the way engineers actually operate: "*I don't think it affects how I proceed, how I work*".

Others were slightly cynical about the role of corporate brand initiatives in general. As an example, one engineer reflected on them cynically, by underrating corporate branding *per se* compared to the "*kind of jobs the company is involved in and their performance on different things*". Given his purely technical position, he appeared to be

much less keen on the corporate brand initiatives and the presentational aspects as compared to the ‘projects’ and technical aspects: *“I get the idea behind it ... but to be honest I look more at what kind of jobs the company is involved in and their performance on different things”*. Relatedly, the initiatives seemed to be less meaningful to him and subsequently his level of explicit buy-in was apparently minimal: *“I like the simplicity of [WRJ’S branding]; it’s just that; it doesn’t really mean much more to me than that”*. In reflection upon the corporate philosophy statement, another engineer perceived it as a ‘marketing tool’ devised to gain the attention of customers and visitors: *“for me, it’s on the wall for the clients; it’s a marketing tool rather than it being inherent in every employee that this is how we work”* (WS1).

On the other hand, a number of engineers criticized current initiatives, particularly marketing materials, for lacking a local flavour or for hindering the localization efforts of regional offices (WG4, WS1, WD1). In reflecting on this issue, WG4 suggested that focusing on local clients, devising the marketing materials used in branding initiatives locally, and *“introducing the actual team members rather than just the company”* are much more effective ways of conducting the initiatives particularly in hard economic conditions.

5.6.3. *“Management speak”*

Many engineers perceived the initiatives as messages from the top management – what management expects the company to be – and a sort of monologue from “the top”. In this way, one engineer dismissed many of the initiatives as “management speak”: *“I don’t mean any disloyalty, but I think ... a lot of it is a little bit sort of ‘management speak’”*.

Many engineers believed middle management behaviour to be central in turning initiatives into actions and in affecting employees' attitudes and behaviour. Some stated that employees 'copy' or, as WS1 put it, 'intimate' their line managers. The significant role of managers in transferring the vision and values to their direct employees was outlined by some respondents; that it is through management behaviour that visions and values cascade down the employee levels. WS1 used the metaphor of "Chinese whispers" to explicate this impact; she explained the risk of gaps arising between the top management vision and employee culture due to the failings of intermediate managers along the way:

"if he is giving the wrong impression and...his own interpretation of the vision and then I'm following his leads...then eventually it is gonna be like Chinese whispery that by the end of that process you look lost {laughter} the ultimate aim." (WS1)

In some accounts, it appeared that, rather surprisingly, the initiatives communicated directly by a top manager in personal or face-to-face interaction with employees were quite clearly remembered by engineers. Three engineers referred to the value word 'excellence', which interestingly enough was not among the five key value words stated in the corporate philosophy statement, and asserted that they could easily articulate how it translates into their processes. This was because the Managing Director (MD) had insisted on 'excellence' in particular, and he himself had explained the implications of 'excellence' in a speech for employees:

"The only thing I do remember about any of these things I hear is [John], our MD, his little mantra is 'excellence'...He just says whenever you're doing a bit of work, whenever it's about to go out the door, take another look at it and say

'is it excellent'...; that completely relates with me because that's exactly what I do. I look at everything the team send out and I say 'no spelling mistake there or...' whatever it might be, as simple as it might be...so that simple thing 'is it excellent?' yes or no is a question you ask yourself. That to me means a whole lot more than any of that ever will because that's just woolly words." (WG4)

It can be argued that the power element – top management standing clearly behind the value word 'excellence' – and that personal contact between the two people are influential factors in establishing the values in the minds and processes of engineers.

This impact was corroborated by another engineer's criticism of top management for paying lip service to UK employees, particularly during the recession, on the implications of the (new) corporate brand: *"for me, the idea of leadership, culture, brand, they're interlinked"*. He further criticized top WRJ executives for spending no more than a few minutes since the acquisition talking to UK employees directly about the implications of the WRJ corporate brand identity post-acquisition. He was also critical that if the WRJ top management so strongly emphasized the importance of the corporate brand and values, why did senior WRJ executives not spend more than a few minutes talking to the UK employees about it in person? This, to him like many others, insufficient consideration amounted to a misconduct that breached and discredited much of the corporate brand initiative activity in the minds of WRJ-UK employees.

Equally in other cases, the hypocrisy of management and their failure to abide by the company codes of ethics, as espoused in values statements and the like, appeared to undermine and discredit the corporate brand in the employees' eyes. One engineer shared concerns about the ethical codes of conduct and raised doubts about the extent to which the WRJ corporate brand itself stands by its (ethical) values:

“Now, good, I agree with all that, yeah, but I also know that we work in Libya. Ok? I also know that we work in Dubai...it’s like politicians saying back to basics and then realizing they have an affair...You got to be careful about standing up and giving all these values...I don’t have a problem with it, because personally I like the idea of having those values; but what those values means is saying ‘No’. If you gonna have things like that, you got to be able to say ‘we are not working there, or if we are working there, it’s under these conditions’.”

5.6.4. “A Given”

Some engineers perceived many of the corporate branding initiatives as ‘a given’; a convention that all companies today get involved in one way or another: *“I would just take it with a pinch of salt, I think. I know all companies are going to do that”*. Thus, the presumption of many engineers was that there is usually a gap between the corporate brand claims – ‘this is what we’re all about’ – and the reality of the firm – ‘what the company actually is’:

“I generally have a preconception of what is going to happen on one of the induction courses and you will get some core values thrown at you and ‘this is what we’re all about’ and I’ll be sat there like ‘ok, right, great, now just tell me a bit more about what the company actually is’.”

Many discounted the statements because most companies *“probably say the same thing”* when it comes to initiatives like values or corporate social responsibility (CSR) statements. Some respondents indicated that the words are by far ‘overused’. For instance, WD1 refrained from using value words such as ‘passion’ and ‘excellence’ because, as she put it, they are overused and hence might not deliver meaning: *“I prefer to steer clear of them a little bit because I think they’re slightly overused now”* (WD1).

Furthermore, many engineers perceived adherence to the corporate branding initiatives as a subconscious rather than necessarily a conscious process. Among others, WD2 considered the initiatives, particularly the values, as inherent and ingrained in all they did. He used the metaphor of DNA to explain the role of values in day-to-day engineering procedures: *“they are...part of the DNA...of what we do anyway”* (WD2). In addition, while the resources dedicated to corporate branding activities and the number of initiatives were perceived as ‘not too much’, some engineers believed that they were sufficient.

5.7. Engineers’ contribution to corporate branding

The engineers’ contribution to the corporate brand (part of the second research question) was reported to be manifold. It was outlined that *“being proud of what you are part of”* is a significant determinant for the engineers’ self-driven contribution to the corporate brand, whereby everyone makes an effort to enhance the corporate brand (WD3).

5.7.1. “We are consultancies so we sell people”

The significant role of ‘people’ in delivering consultancy services and hence contributing to the corporate brand was remarked upon by many engineers. To this end, ‘selling the right image’ was said by some to be one of the ways in which engineers are supposed to contribute to the corporate brand:

“...we are consultancies, so we sell people...we don’t have a product that we send out the door; we send our people out the door and to that effect, I think, it’s vital that those people are selling the corporate brand and selling the right image and...selling the right message...” (WS1)

In this respect, ‘selling’ the corporate brand – i.e. doing some sort of marketing on top of engineering activities – was indicated as an important contribution engineers make to the corporate brand. Furthermore, many engineers articulated their contributions in other ways. One asserted her role, post-acquisition, to be, “*selling the [WRJ] brand to clients and making them understand that ... our culture hasn’t changed*” (WS1) – i.e. maintaining the image and reputation of SMB, and associating it with the newly-formed brand of WRJ-UK.

One director explained another form of contribution; he remarked that the ‘sustainability group’, comprised of engineers from across the company, looked at a wide range of activities across the firm to ensure that ‘sustainability’ was being ‘lived by’ at all levels; from hand-towels and drinking cups, to buildings and designs, these engineers looked into things to see how they could improve them and make them more sustainable. Similarly, ‘green days’ was said by WD3 to be another occasion for engineers to think about and enhance sustainability; in these events engineers compete on the best ways that sustainability concepts are applied, “*both office-wise and project-wise*” (WD3).

However, none of the respondents indicated any sort of direct contribution to the building and development of corporate branding initiatives. Instead, everyone doing their best – e.g. “*trying to do the best work I can*” (WG3) or “*do it as best as we possibly can*” (WG4) – was believed by many engineers to be the way one could contribute to the corporate brand, rather than making direct contributions to corporate brand initiatives as such:

“I think the best thing that I can do, and the thing I have most control over is the quality of my work” (WG2)

“...to try and be proactive in offering the alternatives to the design team and to the architects, and to the client obviously.” (WG3)

On a more direct level, WD3 explained his contribution to corporate branding was in local value-setting. He mentioned that UK managers sit together in meetings regularly to adapt the corporate brand values to the UK setting. He explained that in those meetings – e.g. value workshops – directors sit together and discuss issues such as, *“what’s our key things; what we want our values and directions to be and then what to do – these are just words – what is the meaning beneath the word; how does that impact on our staff and how we know we’ve got there”*. He further explained the rationale of doing so by outlining that although WRJ-UK values are informed by the over-arching WRJ Group values, the two need to be distinctive as well:

“Because their values anyway we embrace. But I think there is a realization that ...each country and culture is slightly different. So how you interpret those, has to be slightly different...the overall ethos is consistent across the group, but we’ll have our own slight take on it in terms of how we apply that.” (WD3)

Hence, a contribution in the implementation of the values was said to be one of the ways engineers, mostly at senior grades, contribute to the corporate brand. WD3 saw his contribution at the implementation level, given that the guidelines and corporate branding activities of WRJ Group were, to him, unchangeable and “very much laid down”: *“I can then influence how that’s applied within the UK, but I can’t change group direction on that”*.

On the other hand, some engineers did not consider themselves to have had a direct contribution to the corporate brand as such. Instead, they believed that they had only complied with it and “followed it in practice”. For instance, in response to the question

as to whether he sees himself contributing directly to the corporate brand, WG1 asserted, “*I wouldn’t say that, no; probably just agreeing with it and following it into practice*”. Nevertheless, it was mentioned by WD3 that there was a direct line provided to the overall WRJ director of global practice for all employees to use if they needed to, e.g. if they noticed drastically unethical conduct, or if they wanted to raise a substantive concern.

5.8. Disengaging factors upon the corporate brand initiatives

A number of factors could be identified in engineers’ accounts that appeared to disengage engineers from corporate brand initiatives. These are discussed below.

5.8.1. “Brand is communication”

Some engineers criticized the way the corporate brand and branding initiatives were communicated; they considered poor communication a cause of disengagement. The remote initiation of corporate brand-related messages and the exclusion of (UK) engineers from the building and development of initiatives were criticized: “*I know where it’s coming from. But it’s coming from Denmark*” (WS5). Some respondents were more specific, and indicated that the personal or social connection – which perhaps better signifies the importance of branding initiatives than plain emails or other modes of communication can – was by far the most conspicuously missing key factor in the way corporate branding initiatives were communicated at the time of the study:

“If you work for me and I say ‘this is very important’, and I send an email, in your head you might go... ‘why didn’t he just come and talk to me about it? {laugh} am I not important enough that you actually want to come and spend time with?’...now, that’s a personal thing; but I actually think that even if

people aren't thinking out there, there is a subtle psychological link there, to the way people are, and how they respond to [WRJ], as an idea, a brand, you know; brand is communication, and...if you've got an idea...and you say this is the way the business is, you need to tell me that..."

To this effect, the lack of personal or 'live' contact between top management and the engineers, along with insufficient authenticity (i.e. sincerity and honesty) in communications, were regarded as serious issues that could disengage engineers from corporate branding initiatives. Furthermore, inconsistencies that engineers perceived between the 'claims' made and 'deeds' performed by top management, appeared to disassociate them with the initiatives substantially:

"[WRJ] always talk about this one company attitude which is their kind of slogan, that we are one company; but we are very sort of cut off from the London office and the UK is cut off from the European countries... so we are one company and they promote all this kind of these values. I'm not sure they're implemented as much as people like to say, really."

5.8.2. *"Woolly, broad and commonsense"*

Some engineers criticized the 'language' that was used for the initiatives and considered it a significant barrier and factor in disengaging engineers. It was said in many cases that initiatives, such as the values statement, were 'woolly', 'broad', or 'commonsensical' the way they stood at the time of study. Similarly, some engineers remarked that they had experienced rather similar wordings or literature in their previous tenures. One engineer, for instance, compared the values statement with those of his previous employers and remarked:

“I think that’s why I get a bit desensitised to it all, because I just think it’s another set of values and, to be honest, there’s not much difference between these words than there are to my previous company” (WG4).

In another case, WS3 considered values statements and the like “too fuzzy”. He instead underlined the everyday practices and behaviours of employees as being much more meaningful and important:

“I think you take your values out of what you do every day...how people in your company...treat you and how you treat them and what kind of development opportunities there are in a company and your support from your team leaders and where there are certain budgets for training and these kind of things”.

He, like some others, criticized the company for spending extensively on “paying consultants to come in and promote this stuff” and suggested that the “money would be better spent on just...having social events between offices and internal competitions, whatever it is to bring the company closer”. On reflecting on such issues, some engineers reported to have developed their “own definition of the brand” not necessarily similar to that espoused by WRJ Group:

“I guess I didn’t even know the brand... {Laughing}, the five elements that we’re supposed to be selling...yeah that’s true. I live my own definition of the brand. I guess I have defined the brand in my own way and that’s what I feel I’m selling which, yeah, is a gap...” (WS1)

In the same terrain, some respondents referred to engineering-marketing dichotomies whereby their association with the latter activity was minimized in favour of the former. Some engineers associated corporate branding activities with marketing or at least ‘non-

engineering' activities. Therefore, if their job was mostly about doing engineering – e.g. creating figures, writing reports, or doing assessments – they tended to distance themselves from corporate branding; in such cases, they claimed that their jobs least had to do with that class (branding/marketing) of activity: “...*but, really, all of our fee earning work is engineering or built around engineering. So, I'm not sure there's anything that we, that I would relate to*” (WG4). This occurrence was partly because the relationship to or relevance of corporate branding was not articulated to them convincingly enough.

In this sense, a sort of evolutionary transition in the engineering grades was also identified; a sort of ranking effect, wherein as engineers become more senior, their job gets away from pure engineering – “calcs” – and leans more towards marketing activities – “work winning” (WS3). In other words, engineers tend to be more involved in corporate branding activities – and, equally, distanced from purely engineering practices – as they are promoted to successively more senior positions.

Age also appeared to be a determinant in engineers' association (or engagement) with the corporate brand initiatives. It was somewhat apparent that younger engineers are more likely to buy into corporate branding initiatives and take the initiatives seriously; as one director indicated, “*we tend to take on young passionate engineers ... that then enable us to create and discuss about ... things that we see as our value and our role in society*” (WD3).

Another engineer referred to the size of the company, in addition to the age factor, and remarked that engagement with the initiatives and alignment with the values can be much easier and faster in smaller firms:

“when I was more junior...I think I joined a very different business, because I joined a small business and you become part of it a lot quicker; it’s a lot easier; so I was probably more involved in these sorts of things as a graduate than people would be nowadays.” (WD3)

Another manager contradicted this and asserted that the level of cynicism towards corporate brand initiatives can be heightened the younger the engineers are. He said that, for instance, if he was asked corporate brand-related questions two decades ago, he would have been much more cynical of it generally, whereas his attitude has now changed in favour of branding. Over the course of time, *“experience, family life and working life’* have shaped his attitude in favour of the corporate brand and related activities. He also referred to engineers’ *“schooling”* as a root cause of unfamiliarity with corporate brand initiatives; *“reputation of engineers being tough, quite narrow minded”*.

5.9. Summary

In this chapter, engineers’ reflections on corporate brand and corporate branding initiatives were discussed within the context of a UK subsidiary of an international engineering consulting firm. Definitions and the implications of the corporate brand (as part of the first research question) were discussed first. Despite ambiguities in defining what the corporate brand is, engineers appeared to distinguish clearly enough the differences between the two corporate brands of WRJ and SMB (the acquired subsidiary). This demonstrated that engineering brands can have meaningful and distinctive brand personalities.

Many associated and defined the corporate brand with organizational culture and identity. In the case studied, the central role of ‘people’ and how employees behave on a daily basis were outlined as crucial in determining the corporate brand image. The central role of an organization’s founders was also raised. Inter-personal relations and personal connection between the employees and founders was also said to be an important factor for engineers’ engagement with the corporate brand. Other respondents associated and defined the corporate brand as higher-level values sitting on top of engineering practice. Corporate brand was also defined as the ‘business’ or ‘marketing’ side of engineering consulting.

Next, the significance and implications of the corporate brand in the engineering consulting setting were discussed from the engineers’ viewpoint. A strong corporate brand was reported to be important in winning ‘interesting’ projects, (and thus) retaining talent, and in surviving in competitive markets (such as the UK). Engineering managers also signalled that corporate branding is a high-priority and an important mode of normative control for top management. They also noted that disagreement upon the corporate brand values is a source of misalignment and tension among internal constituencies.

The colourful role of personal brands and their inter-relationships with the corporate brand was also discussed in interviews. It was identified that personal brands can be in rivalry or synergy with the corporate brand. It was indicated by some engineers that the importance of personal brands can be offset as projects get bigger in size. On the other hand, personal brands were said to be particularly important for customers in small-scale projects. It was also said that the UK market ascribes particular attention to personal brands and inter-personal relationships. Alignment between personal values and those of the corporate brand was also said to enhance engineers’ morale,

engagement and devotion to work. However, senior management noted that full alignment *per se* is practically impossible.

The implications of incorporation were also discussed with engineers. The two organizational styles of professional partnership and corporation appeared to be in constant tension. The two forms of organization structure, nevertheless, exist together and can have (peaceful) co-existence. Among the positive consequences, some engineers referred to connotations of ‘bigness’ as being helpful in winning big projects, securing a sense of assurance in economically-difficult times, and in attracting talent. As for negative implications, a change of management style from a ‘led’ to a ‘managed business’, connotations of a lack of interest on smaller-scale projects, and the loss, dilution, or damaging of personal and collective identities were outlined by respondents.

Another colourful theme in the engineers’ accounts was the implications of the 2008 economic downturn. The dominant threat presented by economic pressures was reported to be ‘suppressing values’, leading the company to breach its own values in ‘hunting’ for work in places that it would have not gone in financially-normal times. Internally, as well, a lack of attention to employees’ morale because of an over-attention to sorting out the finances was said by some senior engineers to encourage talent to depart, “*as soon as the economy turns the corner*”. Economically harsh times was also said to be ‘the test’ whereby successful firms can prove the extent to which they stand by their ethical codes of conduct and “value their values”.

With respect to corporate branding initiatives, many criticized the one-way communication of initiatives. In other cases, initiatives were not valued by engineers who dismissed them as “a given”, “management speak”, or “overused”. Others referred

to breaches of the values by the firm that, to them, had discredited the authenticity (i.e. reliability) of the initiatives to a large extent.

Furthermore, engineers appeared to demarcate between the hard/rigorous procedures and the soft/emotional aspects of engineering practice whereby the former speaks to engineering and the latter is associated with the corporate brand. Respectively, many engineers' accounts showed an engagement with the engineering side at the expense of disengagement with the corporate branding side; this effect was reported to be related to the age, background and seniority of engineers.

Engineers' accounts also revealed the ways in which they see their daily procedures contributing to the corporate brand. In this regard, although many did not recognize they were making any direct contribution to the building and development of the initiatives, some referred to a number of cases where they had contributed to the implementation of initiatives in practice. Doing some sort of marketing on top of engineering and 'selling the right image' were also mentioned as contributions to the corporate brand. A number of factors that tend to cause disinterest and disengage engineers from active engagement and contribution were also identified in the engineers' views. Among them, language use, neglecting face-to-face communication, engineers' rational inclinations, age and company size were mentioned.

Chapter 6: Case Study Three

6.1. Introduction, objectives, and chapter structure

As explained in Chapter Three, primary data were elicited from three engineering consulting firms and subsequently structured as case studies. The third case study examined here is that of JC Consultants, which is an international consulting firm of a few hundred employees, headquartered in the UK and active in diverse engineering fields (e.g. structural, oil and gas, geotechnical), but particularly in military and nuclear designs.

In this chapter, as in Chapters Four and Five, the case study is presented in a thematic manner. The following key sections constitute the organization of the chapter: definitions and implications of the corporate brand; perceptions of engineers about corporate branding initiatives; contributions of engineers to corporate branding; and factors that appeared to disengage engineers from active participation in corporate branding activities. In Chapter Seven, the themes of this and the previous two chapters are revisited in light of the literature and the contributions of the findings are discussed in depth.

6.2. Case Three: JC Consultants

As explained in Chapter Three, the third case study was carried out in JC Consultants, an engineering consulting firm of a few hundred employees providing consultancy services across a number of different industries (e.g. transport, civil, geotechnical, aerospace, oil/gas, defence, nuclear and renewable energies) mainly on medium- to large-scale projects, thanks to its broad and versatile knowledge base. That said, the

civil nuclear and defence industries constitute JC's core proficiency, experience and pedigree. The company operates with a number of national and offshore offices and has a significant growth rate.

Interviews were carried out at two main UK offices, one of which was the head office. In all, eleven respondents participated in one-to-one interviews. All interviews were suitable for further analysis. In the remainder of the chapter, interviewees are referred to with codes: five directors (JD1_5); three senior engineers (JS1_3); and three graduate engineers (JG1_3). Among them, JD3, JG2, and JG3 were female. Director-engineers are approximately 41_50 years old, senior engineers are 31_40 years old, and graduate engineers are 21_30 years old.

Compared to the other engineering consultancies studied, JC is made up of a large number of teams, sub-divisions and partners. Each team forms and re-forms occasionally, based on the projects at hand and expertise on demand for any given project. In recent years, rigid organizational structures and hierarchies have by and large been replaced by an organic and looser formation of teams that group and dismantle depending on the specificities of projects. The move toward this kind of structure has also in part driven by the diversification strategy pursued by JC's top management in more recent years in order to mitigate its heavy reliance on and association with the defence and civil nuclear sectors. The number of directors interviewed is comparatively higher than other grades as JC had undergone a change of strategy, as explained above; there was one director or team manager for about every twenty engineers. In the remainder of the chapter, emergent themes are discussed under the main themes of perceptions; significance/implications; engagement with the corporate brand; and disengagement with the corporate branding initiatives.

6.3. Engineers' perceptions of the corporate brand

In response to the question: "What does the corporate brand mean to you?" (RQ1), engineers' responses gave rise to a variety of different and inter-related subjects. In some accounts the themes were interestingly similar to those which surfaced in the other case studies. In this part, the discussion begins with engineers' definitions of the corporate brand, and then engineers' perceptions about the implications of the corporate brand are presented and discussed.

6.3.1. "Who we are"

Many engineers defined the corporate brand as the representation of "*who we are*" and "*what we do*" (JD3). The corporate brand was considered as a brief depiction of "*what it is we're about*" and "*where are we?*" (JD2). Due to the wide-spread and versatile range of expertise and industries that JC was associated and engaged with, providing a clear and undisputed answer to these questions of identity was markedly difficult, in some cases even said to be impossible (JD2, JS2). Respondents' difficulties in answering questions about corporate identity (in the concise form of a corporate brand tagline, mission, vision, or mantra) appeared to be associated with confusion, anxiety and discomfort for some employees: "*people ask me what I do for a living and I really struggle with it*"²⁰.

As explained earlier in the introduction of the chapter, the new associations of the corporate brand brought about through diversification of the corporate brand appeared to have caused some confusion among engineers as to what it is, at the end of the day,

²⁰As some cynical and controversial statements can bear a certain level of risk for the interviewees, the identity of the respondents is further concealed wherever germane for ethical reasons.

that they do and how they should define themselves, although JC has succeeded in some respects in implementing its diversification strategy. Therefore, the corporate brand, as the representation of company identity, had become a significant and somewhat controversial subject at the time of the study:

“I think we have struggled with trying to write down what it is about, being a consultant working for [JC]. What does that actually mean?” (JD5)

The uncertainties in identity projections that surfaced in many of the engineers’ accounts demonstrate that employees are among the first stakeholder bases to feel the discomfort and confusion of corporate brand transformations, even prior to other stakeholders (e.g. shareholders, customers and/or watchdogs). It also shows that the principal contexts within which JC formerly operated (such as the defence and nuclear sectors) had a significant impact on framing its corporate brand image. Distancing itself from its former (military/civil nuclear) brand image and associations appeared to require a great deal of effort, time and management support: *“we often have lengthy debates around imagery that we use on the walls, on our website, in our brochures”* (JD1). In this regard, JD2 noted that the difficulties involved in dissociating brand image from the military and/or nuclear industries and at the same time reaching consensus in communicating the wide variety of industries within which JC now operates, have been the reasons why they had *“shied away from doing too much work in branding”*.

In addition to the identity-based definitions of the corporate brand, some engineers defined the corporate brand of JC in particular with terms such as ‘safe’, ‘independent’, ‘reliable’, and ‘trustworthy’. All these characteristics (particularly ‘independent’) were said to be crucial to the success of an engineering consulting brand; *“...we try and*

maintain our independent brand...our clients require independence and impartiality” (JD1).

6.3.2. *Cultural values*

In attempts to define the corporate brand, the associations between the corporate brand and culture were also signified in a number of ways. Some respondents referred to a recent rebranding exercise and identified the association between the corporate brand, logo and culture: “...for me when I hear the words ‘corporate branding’ I immediately visualise, kind of, the logo...” (JG3). Misalignment between the connotations of the previous logo, as an artefact of the corporate brand, and organizational culture was thus raised as a source of disbelief in corporate brand initiatives. It was noted that the font style used in the previous logo implied a sense of conservativeness and being old-fashioned which did not align with the young and dynamic culture of the firm (JD2).

In other accounts, some identified corporate brand *values* with organizational culture and emphasized that the values should represent the actual culture of the firm (JD3). Similarly, misalignment between espoused values and the actual culture of the firm was said to cause disbelief, disregard and indifference toward values statements among employees. Others indicated that one of the reasons why JC does not “*explicitly write up anywhere, or put down on a piece of paper*” clearly its values, internally and externally, is that values are implicitly embedded in the culture: “...a lot of the values we have are sort of implicit in what we’re doing on a day to day basis” (JD5).

Regarding the ‘implicitness’ of values, it was noted that articulating a clear values statement which represents the reality of organizational culture is difficult. Values statements were also the subject of internal debate whereas some directors believed that the values needed to be clearly communicated, another group of directors were strongly

cynical about the benefits of doing so. Among the cynical voices, JD4 referred to values statements directly and criticized them for lacking authenticity (believability), meaninglessness, and not yielding perceivable impact.

It was also noted that organizational cultures experienced during previous employment affects the belief systems of employees in the course of time (JD5). To that effect, employees with long tenures (particularly those in the defence side of the business) as well as employees with long tenures in other organizations were reportedly more inclined to resist and/or disregard corporate brand initiatives intended to instigate cultural changes (JS2).

6.4. Significance and implications of the corporate brand

A number of themes underlining the importance and implications of the corporate brand emerged in engineers' accounts. In this regard, engineers appeared to be cynical at times; *"there's a lot of cynicism, as I said, from engineers towards this idea"* (JD2). Part of the cynicism appeared to be associated with the limited perceivable and/or tangible impacts on engineers' attitudes and their daily practices: *"...people saw this rebranding and change of logo and everything and all of the ... templates and the whole lot changed, but it doesn't affect us"* (JS1). Nevertheless, almost all respondents acknowledged the significance of 'the brand' for engineering consulting businesses to varying extents.

Many noted the importance of the corporate brand for attracting and retaining talent. With respect to attracting talent, it was noted that JC actively participates in graduate fairs and advertises its job opportunities to students, highlighting its advanced cutting-edge expertise:

“...you would push the fact that we do advanced stuff...it’s interesting work; it’s cutting edge technology; it’s doing things that weren’t possible before.” (JG1)

Promoting jobs to prospective employees was perceived as similar to selling the corporate brand and services to (prospective) clients: *“the way that we sell our jobs to graduates, I think, is quite similar to the way that we sell our services to clients” (JG2)*. In terms of retaining talent, likewise, it was indicated that, since, *“[JC] is known for being able...to do things other people can’t” (JG1)*, the ‘pride factor’ associated with working for JC helps to retain engineers.

Alongside the points of significance outlined by engineers, the corporate brand was not highly rated and given a somewhat secondary importance compared to technical expertise and the quality of the service in many of the accounts; *“a brand to me is in some ways almost derogatory because you shouldn’t need one...if you’re good enough at what you do” (JG1)*. At the director level, equally, this contention surfaced that the corporate brand is heavily dependent on the quality of service and the technical skills of engineers. As one senior manager outlined: *“the way we have built business, historically, is through doing a good job and earning the trust of very technically oriented clients” (JD2)*.

To this effect, the primary management focus was said to be ascribed to engineering quality and technique instead of the corporate brand and marketing as such: *“the thing to focus on [rather than] brand is quality of people” (JD2)*. Other, more cynical engineers played down the importance of brand, particularly at the presentational level, to the everyday operation of engineers: *“corporate branding is a logo on the front of a report or something like that and it makes very little difference to anything we do on a day to day basis” (JS1)*. Thus, if anything was to be prioritized, it was said to be

technical proficiency and engineering quality rather than corporate brand-related activities.

6.4.1. *Personal brands*

Another strong theme with respect to the implications of the corporate brand was the inter-animation between the corporate brand and professional engineers' personal brands. Some prioritized between the two brand types. In some cases, for instance, for nurturing extant relationships or sustaining repeat business, it was signified that personal brands play a more important role compared to the corporate brand: "*for repeat business...I think it's the personal reputation and that level of relationship...which is more important*" (JS1). Personal brands, as the primary points of contact with clients and the outside world, were also prioritized given that human contacts form the basis of inter-organizational collaboration:

"...the only experience that a lot of customers get of [JC] is dealing with me or similar people who go out and meet them. So they don't experience [JC] as a whole; they experience the people" (JS1)

It was remarked that it is the personal brands that at times attract clients in the first place, particularly on small- to medium-size projects; "*my reputation is what brings them back in the first place*" (JS1). It was generally believed that (field) engineers are the most influential sales factors to client engineers – i.e. engineers sell to engineers more effectively – in the engineering consulting sector as a business-to-business context:

“...engineering is very peculiar because engineers sell to engineers, predominantly. And they sell to the engineers and then the engineer persuades his boss that there is a need for a service.” (JD4)

On the other hand, the corporate brand was said to be more potent in assuring clients of the quality, consistency and durability of services; *“...that they’re still going to get a good job, even if it’s not me that does it” (JS1)*. In this sense, the corporate brand was considered the bedrock and back-up for the personal brands.

Personal brands and the corporate brand were also reported to be mutually influential. Personal brands are enhanced by the reputation of the corporate brand: *“if the company is well known for a variety of good reasons and by association, therefore, those good reasons come to me as well” (JG1)*. Equally, the corporate brand can be enhanced by the personal brands of its respected engineers. For example, it was indicated that the corporate brand can leverage the personal relationships inherent in personal brands and deploy their network of contacts – ‘buying in their contacts’ – particularly of those engineers with more seniority and experience: *“you occasionally bring in very senior people...partly what you are doing is buying their contacts” (JS2)*.

It was outlined by some engineers (JS2 and JD1) that personal brands have the facility to affect the corporate brand and vice versa. Some respondents noted that personal brands can, *“challenge the way that [the firm] operate[s] sometimes and...alter the brand to a certain extent...make a tangible effect, or they change...how the brand is formulated” (JS2)*. It was even said that personal brands’ impacts on the corporate brand are an inevitable and somewhat favourable characteristic of the engineering consulting setting, and nurture the agility, innovativeness, and efficiency of the firm overall:

“...by its very nature, we’re employing very intelligent...motivated...ambitious people and that’s an interesting dynamic because obviously...when they come to the company they are going to change it; they’re going to affect it and we employ them because of that...there’s no point in employing a whole stream of clones...” (JS2)

It was also noted that the more senior the engineer, the more capable they are of affecting and changing the corporate brand. This inter-animation surfaced at times in the form of latent rivalry between the corporate brand and personal brands: *“senior managers may often argue for their own particular backgrounds and expertise to be prioritised...so there is a little bit of a parochial approach at times” (JD1)*. Synergy between the two was also underlined as key to enhancing efficiency; failing to achieve synergy can be mutually damaging, for instance misalignment between the two was reported to increase the likelihood that knowledge resources leave the firm.

6.4.2. Incorporation: ‘essence’ and ‘integration’

One of the implications in respect of corporate branding emerged around the notion of incorporation and corporate activities. Particularly as the company was growing rapidly in size and in coming into competition with new rivals, integrated and incorporated corporate branding activities and initiatives were reported to become more essential:

“...we’re now getting to a size where we have got to compete against some of the larger competitors and I think if we don’t get some of these issues sorted out, we won’t be in a very good position, really.” (JD3)

Corporate branding as a mode and medium of incorporation was said to help sustain the ‘essence’ of the firm as it grows in size: *“we might just begin to lose the essence of [JC]*

or, you know, just be an engineering consultancy” (JD3). Thus, the difference between ‘just an engineering consultancy’ and ‘a corporate brand with a distinctive essence’ was said to be perceivable through cautious corporate brand management. Some respondents described how ‘normal’ inductions, at a more personal and individual level, are becoming increasingly costly as the number of engineers joining the firm every year increases and as managers become ever busier:

“It used to be that directors would be mingling amongst people; senior management people would be out there pitching and helping out. Well, now, they’re quite remote beings...new joiners used to be introduced to everyone personally; we’re now too big; you can’t do that” (JD2)

To address this effect, organized and predefined initiatives that can familiarize newcomers with the culture of the firm and the corporate brand of JC more quickly and efficiently have become highly pertinent. Face-to-face interactions, social events and the like are no longer sustainable as the only modes of communication and acculturation. These (more interactive) modes, although strongly influential, were said to have become applicable in a more complementary fashion to incorporative and corporate branding initiatives; *“as we get bigger, [corporate branding initiatives are] probably more necessary because those more informal activities and even those things like lunchtime seminars...won’t be powerful enough in themselves” (JS2).*

In this regard, JS2 used the term ‘JCing’ to refer to the familiarization process of (new) employees with the culture of the firm and the corporate brand, which according to him and many others can take from six months up to a year. He contended that the JCing process becomes increasingly difficult and lengthy as the company gets bigger in size. He used the term ‘JCed’ to refer to those employees who have been (successfully)

familiarized, adapted to and aligned with the JC culture and corporate brand; “*what I refer to as being [JC]ed is becoming an integrated part of the company*” (JS2). He further raised doubts about the extent to which such alignment processes are realistically feasible in large firms: “*I don’t honestly know whether that works for a much larger brand*”. It was noted, nevertheless, that managing corporate brand initiatives internally can facilitate, enhance, and shorten the JCing process:

“I think there is a significant cost associated with doing that ‘[JC]ing’ process and compressing it and that significant cost is to do with people actually doing activities or learning stuff which doesn’t directly bring in money.” (JS2)

In addition to educating newcomers, it was believed by some (JD2, JS2, JD3, JG3) that, as the firm gets bigger in size, corporate branding can be deployed by management to sustain the ethos of the firm – ‘to protect your values’ (JD2):

“...you get to a size where you need to actively manage your brand...[if you don’t] there’s a big risk that very strong, very positive ethos is just going to dissipate.” (JD2)

Corporate branding activities also appeared to be leveraged as a means of management control in a normative manner. Given the partnership style of engineering consulting businesses and as the company was growing rapidly in size, corporate branding activities were perceived by many as an important means of integration. It was noted that partnership styles without any integrated control can lead to fragmentation of the organization’s knowledge arms. A director-engineer explained this issue by referring to one of JC’s regional offices that had developed a completely different ethos and culture to the rest of the JC, which had caused several conflicts in the past.

A graduate engineer associated the corporate brand initiatives with the fact that the company was getting bigger: “*as an engineer, corporate branding for me is more associated with big companies like Rolls Royce, like Airbus and stuff*”. He further remarked that corporate branding is needed to bring the whole company together: “*I associate that with the fact that we’re becoming a bigger company and we need something which brings us all together...*” (JG3). It was, however, highlighted that incorporative activities that bear connotations of increased bureaucracy can cause engineers to lose interest in the initiatives. A graduate engineer indicated loose bureaucratic controls as a positive characteristic of JC: “*there is very little of the bureaucracy and the red tape that a lot of engineers, by virtue of them being engineers will hate*” (JG1).

6.4.3. Military associations of the business

One of the themes that emerged strongly at different stages of the field work was the implications of the military associations of the business, and the corporate brand image/values generally associated with the defence work. As mentioned in the introduction, consultancy to the defence industry comprises a considerable part of JC’s activities, for which it also has a long pedigree.

Military-related consultancy activities appeared to yield a number of implications for employees especially, who raised concerns about the defence work in a number of ways.

First, it was revealed that some employees had personal reservations about defence- or military-related activities. These engineers experienced clashes between their personal values and defence work in general. Others found it at times “alienating” because they could at times be “*put off by everybody else*”. Others contended that “*as a tax payer*”,

they “*resent wasted money [i.e. inefficiency] on a lot of it*”. In this regard, some indicated that such ethical reservations have become more annoying as they have become more senior: “*I feel more uncomfortable with [it] than I did years ago*”. Although the company makes sure that its employees do not have (strong) objections to military/defence industry-related activities at the point of their recruitment by asking them to tick a box on their application form, it appeared that resentments are not resolved over time, but suppressed and concealed.

Second, some engineers perceived the military side of the corporate brand image, at times, to be overshadowing and thus damaging other interests of the firm (e.g. civil nuclear and renewable energy) in the eyes of clients and/or other external stakeholders: “*the defence guys do insist on putting up weaponry which is very annoying because it puts off my customers. My customers are all non-defence*”. One director explicated this implication further and argued that while the nuclear energy image can be positively influential when dealing with certain industries – e.g. oil and gas – in fostering a ‘very high quality’ image, the defence image can deter some prospective clients by implying ‘overpriced and poor quality’. In such cases, the problems associated with the defence image were less about ethical reservations *per se* and more about service quality perceptions.

Third, it was raised that the defence side of the corporate brand image can discourage particular types of talented engineers from joining the firm. This was highlighted by some respondents as depriving the firm of open access to talent in the job market as well as hindering the firm in entering into new areas because of its heavy association with a controversial industry. The risk of becoming caught up in groupthink or a ‘mono-cultural’ worldview was raised as a consequence of filtering out people with

reservations about JC's defence work. A senior engineer explained these negative implications:

"...that probably changes the types of people...who approach us in the first place; and I think that's negative because I think we are kind of in a spiral, it's very difficult for us to get out of because actually we would quite like to employ people...who have a slightly different view of the world and that would probably help us develop into other areas" (JS2)

Several cases were reported where representatives of the firm at graduate fairs had witnessed prospective employees' concerns, resistance and, at times, active sabotage. For instance, it was noted that on occasion during graduate fairs there had been evidence of a "*propaganda campaign against [JC]*" or "*students at the university have cottoned on to what [JC] do*" and/or "*the presentation on what [JC] does] has been hijacked by people who have wanted to make the point that [JC] works on military stuff whatever it be*" (JG1).

It was reported, however, that only a minority of current and prospective employees had personal ethical reservations about defence work (JG1, JG2, JS3). One graduate engineer who had experienced active sabotage of some prospective employees at graduate fairs believed that such reactions are only a result of misinformation. He contended that JC could have portrayed its non-military image more efficiently without surrendering its military-related activities:

"...there are some quite amusing flyers come out when we go to the graduate fairs and you get sort of the atom bomb cloud [JC] brand across the front of it...it's funny from our point of view because it's complete misinformation. You

know, they've taken two or three points off our website and made a campaign based on just those two or three points, ignoring everything else we do.” (JG1)

Respondents' reactions to the defence-industry-serving image, and in response to ethical concerns, were also manifold. Some engineers 'distanced' themselves from the defence side of the business by drawing a line between what they do in their daily job and the defence work elsewhere at JC; *“...the military work can be kept quite separate from everything else. So you don't necessarily have to come in and deal with all of the military side of things if you're not in that area” (JS1)*. This group of engineers by and large resolved identity tensions by this separation of their jobs from the defence work. They asserted that although they are part of a company that does a lot of defence work, they are only engaged with the non-defence parts of the business. One engineer stressed that he “compromises” on the defence activities in order to work on the interesting non-defence-related projects; *“I make that compromise because I know, as I said, there's a lot of very interesting stuff I do and I don't do any defence stuff”*.

Another form of reaction surfaced through engineers' 'interpretation' of defence-related activity whereby they justified their role in the defence side by portraying military work in a positive manner. For instance, some drew a line between 'knowledge' and 'application' and argued that they contributed to the former, but not to the latter directly – i.e. they contributed to the scientific side rather than the military side – and that *“the application is secondary” (JG1)*. A graduate engineer explained this further:

“...is it any different to, for example, developing an aeroplane that crashes and kills people?...you have to draw a line, at some point, between the knowledge and the application...If it then gets used in a military context, I don't think there is anything you can do to stop it...it's probably not preferable” (JG1)

Others, particularly those with longer tenures in the defence sector, defined defence work in a completely positive manner and even perceived working in the defence area as a 'value' to be proud of. One director contended that many engineers working on defence projects are focused on the 'production' and 'design' aspects of their work and not concerned about the 'purpose' and, to that effect, there is no point being concerned ethically:

"...whilst they appreciate that a gun may well be used to kill somebody, they actually see it as 'we've decided as a nation that we need to defend ourselves and the best way of doing that is a gun' and they want to manufacture and design the best product available. So, I think most engineers see it as product- and design-related rather than the purpose that it's being used for." (JD1)

Following another line of positive interpretation, some noted the applications of military advancements across non-military sectors and that *"there are a lot of things that get developed for military purposes that feed back and make civilian life a lot better"* (JG1). It was also indicated that even military projects have become 'greener' in recent years – *"we look at green ships"* (JD1) – so emphasising innocent and important knowledge transfer abiding by high environmental standards. These, at times opposing, stances towards defence work show that the corporate brand and its associations can play a significant and multifarious role in engineers' self-image constructs.

6.5. Engineering consulting and corporate branding

Some accounts referred to those specificities of the engineering consulting context that yield implications for corporate branding. The most colourful theme in this regard was the distinction between engineering and marketing. At times, engineers equated

corporate branding with marketing or perceived it as a subsidiary of marketing. In this sense, they defined corporate branding in terms such as the “*softer side of what they are doing*” (JD1), “*marketing fluff*” (JD3), “*sales tool*” (JG1), or “*marketing material for customers to buy into*” (JG3). These definitions demonstrate a certain level of detachment between engineers and corporate branding as engineers typically associate themselves with the ‘hard’, practical and rigorous dimensions of engineering practice. In this regard, a number of engineering characteristics were outlined that appeared to add to the engineering-marketing divide.

First, engineers’ general unfamiliarity with marketing or branding concepts was mentioned. Educational background and work experience were said to be the main reasons for such unfamiliarity:

“...the majority of engineers and even senior managers and directors in this industry have absolutely no idea about marketing; they have no idea about branding and they have no idea about the softer side of what they’re doing...So, you do tend to end up with a compromise rather than something that comes out as a leading brand image that you would get perhaps in another industry.”
(JD1)

Second, it emerged that engineers were dominant compared to marketing employees in terms of employee numbers and the value placed on their (engineering) mindset. Consequently, marketers or corporate branding advocates were conclusively marginalized and so had almost no voice in the strategic direction of the firm. As one of the advocates of corporate branding remarked: “*...we are completely dominated by engineers and have a very thin veneer of marketing professionals and...they find it very hard to have a voice...*” (JD1).

The lack of a dedicated marketing director, at board level, and engineers' insufficient communication skills were also mentioned as factors that contribute to the engineering-marketing divide; *"...there's a problem because we don't have a marketing director...and engineers...aren't terribly good at communicating sometimes"* (JD3).

Third, it was reported that engineers can at times be difficult to convince of the value, role, and positive implications of corporate branding; *"we're a company of engineers run by engineers and...engineers don't quite get it, to put it bluntly"* (JD2). "Engineering intellectual snobbery" was also noted, that is, engineers' tendency to look down on marketing concepts:

"...we don't value it as an activity in the company...it's engineering intellectual snobbery: 'what do these possibly have that we can't pick up in an afternoon reading a book?'" (JD2)

In addition, engineers' 'professionalism' was defined as the ability to deliver engineering exercises purely on the basis of engineering rigour, practicality and standards without any 'emotional impact factor'. In other words, engineering professionalism was defined as minimizing the influence of emotional factors – including corporate brand associations – while executing engineering practices: *"I don't think what the brand is changes how people work...they are professional"* (JS1). Although employees' identifications and emotional states were said to be highly pertinent to the quality of services delivered, professionalism was noted as the ability to minimize attitudinal and emotional forces. It was noted in several cases that engineers are by and large characterized by the inclination to *"look at what they are doing objectively"* and, therefore, are not extremely concerned about the corporate brand, values, and the *"other softer things"* (JD5).

“there are many people that work in the company that are engineers, full stop, and they don’t really mind whether they are working on a wind turbine or...an aero engine...I would say the majority of them look at what they are doing objectively and they look at the challenge of the issue, probably putting that ahead of their own personal beliefs as to what’s right and wrong and the arguments that are out there.” (JD1)

Another interesting characteristic mentioned was that in the UK engineering consulting firms attract the best talent available comfortably ahead of other engineering-intensive firms, whereas in other (European) countries the best engineering talent typically approaches big production-based engineering firms (e.g. Airbus), and then the next tier of engineering talent approaches consulting firms. This was reported to put UK engineering consultancies in a relatively prestigious position in terms of reputation for engineering knowledge and service quality. This feature was also said to put UK engineering consultancies in a stronger position in relationships with clients (JD2).

6.6. Disengaging factors upon the corporate brand initiatives

In response to the question of “How do you think you can contribute to the corporate brand?” (part of the second research question), engineers’ responses implied a number of factors that apparently could disengage them from active contribution to corporate branding activities. That said, it was by and large noted that the whole engagement with and contribution to the corporate brand process is subconscious, i.e. not something that engineers readily and consciously take into account: *“...a lot of that identity is done...through a lot of subconscious – I suppose – activities that allow people to understand what’s going on”* (JS2). It was also noted that the firm had reached a size

whereby it was felt highly important to consciously manage the corporate brand and enhance internal engagement with the initiatives:

“...we’ve been able to...even unconsciously manage our brand. As I said, we’ve not understood it. It sort of happened and it’s a good strong brand, but it’s not been consciously managed. I think we’ve now got to the point where we’ve grown so quickly if we don’t manage it, it could go wrong” (JD2)

Four main factors could be identified in engineers’ accounts that appeared to disengage or disinterest engineers from corporate brand initiatives.

First, JC’s ‘top-down’ conduct and excessively one-way approach in the building, development, and communication of initiatives was reported to disengage engineers from active contribution. It was even remarked that the firm had at many times taken a “*quite dictatorial*” approach in conducting corporate brand initiatives. Engineers were reportedly largely excluded from the development of initiatives. It was noted that it was only the senior management team (the managing director and the chairman in particular) that were actively involved in devising and developing corporate brand-related initiatives. The rest of the employees’ stance on the initiatives remained passive, and their viewpoint was reportedly summed up as initiatives were likely to “*end up as a complete compromise*” (JD1) as a result of the excessively top-down conduct.

Second, it was noted that engineers’ preoccupation with other obligations had been a significant factor in their disregard of corporate branding-related initiatives and activities. Some perceived the whole corporate branding exercise as “painful because they were already very busy with other duties at hand: “*...they will see it as a painful exercise and something that they’re probably too busy to undertake*” (JD3). Some underlined that “being busy” is an inevitable characteristic of engineering consultants

nowadays and, thus, corporate branding activities and the like are likely to appear as extra ‘weight’ and work load to engineers. As one senior engineer noted, management, more often than not, tries to fill the schedule of its (rather highly-paid) consultants up to its maximum and, to that effect, there is much less space left for other complementary matters such as corporate branding:

“I think when I’m managed most of the time, its people make sure that I’ve got plenty of work to do...so there is very little management needed and when there is management, I don’t think the corporate branding comes into it” (JS1).

Third, it was noted that poor communication is another factor that most of the time causes engineers’ disengagement. Miscommunication and differences in mindset between marketing and engineering constituents was also reported as one of the important disengaging factors: *“...we are two very different people; sometimes talking different languages...we have got two very different mindsets” (JD3).* More importantly, others noted that insufficient ‘face-to-face’ communication, as a by-product of increased incorporation, causes further disconnection between engineers and marketers, who were mainly in charge of the corporate brand initiatives: *“...there’s much less...face to face engagement. I don’t know how you cope with that...” (JD2).*

Fourth, engineers appeared to engage rather strongly with projects, clients, work-based teams, and/or industries within which JC executes projects. These types of engagement came, sometimes, at the expense of engagement with the JC corporate brand and appeared to be another root cause of decreased identification with corporate brand initiatives. In some cases, it appeared that engineers seek ways to identify with only parts of the corporate brand, e.g. a particular expertise of the firm or part of the industry-specific image, and not with the JC corporate brand as a whole: *“...in terms of*

everything being thought of individually and the fresh thinking, I definitely feel like I'm involved with that..." (JG2). Therefore, various forms of identifications appeared to lead to types of (partial) disconnection with the corporate brand.

6.7. Summary

In this case study, the themes corresponding to the perceptions of JC's engineers about its corporate brand, the significance and implications of the corporate brand, and the factors causing disengagement with corporate brand initiatives were discussed. First, it was shown that engineers' definitions of the corporate brand correspond to the organizational identity and culture. Some equated the corporate brand with organizational identity and culture, and some referred to misalignments between the three. For instance, the values statement had been removed by top management because it was no longer in alignment with the (new) corporate culture.

With respect to the importance of the corporate brand, it was generally agreed that the corporate brand is a significant determinant in attracting and retaining talent, despite some cynicism in the details and conduct of corporate branding. However, the corporate brand was said to be built upon robust technical expertise and quality engineering service. If its priority were rated, therefore, the corporate brand was given a somewhat secondary importance as compared to engineering skills and technical expertise. Only a few respondents perceived the technical aspects to be embedded in the corporate brand reputation for engineering excellence.

The inter-animation and, at times, rivalry between the two brand types examined – personal brands and the corporate brand – were also outlined. The two were reported to be mutually-influential, although in varying ways. It was reported also that they can

create synergy when they are aligned and can be mutually-damaging when destructive rivalry is formed. While the corporate brand was said to attract new clients and assure current clients of consistency in quality of service, personal brands were reported to play a key role in sustaining relationships and maintaining business ties. While junior personal brands – i.e. the personal brands of young, cutting-edge engineers – were said to be necessary for keeping the corporate brand vibrant, senior personal brands were said to be more influential and powerful in transforming the corporate brand. Senior personal brands' contacts and relationships were also said to be a precious source of business development for the corporate brand as well, particularly on small- to medium-sized projects.

As the firm was growing in size, incorporation and corporate branding activities were perceived by engineers to be essentially interrelated. Corporate branding activities were perceived as a mode of (further) incorporation that facilitates engineers' familiarization processes with the organizational culture in a faster and more efficient manner (a 'JCing' process as one engineer put it). Negative perceptions were also raised concerning incorporation, not least for implying notions of increased bureaucracy, further separation of managers and employees, dilution of individuality, and decreased face-to-face communication.

On defence industry-related work and its brand associations, some respondents raised ethical concerns and exposed personal reservations. Others tried to 'distance' themselves from it, and separate their daily job from defence work in the attempt to resolve identity tensions. In other cases, some interpreted defence work in a positive manner by drawing a line between 'knowledge' – i.e. consultancy provided on defence projects – and 'application' – designing weaponry – and argued that engineering consultancy contributes to the former and is distanced from (and has no control over)

the latter. In other, stronger reflections, some (more senior engineers) defined defence work as a 'value' and in a completely positive manner as "the best way to defend a nation". All these various identity-related reactions demonstrated that the JC corporate brand and its associations can imply various – often opposing – meanings, and can yield different identity reactions among engineers.

The engineering consulting setting was also said to yield a number of implications with respect to corporate branding due to its particular specificities. One of the most evident characteristics was said to be the engineering-marketing divide evident in engineering-intensive contexts which appeared to disconnect engineers from corporate branding activities to a certain extent. The reasons for this were said to be associated with engineers' educational backgrounds, the predominance of the engineering mindset, the ratio of engineers to marketers, engineers' 'professional' tendency to distance themselves from emotional factors, and last but not least, presumptions about engineers' dissociation from corporate branding initiatives.

Finally, four factors were identified in engineers' accounts to disengage them from active contribution to corporate branding initiatives. First, the top-down, one-way, and somewhat dictatorial conduct in the communication of the initiatives was raised and criticized. Second, extensive workload was reported to leave little space for other activities, including corporate brand-related initiatives. Third, 'static' and passive communication and the lack of decent face-to-face interaction in conducting corporate brand initiatives were mentioned. Fourth, engineers preferring to identify with projects, JC's recognized areas of expertise, and/or clients at the expense of the JC corporate brand appeared to lead to their further disengagement from brand initiatives.

In the next chapter, the themes common to this case study as well as the other two case studies are revisited and discussed in depth and in light of the literature reviewed in Chapter Two. Six organizing themes have been constructed to sum the themes emerged across the three case studies in this thesis. These organizing themes constitute the structure of the following chapter.

Chapter 7: Discussion

7.1. Introduction, objectives, and chapter structure

In Chapter Two, bodies of the literature on corporate branding, internal branding and B2B branding were reviewed. Additionally, the literature on (internal) corporate brand communication was reviewed and a number of critiques were presented on notions of alignment, engagement, authenticity and corporate branding conduct. Engineers in the engineering consulting context were chosen for further exploration as to how they perceive the corporate brand and corporate branding initiatives since engineers are among the least-studied stakeholder groups and contexts with respect to corporate branding.

Given that very few studies to date have explored corporate branding in knowledge-intensive contexts (e.g. Powell, 2005; Kärreman and Rylander, 2008) it was very difficult to set a definite theoretical point of departure for this study in the literature review. For this reason, an inductive approach was adopted to explore further the perceptions of engineers about corporate branding. Thus, pertinent bodies of the literature comprised the theoretical ground of this study. In addition to the bodies mentioned above, other relevant parts of the literature on knowledge-intensive firms, identity and value alignment were also reviewed in Chapter Two.

The first research question was, therefore, formulated as how do engineers at various grades in an engineering consulting firm perceive the corporate brand. The second research question was also formulated to explore the viewpoints of engineers as to how they perceive, engage with and contribute to the corporate brand initiatives. Thus, the corporate brand initiatives communicated to employees, in the context of three

engineering consulting firms, were deployed to elicit engineers' opinions upon corporate branding.

Findings were presented in the form of three case studies in a thematic manner (Chapters Four, Five and Six). The case studies revealed a number of different, yet to a large extent interrelated, themes. Interestingly, most of the themes recurred in the three cases although with different nuances. Therefore, although the most essential, important and recurring themes have been discussed in all three case study chapters, it is attempted to put more emphasis on new themes or the themes with new nuances in the presentation of cases in each case study chapter.

Based on all these three case studies, six key themes (as *organizing themes*) were identified. These are, in order, corporate vs. personal brands, partnership vs. corporation, corporate branding conduct, engineering-marketing divide, economic conditions, and the inter-dynamism among corporate culture, identity, and brand. These six organizing themes along with their sub-themes are reviewed and discussed in this chapter and in light of the literature reviewed in Chapter Two.

This chapter ends with a summary of 'theoretical contributions'. This theory-focused part also aims to set the theoretical ground for future research. To this end, six propositions are provided – respectively on each of the organizing themes – to be examined further in future studies.

7.2. Corporate vs. Personal Brands

The case studies revealed associations and mutual implications between two brand types: the corporate brand and personal brand(s) of engineers. Manifestations of a degree of suppressed rivalry between the two were among the most colourful themes

emerging in this study, which appeared to lead to identity tensions and distress among engineers.

The inter-animation between the corporate brand and personal brands has been less discussed in the literature to date (Gad, 2003; Shepherd, 2005) and deserves further scrutiny. Part of the reason for the absence of this theme in the corporate branding literature is that perhaps it is more evidently manifested in the knowledge-intensive context in which very limited corporate branding studies have been hitherto conducted (Kärreman and Rylander, 2008). That said, rivalry between personal and corporate brands can be found in less knowledge-based contexts as well, yet at lower or perhaps more suppressed levels (Hearn, 2008). It can be argued that enhanced autonomy of engineering consultants has allowed this phenomenon to surface more clearly in this study.

The rivalry between the corporate brand and personal brands manifested in a number of different ways in case of the companies studied. Plus, engineers reported that such rivalries yield a number of implications. In their identity reflections, engineers attempted to maintain their individuality and (in some cases) their collective identity – personal brand(s) – in the face of the corporate brand (*'I don't consider myself [WRJ], I consider myself [WRJ] UK'*).

At times, identity reactions manifested in disengagement with the corporate brand at the expense of further engagement with the division, region, client and/or project wherein one operated (Alvesson, 2000; Alvesson, 2001; Powell, 2005; Powell, 2007). Identity tensions could also be seen in the discomfort expressed by engineers of all cases (but more evidently in WRJ-UK) in coping with business process reforms aimed at extensive integration of reporting, presentation and knowledge management systems

which appeared to threaten or dilute the uniqueness and individual specificities of personal brands (*'your personality is sort of taken out of it'*). In such cases, the personal brand of consultants would sometimes come into conflict or misalignment with the corporate brand (*'I live my own definition of the brand...which, yeah, is a gap'*).

In another form of rivalry between the corporate brand and personal brands, corporate branding initiatives were deployed as a power discourse by top management (more explicitly outlined in the case of CEB Tech.) to suppress personal brands and lessen their over-confidence that could potentially lead to their departure from the company. By emphasising the importance of corporate brand – that *'there is value in [the] brand and not just in the people'* – top management intended to undervalue the importance of 'people' in favour of the 'brand', thus highlighting the difficulties of building a strong corporate brand and lessen professionals' (over-) confidence in setting up their own operations or migrating to rival firms.

An equivalent of such suppression could only partially be identified in the pertinent identity literatures (Alvesson, 2001; Balmer and Greyser, 2002; Alvesson and Willmott, 2002; Hatch and Schultz, 2008). Hence, this theme promises to be an interesting line for future research. Ultimately, this tension and misalignment can have negative impacts on the corporate brand, further intensifying gaps between the corporate *vision* and organizational *culture* (Christensen and Cheney, 2000; Hatch and Schultz, 2000; Hatch and Schultz, 2001). Thus, a key implication of this finding is that the personal brand(s) of professional employees threaten to override the corporate brand, and vice versa, leading to confusion in (external) stakeholders' minds (Hatch and Schultz, 2001; Balmer and Greyser, 2002).

The force of personal brands, however, can also be aligned with the corporate brand and thus create synergies as well (Gad, 2003; Shepherd, 2005; Greenwood et al., 2006). Taking the metaphor of a modern football team (remarked by CG2) indicates, the image and reputation of personal brands can feed into the corporate brand, and vice versa; so that *'there is a pride factor'* in both directions. The central role of 'people' (*'we are consultancies, so we sell people'* and *'people are selling the corporate brand and selling the right image'*), as emphasised by engineers, corroborates the fact that personal brands can create synergy with the corporate brand. The significance of inter-personal relationships in maintaining corporate brand ties with clients and other external stakeholders also lends support to this notion.

The implications of personal brands in relation to the corporate brand also proved to be manifold. In this regard, project size, seniority of personal brands, market characteristics and the state of inter-organizational relationships were reported to be influential. It was found that the bigger the project, the less important the personal brand(s) and the more important the corporate brand is in the decision making process of clients. The reverse was also reported to be the case: i.e. for smaller-scale projects, clients tend to place their trust more upon the personal brands of their relationships than upon the corporate brand.

Also, engineering managers indicated that the UK market (as compared to the Nordic countries) is characterised by increased competition. Therefore, engineering consulting firms and client companies ascribe more attention to corporate brands, even more so to personal brands and inter-personal (still to a large extent technically oriented) relationships in the UK context in particular.

Furthermore, the state of relationship with clients – i.e. whether clients are new or returning – reported to affect the extent to which personal brands matter. For returning clients (repeat business), particularly those with long-standing relationships, the role of the corporate brand was said to be minimized and instead, personal brands were reported to be more critical. On the other hand, for ‘winning new markets’ and clients, particularly those in the private sector, the role of the corporate brand rather than personal brands was maximized.

And last, but not least, seniority of personal brands reported to be positively related with the extent to which personal brands are crucial. This resonates with Alvesson and Kärreman’s (2004) findings that report the increased likelihood of a whole division’s departure when senior members leave. All these relationships are worthy of further (quantitative) scrutiny.

The findings also show that alignment between personal brand values and those of the corporate brand can create synergy and have positive implications for enhancing employees’ morale, engagement and commitment to the corporate brand (*‘going [the] extra mile’*). This corroborates previous findings on the positive implications of value alignment between employees and the corporate brand (Knox et al., 2000; Ind, 2003b; Urde, 2003; Ind, 2004; Burmann and Zeplin, 2005; Ind and Bjerke, 2007; Urde, 2009). Full alignment, however, was said to be practically impossible (*‘you don’t necessarily have the choice of taking on people who you feel fitted’*). Therefore, value alignment theories are reportedly bound with practical limitations such as expertise on demand, project specificities and human resource availability (Ind, 2004; Hatch and Schultz, 2008).

In creating synergy, nevertheless, value alignment (between personal values and those of the corporate brand) was highlighted only to a moderate extent. Critical engineering values such as technical proficiency, creativity and rigour are equally central in engineers' personal brands. Thus, in order to have synergy between the two, these *permission-to-play* values (Lencioni, 2002) need to be in place. This type of value alignment, although it illuminates extant insights on value alignment (Ind, 2004; Burmann and Zeplin, 2005), it also proves to be a different type of value alignment, compared to other contexts hitherto studied, in that it by and large revolves around notions of engineering rigour, reliability, practicality and technical proficiency.

Misalignments between corporate and personal brand values appeared to have negative ethical implications as well. This appeared to be manifested in engineers' perceptions of their firms' breach of espoused or ethical values. Thus, misalignment of identities appeared as a major challenge for corporate brand management (Balmer, 2001c; Hatch and Schultz, 2001; Hatch and Schultz, 2003; Hatch and Schultz, 2008; Balmer, 2010; Punjaisri and Wilson, 2011). Concurrently, findings show that employees can often be the first to feel the discomfort of ethical misalignments between *ideal* identity (the corporate vision) and *conceived* identity (the corporate brand) – as explained by Balmer and Greyser (2002) – even before other stakeholders are informed (*'good, I agree with all that, but I also know we work in Libya. Ok?'*).

Symmetry in ethical values was also identified in a number of cases (*'it's a personal thing for me'*) and proved to have boosted staff morale, commitment and excitement (*'I was impressed with...things like the charitable foundation...the voluntary work that was being done'*). This informs previous studies (Harquail, 2006; Morsing, 2006) by showing that, if the ethical values are presented to employees on a selective and voluntary basis, it can be well-received and praised. Cases of ethical discomfort (*'I feel*

more uncomfortable with [the company's military-related activities] than I did years ago') also lend support to the extant criticisms in the literature (Harquail, 2006; Morsing, 2006; Powell, 2011) that companies can not only exert extra emotional pressure on employees by pushing moral values, but that they can also expose their employees to serious ethical distress when ethical codes of conduct are breached by organizations themselves.

7.3. Corporate branding conduct

The next organizing theme that surfaced in this study was the way corporate branding activities and initiatives are carried out in action – i.e. corporate branding conduct. In the literature, much has been said about the implications of corporate branding and how it *ought to* be carried out to make a success (Balmer and Greyser, 2003; Ind, 2004; Schultz et al., 2005b; Hatch and Schultz, 2008). However, nuanced insights on the shortcomings of corporate branding conduct are very limited.

Therefore, this study makes a contribution by revealing (not necessarily successful) aspects of corporate branding conduct and where it can falter in real-life case studies. These were particularly discussed within case studies as factors that appeared to disengage, desensitize or disinterest engineers from the corporate branding initiatives. Engineers' perspective was specifically insightful in that they articulated the shortcomings from a non-marketing perspective – as the 'receiver' and not the 'sender' of corporate branding initiatives – and from outside the (pro-) marketing discipline. Engineers' cynical reflections were even more informative in that they indicated the shortcomings more openly and without (positive or negative) preconceptions about corporate branding.

Interestingly, almost all respondents had difficulty remembering the actual content of the company's initiatives as they stood. Values statements, for instance, were widely forgotten and neglected. This phenomenon somehow corroborates Ind's (2004:79-80) indication that the majority 'of employees do not support their company's branding initiatives' and/or 'do not understand how to represent the brand effectively'. As a justification, many engineers contended that association with the values (and other corporate brand-related initiatives) is a subconscious rather than a conscious process. Engineers' inattentiveness to some of the initiatives, e.g. values statements, was despite that values statements and the like were ubiquitous over office and factory spaces²¹.

An important contributor to such negligence, which has remained widely under-stated and under-researched in corporate branding research, is the extent to which the human brain (subconsciously) excludes unchanged items in the course of time (Berry, 2000). In all the cases, 'static' initiatives – i.e. those that remained unchanged for a long time – were more likely to be overlooked. This lends support to the important role of the brain in filtering out unchanged and static items in one's surrounding environment over time.

Many engineers believed that the initiatives hardly ever remind the employees about certain values or work-related disciplines (*'I can't remember last time I read them'*). This finding contrasts partly with studies that consider values statements as 'reminders' of values to employees (Lencioni, 2002; Chernatony et al., 2006; Jaakson, 2010a). This dilemma deserves further (quantitative) research to enlighten the actual level of effectiveness, influence and 'penetration' of corporate brand initiatives, particularly

²¹ JC Consultants had much less of such written statements in place compared to the other two case studies.

those of values, vision and mission statements (and the like) that are widely applied rather similarly in various industries.

One-way communication and the top-down conduct of initiatives were also raised as one of the important problems in corporate branding conduct. Although the corporate branding literature is dominated by one-way, marketing-led and management-driven contentions of corporate branding (conduct) – what Schultz *et al.* (2005a) criticize as ‘campaign’ approaches to corporate branding – excessively one-way communication appeared to be one of the important failure factors in corporate branding conduct. This finding is a counter-argument to many of the existing instructions of corporate branding (e.g. Burmann and Zeplin, 2005:289) that encourage top-down approaches in corporate brand communication.

The data showed that corporate branding initiatives can be sacrificed in inter-organizational disagreements and discrepancies as well; this finding further illuminates Schultz’s (2005a) note on ‘turf battles’ and how inter-organizational conflicts can undermine the corporate brand and the initiatives. Additionally, physical distance between where the initiatives are developed or ‘aired’ from and where they are being received appeared to contribute to engineers’ disengagement with the initiatives (*‘I know where it’s coming from. But it’s coming from Denmark’*).

Bottom-up approaches, on the other hand, appeared to be a much more efficient approach whereby senses of belonging, togetherness, and commitment are enhanced (*‘[SMB]...was a bit more self-generating...you individually...contributed to that willingly and it just sort of came out of everybody’s ability’*).

A few incidents were remarked upon by top management whereby the initiatives had been presented to engineers to elicit their opinions (e.g. in the case of WRJ-UK). The

engineers' level of participation in crafting, refining and developing the initiatives was however insufficient to gain their attention, trust and commitment. The conduct of corporate branding in all three cases remained predominantly top-down. More research is necessary to explain the ways in which bottom-up approaches to corporate branding can be facilitated, enhanced and utilized (Hatch and Schultz, 2008).

In addition, corporate branding initiatives that were driven excessively by marketing departments appeared to be unsuccessful as this approach tends to exacerbate the (unnecessary) divide between engineering and marketing constituents. In cases where this happens, engineers are likely to look down on marketers about the extent to which they can understand engineering practices. Marketers, in the same manner, are likely to underestimate engineers about the extent to which they can understand, buy-into and collaborate with the building, development and implementation of initiatives. This issue demonstrates that the role and contribution of marketing constituents in corporate branding activities needs to be managed with caution and at a moderate level in an engineering-intensive context (*'we've been relatively subtle on doing this. If we did make a massive thing about this, I think their reaction would have been massive'*).

Thus, engineers need to be involved by large not only in the building and development of corporate branding initiatives (e.g. drafting values statements or corporate collateral), but also in the communication and implementation of initiatives (e.g. in conducting brand training or brand-related social events). In other words, corporate branding is better to be done by engineers and for engineers. In this way, marketers and corporate branding consultants can serve as facilitators and advisors in a complementary fashion. This approach is a rather new contention, as the corporate branding literature is dominated by (pro-) marketing scholars, marketing-oriented language and largely marketing-driven mindset. This study, therefore, is an attempt to call for new vistas of

corporate branding whereby non-marketing scholars and practitioners are given more room and ‘voice’ to theorize corporate branding which better suits the specificities and complexities of less-studied contexts such as engineering consultancies.

Similarly, excessively management-led conduct in corporate brand communication appeared to yield a number of positive and negative implications. While management commitment was seen as a constructive driving force for corporate branding activities, heavy association between (top) management and the corporate brand appeared to be equally destructive. Particularly, the central role of line managers in delivering corporate brand values to their subordinates was highlighted by respondents in all three case studies (Ind, 2004; Vallaster and Chernatony, 2006; Järventie-Thesleff et al., 2011) and employees reported to ‘intimate’ their line managers in taking onboard corporate brand values.

While management support proved to establish some of the initiatives in the (hearts and) minds of employees (Ind, 2004; Burmann and Zeplin, 2005; Schultz, 2005a; Vallaster and Chernatony, 2006), in other cases, the corporate brand was unequivocally equated with management’s personality (*‘he was the brand’*), ‘utopian’ ambitions or unrealistic idealism (*‘all it tells me is how [John], who is our MD, wants this company to be’*). Furthermore, when a stark contrast is conceived between the *actual* and *ideal* identities of the brand (Balmer and Greyser, 2002), corporate branding conduct can be undermined altogether when it is perceived as ‘management speak’, empty rhetoric or business ‘fad’.

Another observation in the case studies was that engineers are (rather heavily) associated with notions of rigour, preciseness and pragmatism. These inclinations are essentially part of engineering practices. On that basis, business activities that do not

meet the standards of rigour are likely to be disregarded, challenged or, in severe cases, resisted by engineers in engineering-intensive settings. Evidence of corporate branding initiatives being changed too often with undue preparation or explanation to employees and without leading to any perceivable change in the operation of the business had, at times, caused disregard or doubt in engineers' minds about the extent to which such initiatives are significant; making engineers believe that corporate branding initiatives are not *'quite as irreplaceable and vital to the operation of the business as it's sometimes made out to be'*.

Therefore, the presentational aspect of the corporate brand and initiatives needs to be managed with caution, particularly in meticulous and 'conservative' contexts such as engineering consulting; while abrupt and frequent changes in the initiatives should be avoided as much as possible. If engineers perceive the presentational side of things to change repeatedly, abruptly, and without a great deal of distress, they are much more likely to be 'desensitized' upon the corporate brand initiatives.

Adopting mainstream approaches to corporate branding conduct also appeared to desensitize engineers from the initiatives. Some engineers used terms such as 'overused' or 'a given' to reflect upon the initiatives. This demonstrates that, perhaps having experienced the same initiatives in previous tenures, engineers perceive the initiatives as a set of given organizational exercises (*'I know all companies are going to do that'*) that are *'completely benign'* and will not yield considerable distinction after all.

To change such unresponsive perceptions, more innovation needs to be put in place in the conduct of corporate branding. While the prevalent characteristic of the engineering context is innovation, creativity and bespoke projects, one wonders why corporate

branding conduct remains mainstream, static and uninteresting most of the times, as was seen in all the cases studied. Christensen and Cheney (2000, as cited in Karmark, 2005) have similarly criticized corporate branding initiatives for being uninteresting; they argue that the initiatives are simply not as compelling, enticing and engaging as corporate branding scholars, consultants and practitioners think they are. This study supports this criticism. Engineers studied in this thesis equally reported to be disenchanted with some of the initiatives as the corporate brand initiatives are not interesting enough, compared to other activities such as engineering projects (*'every project is a challenge'*) or social events (*'money would be better spent on just... having social events between offices and internal competitions, whatever it is to bring the company closer'*).

In this regard, one proposition is for firms to adopt unconventional, interesting, creative and case-sensitive initiatives. Corporate brand values can be embedded in attractive initiatives and communicated to employees in an implicit, yet authentic manner. As an example, WS5 recalled an event whereby a group of graduate engineers, as representatives of SMB (WRJ-UK prior to its acquisition), had participated in a competition to build a machine that flies the longest distance over a bridge in Hyde Park. Having won that competition, SMB employees' confidence and level of buy-in to values was boosted substantively because *'that made everyone think 'I can do anything''* (WS5). Hence, through engaging and compelling initiatives, creativity and competence can be truly 'lived' and sensed by employees.

Another observation was that the corporate brand initiatives are highly vulnerable to be discredited by an organization's own breach of values (Hatch and Schultz, 2008). Inconsistent or, at times, unethical organizational behaviours as well as the way employees are perceived to be treated every day were reported to be critical factors in

determining the extent to which employees legitimize corporate brand values. There appeared to be a mutual mental obligation – what Robinson et al. (1994) call ‘psychological contract’ – between the employees and their corporate brand whereby employees assess their organization’s commitment to espoused values and, accordingly, employees’ level of buy-in can be affected (*‘I didn’t do that because you didn’t do this, because this has been wrong’*).

Evidence of a firm’s breach of values also appeared to raise the level of cynicism upon the initiatives among engineers (*‘what those values mean is saying ‘No’’*). It has been signified in the literature that stakeholders are ever more informed and sensitive on corporate ‘behaviours’, look beyond corporate claims, assess every ‘touch point’, and authenticate corporate behaviours not only against its espoused values, but also against their personal values (Holt, 2002; Antorini and Schultz, 2005; Hatch and Schultz, 2008; Charters, 2009). This study lends credence to this contention by revealing evidence of misalignment between *perceived, actual, communicated* and *ideal* (including ethical) identities (Balmer and Greyser, 2002) and the consecutive discomfort expressed in engineers’ accounts when misalignments accrue.

Another interesting finding was the critical role of inter-personal relations and face-to-face contact in communicating, authenticating and establishing the corporate brand initiatives in the hearts and mind of employees. Many engineers reported that the lack of personal contact in the communication of values is a primary source of disengagement with the initiatives (*‘if you’ve got an idea...you need to tell me that’*). Insufficient personal contact and rapport with senior management (*‘they’re quite remote beings’*) proved to have undermined many of the initiatives in the eyes of engineers.

It appeared that interpersonal connection in the communication of initiatives, particularly with top management, is very influential in affirming the initiatives in the minds of employees. Although some studies have underlined the importance of personal connection in the building of a vibrant environment as a prerequisite of a strong corporate brand (Mitchell, 2002; Ind, 2003b; Ind, 2004; Burmann and Zeplin, 2005; Punjaisri and Wilson, 2007; Hatch and Schultz, 2008) more research needs to be done on *how* inter-personal relationships can be enhanced and leveraged in the management of corporate brands.

Lack of clarity about the extent to which engineers are to be involved in various stages of corporate branding also appeared to lead to ambiguity, inconsistency and disengagement. At times, engineers declared that they were unsure about how they could play a role in corporate branding or said they were '*too busy to generate business to worry about [the] brand*' (Ind and Watt, 2006:334). This proves that their role in corporate branding was not thought through, had not been clearly articulated for engineers or had clashed with their current engineering obligations.

Although the corporate branding literature contends that all, and not some, constituents should be involved, one way or another, in corporate branding conduct to make a success (Ind, 2004; Hardaker and Fill, 2005; Ind and Bjerke, 2007), much less is known as to *how* non-marketing constituents should actually be engaged, at what levels, and to what extent. This study, while identifying this to be an issue that can confuse engineers on ways to contribute, sheds some light on how the *brand confirmation* phase, whereby the role of other constituents in corporate branding is thought through and defined (Knox and Bickerton, 2003), can be further enhanced:

In this regard, engineers provided some interesting suggestions in order to improve their engagement in corporate branding. One recommendation they made was using engineers to carry out brand training – e.g. brand workshops to be conducted by engineers for engineers. It was further noted that cynical engineers (who are convinced of the values and positive implications of the corporate brand) are particularly insightful reference groups in enlightening other engineers and bringing them on board with the corporate brand. This complements previous studies (Ind, 2004; Wallace and Chernatony, 2007) in that brand *cynics* can be considered as prospective brand *ambassadors* and potent sources of brand inspiration.

Another suggestion was that all employees – but field engineers in particular – should be made aware of their critical role in ‘selling’ the corporate brand while delivering a service or dealing with clients and other external stakeholders on a daily basis. Involving engineers in marketing or corporate branding roles was another suggestion for enhancing engineer’s engagement although it was said to be ‘*difficult to find engineers interested in marketing*’.

Age, educational background and seniority appeared to be influential factors in engineers’ perceptions, reflections, and engagement with corporate branding as well. Younger engineers appeared to be more active with respect to corporate branding – i.e. challenging, scrutinizing, and engaging with the initiatives – as compared to older engineers, who appeared to take a more conservative, passive and receptive stance; these effects are worthy of further research.

Engineering educational background was also reported as one of the disengaging factors with the initiatives, since corporate branding as a discipline as well as an organizational practice was said to be a new experience to many engineers (*‘that is the*

first time I come across this branding thing'). This confirms the findings of Shaw et al. (2003:496) who identified education and training as factors causing an engineering-marketing divide (in addition to five other factors namely, conflicts in goals and priorities, time and cost factors, poor communication, problems with marketing in the company, and management problems).

Seniority was also said to be influential in that corporate branding and '*work winning*' activities tend to become more embedded in engineers' daily activities the more senior they become. As engineers become more senior, particularly as they take up managerial positions, their job tends to be inclusive of less pure engineering ('*calcs*') and instead inclusive of more 'meta-engineering' activities (Bucciarelli, 1994; Suchman, 2000) – part of which is corporate branding. At the top senior levels, corporate branding narrative appeared to be used as a mode of normative control (Alvesson and Willmott, 2002; Alvesson and Kärreman, 2004; Alvesson, 2004; Naus et al., 2007). In that sense, corporate brand values were deployed as behavioural 'measures' for employees. In addition, management intended to lessen the risk of talents leaving the organization by emphasizing the corporate brand (while undervaluing personal brands) – and reminding engineering professionals (personal brands) that it is very difficult to build a strong corporate brand.

Excessive uniformity attempts in corporate branding initiatives also proved to yield a number of negative consequences. Particularly in the WRJ and JC cases, which were much more diversely spread, uniformity instructions through corporate branding initiatives proved to cause limitations and resistance at the regional and local levels. Many respondents criticised corporate branding initiatives (e.g. brand book or presentational guidelines) for being excessively definitive, lacking space for contribution, and overlooking the cultural, regional, and individual nuances of

engineering consultants. Given the knowledge-based nature of engineering consultants and the level of autonomy and flexibility required to that effect, corporate brand initiatives that imply uniformity, only for the sake of a uniform presentation of the brand and with undue consideration to the specificities of each knowledge arm are more likely resisted.

Therefore, corporate branding is better to be carried out more flexibly and with due space for stakeholder engagement, adaptation and contribution. This corroborates others advocating a stakeholder approach to corporate branding (Morsing and Kristensen, 2002; Schultz and Chernatony, 2002; Balmer and Greyser, 2003; de Chernatony and Segal-Horn, 2003; Schultz *et al.*, 2005a; Ind and Bjerke, 2007; Gregory, 2007; Roper and Davies, 2007; Hatch and Schultz, 2008). Furthermore, findings of this study support preceding studies (Holt, 2002; Antorini and Andersen, 2005; Antorini and Schultz, 2005; Hatch and Schultz, 2008; Charters, 2009) that criticised misconceptions of consistency with blunt ‘sameness’.

7.4. Partnership vs. Corporation

Another key organizing theme which surfaced in all the case studies was the association between the two organizing structures of *professional partnership* and *corporation* with respect to corporate branding. Intrinsic to the way consulting firms classically operate is the loose and organic structure binding professional partners together (Greenwood and Empson, 2003; Greenwood *et al.*, 2006). Due to the knowledge-based nature of business processes, an adequate level of autonomy is demanded for the knowledge arms (individual knowledge workers or small collectives) to operate and put their best creative ideas in place.

Such an autonomous orientation, however, classically clashes with the tendencies towards incorporation. While growing, firms try to manage knowledge and standardize ordinary processes (such as reporting, finance and the technical procedures that are common among various projects) in order to achieve further managerial efficiency and, to that effect, incorporation is typically an almost inevitable option (Greenwood and Empson, 2003). Nonetheless, incorporation is associated with increased bureaucratic characteristics and connotations of slowness, steadiness and regularity whereas partnership is associated with autonomy, creativity and agility. In all three case studies, elements from both organizing forms were in place and in tandem in a complementary manner.

The tensions between the two organizing styles of corporation and partnership also yielded employees' identity reactions. Given that the corporate brand is highly influenced by knowledge workers' attitude, these identity reactions are worthy of understanding. In this regard, corporation was perceived as increased 'dehumanization' of the company whereas partnership more strongly bore notions of (humanistic) individuality and inter-personal collaboration. Identity reflections also surfaced in employees' sense of discomfort when they felt they are a small part of a big corporation (*'I personally don't want to be just kind of a number in a huge company'*), or in engineers' contempt about the dilution of individuality (*'I think we've lost a little bit of our individuality'*).

Some engineers associated partnership style with 'leadership' and corporation with 'management'; the former embraces more inter-personal connections not only among employees, but also between employees and founders ('leaders'); the latter, on the other hand, was associated by engineers with insufficient personal contact with the founders which was replaced by relationships with line managers. Some engineers remarked that

founders can ‘personify’ the corporate brand. Others related the presence of founders with the creativity and agility of the firm – i.e. founders being the driving force of an agile and creative corporate brand.

The link between management and the corporate brand has been comprehensively studied by Vallaster and Chernatony (2006) who ascribe a central role for management in driving corporate branding activities. The significant role of management in nourishing the corporate brand has also been verified in previous studies (Vallaster and Chernatony, 2006; Ind and Bjerke, 2007; King and Grace, 2008; Punjaisri, 2009). However, the role of founders in corporate branding has been less discussed. This study illuminates a distinction in this regard between the two – i.e. founders and managers – and demonstrates that each can have different implications as far as corporate branding is concerned. This needs to be researched further in future.

Connotations of big size (‘bigness’), as a by-product of incorporation, reported to yield a number of implications for the corporate brand as well. While big size can be supportive in winning large-scale projects, attracting talent and/or implying financial security in times of financial downturn, a number of negative implications were also raised:

Bigness was said to imply firms’ undue interest in small- to medium-scale projects in the eyes of prospective clients. Furthermore, engineers and managers perceived the ‘big’ image as extra weight and impediment when dealing with local, regional or small- to medium-scale projects (*‘you do feel a bit like a hammer trying to crack a nut’*). Some employees associated big size with ‘going for extra work at any cost’ to cover expenses (*‘because we are a big company, we have got a lot of mouths to feed’*) which meant further risks of breaching corporate brand or ethical values.

Although these implications have been discussed by Empson and Chapman (2006) on the procedural difficulties of corporation as compared to partnership, they have not been hitherto discussed under the rubric of corporate branding. It is worth further research to identify how incorporation affects the corporate brand negatively and whether (and how) partnership can mitigate these effects.

7.5. Engineering-Marketing divide

Another organizing theme that appeared in this study was the engineering-marketing dichotomy which underlies many of the sub-themes emerged. Engineers' perceptions of the corporate brand could be inferred according to a sort of engineering-marketing divide in many cases since engineers by and large considered corporate branding as a subsidiary of marketing (*'it's a marketing tool rather than it being inherent in every employee'*; *'I think branding is just one aspect of the whole marketing kind of thing'*). This finding lends weight to previous criticisms (Schultz and Chernatony, 2002; Balmer and Gray, 2003; Schultz et al., 2005a) that claim that corporate branding is dominated by the marketing discipline in practical terms, thus exacerbating the disengagement of non-marketing constituents. The engineering-marketing dichotomy can also be deployed to unveil many of the engineers' viewpoints about the corporate brand:

While engineering was explained with terms such as 'hard', 'rigorous', 'functional', 'measurable' and 'difficult', corporate branding was respectively characterized by terms like 'soft', 'touchy feely', 'form', 'immeasurable', and 'easy'. These terms indicate that although engineers did not totally dismiss the significance of the corporate brand and corporate branding activities, they *'just take it with a pinch of salt'* in a complementary manner to engineering activities (*'we're not just steel and pipes and wise engineers, but there's more to our makeup'*).

The metaphor of ‘a meal with one’s wife on their anniversary’, as offered by a marketing manager (CD2), is informative with respect to the significance of corporate brand to some engineering managers. Although the activities and resources dedicated to corporate branding was reported to be very limited compared to the engineering resources in place, corporate branding activities were perceived as ‘little but important’. In some cases engineers undervalued, if not to say scorned (*‘there is a bit of humour there’*) the corporate brand (Ind, 2004; Wallace and Chernatony, 2007). It was predominantly believed that engineering constitutes the core of engineering consulting (*‘really, all of our fee earning work is engineering or built around engineering’*) while corporate branding forms the ‘packaging’, presentational and peripheral side of the engineering consulting business in a complementary fashion.

Corporate branding was also criticised for insufficient authenticity (i.e. alignment between ‘claims’ and ‘deeds’) and rigour. As discussed, engineering typically abides by strict codes of conduct, rigour and reliability (*‘we deal with very sort of tangible things and steel and concrete and big things and they’re sort of quite serious safety issues going on’*; *‘engineering is working the right way to solve the problem’*); thus, corporate branding was criticised for embodying claims and values that are difficult, if not impossible, to measure (Baumgarth and Schmidt, 2010). Such perceptions appeared to discredit corporate brand initiatives in the eyes of some engineers (*‘we’re not going to get upset by a few words...it’s...not that important at the end of the day’*).

Given the rational inclinations of engineers, engagement was equally maximized with the engineering side at the expense of disengagement with the marketing side whenever a stark contrast was perceived between the two elements of engineering and marketing. ‘Woolly’ language of corporate brand initiatives appeared to be somewhat unfamiliar to engineers (*‘the language is not my language’*) (Ind, 2004). Engineers’ ‘professionalism’

was also signified as their ability to distance themselves from or '*compartmentalize*' with the emotional (branding) side of the business. Professionalism was described as avoiding 'emotions' to interfere with or 'corrupt' engineering 'science'.

An interesting insight in this regard was the 'music' metaphor, offered by WD1, to explain the meaning of the corporate brand. The metaphor implies that corporate brands – like music – do not necessarily have to have a definite, specific or even clear meaning; instead engineering brands could simply remind of 'good feelings' or inspire engineers regardless of their actual content and characteristics. It was described as an incident where nostalgia is associated with a brand whereby a brand can be a reminder of one's particular life stage, experience, or state of emotion. Such a perception upon an engineering brand is somehow similar to reflections that have been widely discussed in the context of consumer brands (Fournier, 1998; Kozinets and Handelman, 2004; McCracken, 2005).

Besides, the music metaphor highlights the significance of emotions in engineers' engagement with engineering brands. The significance of emotions has similarly been shown in other B2B sectors in enhancing employees' engagement (Hardaker and Fill, 2005), industrial buyers' decision making (Mudambi, 2002; Lynch, 2004; Lynch and Chernatony, 2007) and engineering designs (Bergstrom et al., 2002).

Contribution to the corporate brand and corporate branding activities can also be explained with the engineering-marketing dichotomy. On one hand, many respondents said they contribute to the corporate brand by doing their best in their defined engineering obligations ('*the thing I have most control over is the quality of my work*'). On the other hand, some engineers noted that to contribute to the corporate brand, they

need to be engaged in some sort of (part-time) marketing on top of their defined engineering responsibilities; selling the corporate brand image day-to-day.

Although the engineering-marketing divide formed a distinctive theme in this study similar to what has also been mentioned in previous studies (Donald Weinrauch and Anderson, 1982; Filiatrault and Lapierre, 1997; Shaw and Shaw, 1998; Shaw et al., 2003; Ind, 2004), such divides should not be taken too literally or over-estimated. Exaggerated assumptions about engineering-marketing divide can be destructive when scholars and practitioners alike presume a stark disconnection, dissonance and distance between engineering and corporate branding. In cases studied, overall, engineers' level of understanding, knowledge and attentiveness upon corporate branding was considerable and somewhat surprisingly high. Thus, findings of this study contrasts with the studies that consider a stark separation between engineering and marketing/corporate branding (Shaw and Shaw, 1998; Shaw et al., 2003). Additionally, wherever cynicism surfaced, it was associated with the 'details' of how to better conduct corporate branding and not towards its relevance altogether.

Today's easier access to information, general marketing-awareness (*'everyone's to be marketing-aware these days'*), inter-disciplinary courses in both engineering and marketing schools, and cross-disciplinary nature of engineering consultancy projects, can be named as factors that have reduced the distance between the engineering and marketing disciplines, particularly in more recent years. It is also noteworthy that in the cases studied here, marketing employees were by and large coming either from an engineering background or were familiar with engineering procedures, which appeared to have lessened much of the disconnections between engineers and marketers.

7.6. Economic conditions

Economic conditions, both at micro and macro levels, and their implications for corporate branding formed another organizing theme in this study (particularly in the case of WRJ). Having a strong corporate brand was said by many engineers to help the company better survive economic downturns as well as imply a sense of assurance to employees (*'we know we're secure'*).

However, it was outlined that corporate brands are more susceptible to breaching their values in economically hard times. In order to survive economic downturns, companies are vulnerable to pay lip service to value congruity between the conditions of projects they take on-board with their espoused values – i.e. take on-board works that are not necessarily aligned with their values. When *'things are not rosy'*, firms tend to suppress their values in dealing with projects as well as employees. During financial downturns, values and ethical standards tend to become a second priority (*'in difficult times...you sometimes lose sight of the fact that what's the reason why you come to work'*). 'Having a lot of mouths to feed' and having to go 'hunting' in areas the firm would have not gone in economically normal times only exacerbates the likelihood that the corporate brand continues to breach its own values.

Also, firms are susceptible to pay undue consideration and support to organizational culture, staff morale, and employees' ethical reservations in economically difficult times. This was reported to have long lasting negative impacts on employees' emotional state, their commitment to work, and their loyalty to the corporate brand. It was contended by some engineers that as 'the economy turns the corner' and when economic situation is back to normal, engineers are likely to migrate to other firms with a 'nicer culture' or those that are more committed to employees' emotional wellbeing.

The significance of employees' emotional state was particularly raised given the heavy reliance of engineering consultancies on human capital and the direct implications of knowledge workers' emotional state on the quality of services (Alvesson, 2004; Kunda, 2006).

The data showed that economically difficult times is a critical opportunity as well for corporate brands to prove not only to their employees, but also to other stakeholders that the corporate brand would stand by its values at all times (*'the test of a successful organization of any sort is how they deal with the times like this'*). Commitment to values, particularly during economic downturns was hence reported to enhance stakeholders' trust and sense of belonging to the corporate brand.

These effects have been under-researched in the existing corporate branding literature partly because severe macro-level economic downturns have thus far been a recent, unforeseen and relatively infrequent occurrence. It can be argued, however, that since the 2008 economic turmoil, international markets have been experiencing different forms of economic uncertainty more frequently. It is, therefore, necessary to pay particular research attention to the implications of economic downturns on corporate branding in future research.

7.7. Organizational culture, identity and the corporate brand

The sixth and final organizing theme in this study is the association between the corporate brand, organizational culture and identity as emerged from engineers' accounts. Regarding the relation between the corporate brand and culture, the role of organizational culture was explicitly outlined in determining the corporate brand, particularly given that engineering consulting is heavily reliant on human capital

(*'consultancy is about people'*). Therefore, knowledge forces' attitude and emotional state reported to be highly pertinent in determining and delivering the corporate brand. To that effect, organizational culture, as the context for employees' meaning making, attitude and behaviour (Hatch, 1993; Schein, 2004) is highly important in determining employees' sense of creativity, wellbeing and belonging to the corporate brand. It was outlined that *'having the right culture'* is equally significant for maintaining talent.

Some engineers deployed organizational culture to define the corporate brand. Others perceived the corporate brand as *'an outward projection of culture'*. Direct association of corporate brand and culture was further corroborated when engineers criticised the discrepancies between the corporate brand initiatives and corporate culture. They believed that corporate brand initiatives that do not reflect the 'reality' of organizational culture are by and large disregarded. Given the 'conservative' inclinations of engineers, drastic shifts in the initiatives without legitimate cultural relevance only appeared to lead to further disengagement on the engineers' part and gap between *cultural* and *covenanted* identities (Balmer, 2005).

Corporate culture was, therefore, perceived as the bedrock of corporate brand whereby instigating change in the culture was considered difficult, not least through superficial changes in the corporate brand initiatives. Such association of the two concepts is in line with Schultz et al. (2000) who indicated that the corporate brand is deeply rooted in organizational culture.

Despite interrelatedness, a contrast could also be inferred between corporate culture and brand in engineers' perceptions. While corporate culture was perceived as 'real' (*'what the company actually is'*), authentic (*'engineering is working the right way to solve the problem'*) and central (*'they are...part of the DNA...of what we do'*), corporate brand,

on the other hand, was at times seen as unreal (*'management speak'*), inauthentic (*'I'm not sure they're implemented as much as people like to say, really'*) and peripheral (*'we're not going to get upset by a few words'*).

Additionally, the 'reality' of firms and the type of values that engineers believed were 'lived' by on a daily basis was different from those espoused in corporate brand values statements. This illuminates a gap between what Balmer (2005) terms *cultural* identity with those of *perceived* and *actual* identities (Balmer and Greyser, 2002) and a gap between *culture* and *vision* in Hatch and Schultz's (2001) terms. It also resonates with Kärreman and Rylander (2008) who found a similar contrast between the values lived by on a daily basis and those communicated through value initiatives in their case study of an IT and management consultancy firm.

Misalignments *within culture* also reported to lead to friction; this was the case when various internal constituents held different views upon the corporate brand. Inter-cultural misalignments need to be explored more in-depth in future research as existing works are highly focused on *culture-image*, *image-vision*, and *culture-vision* gaps and less is known about *culture-culture* dynamism and gaps with respect to corporate branding.

Organizational identity, as a constellation of engineers' self and organizational understanding (Gioia et al., 2000; Schultz et al., 2000) appeared to be highly pertinent to the corporate brand as well. Corporate brand was, at times, equated and defined with organizational identity and notions of *'who we are'*, *'what we do'*, *'what we are and what we stand for'* and *'how we do things around here'* (Schultz et al., 2000; Balmer, 2001a). Some defined the corporate brand as a portrayal of organizational identity (*'the way that we portray ourselves'*). These definitions corroborate conceptions that define

corporate brand as an identity type (*covenanted* identity) among other identity types (*culture, conceived, communicated, actual, ideal, and desired*) (Balmer and Gray, 2003; Balmer, 2010). Furthermore, it supports Hatch and Schultz (2008) who defined corporate branding as the inter-dynamism between *culture, image* and *vision* in the context of organizational identity and identity projections. It also sheds empirical light on Hatch and Schultz's (2001) model by demonstrating manifestations of the gap between various internal perceptions (*vision* and *culture*) upon the corporate brand as part of engineers' identity projects.

7.8. Theoretical contributions

This thesis brings substantive theoretical contributions to the table. It reveals new aspects to, and implications of, corporate branding as perceived by engineering consultants and managers in the engineering consulting setting. This thesis particularly contributes to extant research in knowledge-intensive sectors on the corporate brand phenomenon and the ways in which employees make meaning of and react to it (Alvesson, 2004; Kärreman and Rylander, 2008).

The six organizing themes emerged and discussed correspond to the interactions between personal and corporate brands, the brand implications of incorporation in tandem with partnership, the conduct of corporate branding in action, brand implications of economic conditions, the inter-dynamism of corporate culture, brand and identity and, last but not least, the engineering-marketing divide. All these enlighten some of the extant theories in corporate branding and other pertinent realms of research and provide rich directions for further research. In the remainder of the chapter, these theoretical contributions are more precisely reviewed and a number of research propositions are generated.

In the remainder of the chapter, each organising theme has been summarised. Accordingly, one proposition for each organising theme has been generated. In doing so, not all the sub-themes are reflected; instead, one of the most potent themes, as interpreted and selected by the researcher, is formulated as the research proposition. Hence, several other propositions could equally be generated corresponding to the emergent themes within every organising theme. Respectively, for each of the propositions, the theoretical underpinnings in the literature have been highlighted in the ‘theoretical contributions’ section (and in the table 7.1.). Thus, the link between the propositions and theory and the contribution each proposition makes to pertinent theories have been explicated in the remainder of the chapter and subsequently summarised in the table 7.1.

In terms of the relationship between personal brands and the corporate brand, this thesis confirms that the personal brand of the consultant(s) can override that of the corporate brand, leading to a series of destructive consequences in both directions. Negative implications include, but are not limited to, the risks associated with misalignments between corporate brand values and personal brand values (Ind, 2004; Burmann and Zeplin, 2005; Hatch and Schultz, 2008), inconsistencies and inter-organizational conflicts. Synergy between the two and alignment between personal and corporate brand values, on the other hand, enhance employees’ commitment, morale, and self-concept (de Chernatony, 2002; de Chernatony and Segal-Horn, 2003; Ind, 2003b; Urde, 2009; Jaakson, 2010b; Thorbjørnsen and Supphellen, 2011).

The tensions between the personal brand of professionals and the corporate brand increase with increased seniority of employees. It is also shown that the project’s and firm’s *size* matter significantly: the larger the corporate brand, the greater the risk that individual, local and regional contact points are lost. Furthermore, the bigger in size the

project at hand, the lesser importance customers ascribe to personal brands compared to the corporate brand. Corporate branding initiatives also serve as a means of power discourse whereby not only normative control is exercised through values, ethics, and codes of conduct, but also through mitigation of personal brands in the face of the corporate brand (Alvesson and Kärreman, 2004; Ditillo, 2004; Kunda, 2006).

***P1.** The personal brand(s) of employees in professional B2B consulting settings can threaten to override the corporate brand, or vice versa, leading to confusion in stakeholders' minds.*

In this study it was shown that one of the reasons for the disenchantment with, or disengagement from, the corporate brand relates to how the partnership/incorporation tensions unfold and are managed (Greenwood and Empson, 2003; Greenwood et al., 2006). Incorporation can threaten employees' sense of belonging to a solid corporate brand. It can also dilute regional or local contributions and the sense of personal closeness which clients demand. Connotations of bigness, as a side-effect of incorporation, can also destructively obfuscate individual, regional, and local capabilities. Exerting (unnecessary) extra corporate brand 'weight' on knowledge partners through incorporation appeared to undermine knowledge-arms' autonomy, creativity, and practical effectiveness.

***P2.** Incorporative activities and connotations of 'bigness', 'dehumanization' or 'steadiness' can undermine the corporate brand in the mind of stakeholders.*

Employees' ethical reservations play a significant role in how they interpret and respond to corporate brand values. As shown, informal observations of the company's breach of espoused or ethical values can distance employees from the corporate brand. In such cases, employees may focus on their 'own' identity projects, identify with

clients/projects, or develop their own version of branding instead of going with the corporate brand narrative. Urde (2003) argues that corporate branding is about aligning corporate values with the internal values of employees as well as external stakeholders. Findings of this thesis contribute to this and similar insights by showing that efforts at alignment need to take into account the ethical dimensions of (internal) stakeholder-corporate value congruity (Harquail, 2006; Morsing, 2006).

Relatedly, this study sheds further empirical light on extant corporate branding theories by revealing manifestations of misalignment of identities or values among internal stakeholders – e.g. employee *culture* and management *vision* – that can undermine the corporate brand. This study also revealed nuanced expressions of *culture-vision*, *actual-desired*, *conceived-communicated*, and *core-organizational value* gaps, thus contributing respectively to the models proposed by Hatch and Schultz (2001), Balmer and Greyser (2002), and Urde (2003). In cases of misalignment, the cynical reflections of engineers can be constructively deployed to illuminate the shortcomings of corporate branding in practice: these were partly described in this thesis as failure factors in corporate brand communication, initiatives, and conduct.

Adopting conventional, old-fashioned, static, dispirited, inflexible and uninteresting corporate branding initiatives had at many times discouraged engineers from active participation (Christensen and Cheney, 2000; Karmark, 2005; Hatch and Schultz, 2008). This appeared to be partly because these initiatives were designed by non-engineers – i.e. by external branding consultants or internal communication executives or a combination thereof – and in an excessively top-down, one-way, marketing-led, and management-driven manner. In devising initiatives, ‘the top’ is usually senior managers (supplanted by external consultants) who are rather cut off from the lower tiers (Ind, 2004; Burmann and Zeplin, 2005; Burmann et al., 2008). It could be inferred

from the respondents that, this was due to a problematic presupposition (or lack of confidence) of marketing managers in engineers' level of understanding, appreciation and knowledge about corporate branding.

***P3.** Corporate branding initiatives that are carried out in extensively top-down, marketing-led, dispirited or management-driven manners, risk alienating employees, disengaging them, or suffocating their specialist talents or nuanced contribution, thus undermining the corporate brand.*

Economic conditions also proved to be a factor in whether a firm breached espoused values or not, both internally and externally. Taking onboard projects that do not resonate with the corporate brand values appeared not only to discredit value initiatives in the eyes of stakeholders, but also create long-lasting ethical distress for employees. Undue sensitiveness to organizational culture and paying lip service to employees' emotional state in times of financial difficulty proved to cause employees' loss of trust, devotion and morale. It also appeared to increase the likelihood of losing talent or undermining their efficiency, creativity and loyalty.

***P4.** Corporate brands that pay only lip service to espoused values or organizational culture during financial downturns are likely to lose stakeholder trust, human capital, employee support and practical efficiency.*

The inter-dynamism of corporate culture, identity and the corporate brand also surfaced in the data. While organizational culture appeared to constitute the root of the corporate brand (Hatch and Schultz, 2000), organizational identity proved to set the ground for employees' perceptions upon the corporate brand (Hatch and Schultz, 2008). Disparities between the corporate brand values and cultural values in engineers' viewpoint demonstrated that 'real', 'lived', and authentic values are to be sought in organizational

culture and identity and not in the corporate brand *per se* (Kärreman and Rylander, 2008), unless an espoused corporate brand is well aligned with corporate culture and identity. When they resonate, employees' opinions of the corporate brand were reported to be enhanced.

P5. Misalignment between corporate brand values and those 'lived' by employees day-to-day undermines the corporate brand, leads to disregard upon the initiatives, and gives rise to ethical discomfort among employees.

Last, but not least, it was shown that an underlying engineering-marketing divide drives many of the perceptions upon the corporate brand and the initiatives. Engineers showed great inclination to and engagement with, the 'hard', rigorous and challenging aspects of engineering corporate brands rather than the 'soft', presentational and/or marketing aspects. Findings of this thesis show that professional services firms equally rely on the technical side of the corporate brand, more so than on brand awareness and relevance among stakeholder groups. To that end, the engineers in this study identified more readily and engaged better with, the specialist competencies as well as the technical dimensions of the corporate brand (Kotler et al., 2006; Ohnemus, 2009).

P6. As engineering consultancies rely on technical excellence, engineers show greater reliance on the technical, rather than the presentational, aspects of the corporate brand.

The table below summarizes more explicitly the theoretical contributions of this thesis as discussed above.

Table 7.1. Theoretical contributions of the thesis

Article	Contributions of this thesis
(Hatch and Schultz, 2001; Balmer and Greyser, 2002)	Demonstrates empirical manifestations of misalignment between <i>culture-vision</i> perspectives, as well as <i>actual-desired</i> , and <i>conceived-communicated</i> identity types
(Alvesson, 2004; Hatch and Schultz, 2008)	Highlights the risks involved during financial downturns for ascribing undue consideration to values, ethics, organizational culture and staff morale
(Urde, 2003; Ind, 2004; Kärreman and Rylander, 2008)	Demonstrates empirical manifestations of misalignment between <i>core</i> (corporate brand) values and <i>organizational</i> (actually ‘lived’) values
(Alvesson, 2004; Alvesson and Kärreman, 2004; Shepherd, 2005)	Provides nuanced account of the tensions and inter-dynamism between personal brands and the corporate brand
(Greenwood and Empson, 2003; Greenwood et al., 2006)	Provides nuanced account of tensions and mutual implications between corporation and partnership from the perspective of corporate branding

(Kotler <i>et al.</i> , 2006; Ohnemus, 2009)	Levels the association of corporate brand and technical proficiency in engineering-intensive contexts
(Alvesson and Kärreman, 2004; Kunda, 2006; Ditillo, 2004)	Illustrates deployment of corporate brand initiatives as a means of normative control and power discourse

7.9. Summary

In this chapter, the findings of three case studies were reviewed on a cross-case basis and in light of the literature reviewed in Chapter Two. Findings are categorized into six organizing themes: the inter-dynamism between personal brands and the corporate brand, nuances and failure factors in corporate branding conduct, tensions between the two organizing forms of partnership and corporation and its implications for the corporate brand, implications of financial downturns for the corporate brand, the engineering-marketing divide and its manifestations in engineers' perceptions of the corporate brand, and last, the association between the three constructs of corporate culture, identity and the corporate brand. Original theoretical contributions of this thesis were more specifically and succinctly reviewed under the theoretical contributions section. Six propositions were generated respectively as a result in order to set the theoretical starting point for future studies. Wherever relevant, this section outlined directions for future research and underlined findings of this research that are worthy of further investigation.

Chapter 8: Conclusion

8.1. Concluding remarks, objectives and chapter structure

In Chapter Five, findings from across the three case studies were discussed in-depth in light of the literature reviewed in Chapter Two. Six organizing themes were common among the three case studies and formed the basis of Chapter Seven's discussion. These themes were: corporate vs. personal brands; the conduct of corporate branding; partnership vs. corporation in corporate branding; the engineering-marketing divide; economic conditions; and the interaction among corporate culture, identity, and brand. Theoretical contributions of the thesis were also further developed and clarified in the final part of Chapter Five.

In this chapter, it is intended to summarize the key pertinent theories and explicate the ways in which the findings of this thesis enlighten and contribute to them. Therefore, in its first part, the chapter briefly reviews the key pertinent theories at the focus of this thesis and then explains the thesis' theoretical insights and contributions. The chapter then goes on to consider personal reflections, managerial implications, limitations of the study and directions for future research.

8.2. Theoretical insights

As explained in Chapters Two and Five, the corporate brand has been defined in the literature as an organizational identity type; an *expression* of a clearly-defined business model, visions and values which revolves around brand 'promise' (Balmer and Greyser, 2003; Hatch and Schultz, 2003; Knox and Bickerton, 2003). Engineers' definitions of the corporate brand corroborate with the identity-based definitions. They similarly

defined the corporate brand as a 'projection' of 'who we are' and 'what we do'. In the literature, alignment between the corporate brand and other types of organizational identity is praised (Hatch and Schultz, 2001; Balmer and Greyser, 2002; Balmer, 2005). The engineers studied in this thesis also raised concerns when their perceptions of the corporate brand and values went out of sync with other engineers' (within the same organization) or management's perceptions.

Scholars have emphasized that the corporate brand is 'lived' through employees' behaviour (de Chernatony, 2002; Ind, 2004; Karmark, 2005). It is also contended that 'real' and authentic corporate brand is experienced through employees' everyday practices (Gilmore and Pine, 2007; Ind and Bjerke, 2007; Kärreman and Rylander, 2008). It was shown through this thesis that engineers believed the same: that the corporate brand is engrained and is 'implicitly' embedded in the everyday life of the organization; how employees are treated and how they behave toward customers.

Engineers' 'conscious' attentiveness to values initiatives and the like (e.g. philosophy, vision and/or mission statements) were minimal simply because engineers did not 'experience' them day-to-day, could not remember their contents, and/or initiatives stood in stark contrast to the 'reality' of the firm. When there was evident misalignment between the espoused values of the corporate brand and the 'actual' organizational culture or when the company breached its own (ethical) values, engineers tended to disregard (and at times strongly criticize) non-conforming initiatives even more strongly. Engineers' attentiveness to the culture of the firm and how its values are delivered in practice was considerably high.

It has been highlighted in the literature that the corporate brand is key in shaping the attitudes (and thus behaviour) of employees (Ind, 2004; Burmann and Zeplin, 2005;

Brexendorf and Kernstock, 2007; Punjaisri, 2009; Thorbjørnsen and Supphellen, 2011). It is also contended that a strong corporate brand enhances employees' identification with the organization (Albert et al., 2000; Ind and Bjerke, 2007), brand citizenship behaviour (Ind, 2004; Burmann and Zeplin, 2005) and overall (economic) performance (Munoz, 2004; Kotler and Pfoertsch, 2007; Wong and Merrilees, 2008). But the literature is very thin on the role of personal brands – professional employees who develop brands of their own – within the corporate brand, the inter-animation among them, and the mutual implications. This thesis enlightens an important, yet widely-understated, phenomenon that is the significance and implications of the personal brands in relation to the corporate brand (Gad, 2003; Shepherd, 2005).

It is demonstrated in this thesis that, at times, the personal brands of organization members are more potent in shaping the corporate brand than the other way around. It was shown that rivalries and tensions emerge between the two brand types when their strategic directions or values fall out of sync (Alvesson and Kärreman, 2004). Also, a power discourse is perceivable between the corporate brand and personal brands (Alvesson, 2004) which threaten to replace the self-driven buy-in of organization members to the values and missions of organizations.

Corporate branding is often defined in the literature as an integrated mode of communication to stakeholders (Bickerton, 2003; Knox and Bickerton, 2003; Gregory, 2007). It is contended that corporate branding can be deployed to align the presentational aspects of corporate communication as well as employees' attitude and behaviour with the corporate brand promise (Hatch and Schultz, 2001; Schultz, 2005a; Morsing, 2006).

However, engineers perceived corporate brand initiatives – particularly those that attempted to bring presentational, attitudinal and behavioural elements of engineers’ practices into an integrated shape – as a threat to their individualistic identities and nuances. Engineers expressed concern about attempts to ‘norm’ them through corporate branding initiatives that appeared to dilute and suffocate their individual, collective and local autonomy. Thus, a downside to corporate branding is apparent when it threatens employees’ individuality, nuances and autonomy. This thesis demonstrated that the delicate balance between incorporation and partnership needs to be considered and maintained when devising corporate brand initiatives, particularly in knowledge-intensive context.

As discussed earlier in this chapter, it has been shown in the literature that the corporate brand is key for enhancing economic performance (Munoz, 2004; Kotler and Pfoertsch, 2007; Wong and Merrilees, 2008) and employees’ identification with the organization (Albert et al., 2000; Ind and Bjerke, 2007). However, macro- and micro-level financial downturns, and the implications for the corporate brand and employees’ attitudes, have not been discussed sufficiently in this regard.

Engineers indicated that although a strong corporate brand can provide a sense of financial safety to stakeholders, particularly during economic downturns, companies are vulnerable to paying lip-service to their employees’ emotional states, and to breaching their (ethical) values in order to survive financially difficult times. The corporate brands in the cases studied appeared to prioritize staying in business over corporate brand values when ‘things are not rosy’. That is, the test provided by the economic downturn proved corporate brand values to be a second-ranked priority in the cases studied. Thus, economic pressures appeared to suppress and overshadow the corporate brand and values to a large extent.

In the literature, corporate branding is criticized for being dominated by the marketing discipline (Schultz and Chernatony, 2002; Balmer and Gray, 2003; Schultz, 2005b). It is noted that heavy association with the marketing discipline does disservice to the theory and practice of corporate branding as a multi-disciplinary and multi-dimensional construct (Hatch and Schultz, 2008). In the cases studied, as well, corporate branding was by and large perceived as a subsidiary of marketing. Most of the initiatives were perceived as marketing tools for ‘the outside world’. To those engineers who saw a stark contrast between engineering and marketing, perceiving corporate branding as a subsidiary of marketing appeared to disengage them from corporate brand initiatives. That said, an engineering-marketing divide was noticeable only to a moderate extent. The classic engineering-marketing dichotomies noted in the literature (Shaw and Shaw, 1998; Shaw et al., 2003) appeared to be much less present in the engineering-intensive case studies examined in this thesis. Debates, cynicisms and nuances expressed in engineers’ accounts appeared to be more focused on the *details* of how corporate branding can be operationalized and made more efficient rather than on the very relevance of corporate branding or marketing to the engineering context.

Last but not least, corporate branding has been articulated in the literature as a top management responsibility (Balmer and Gray, 2003) with cross-sectional reach and the multi-disciplinary engagement of all stakeholders (Schultz, 2005b; Ind and Bjerke, 2007). Although much has been said about the importance of engagement and participation in devising and communicating corporate brand initiatives, little is known on *how* engagement with the initiatives can actually be maximised (Gregory, 2007; Jaakson, 2010a).

In all the three case studies examined, corporate branding initiatives were perceived as ‘top-down’ practices. Because of that, not only was engagement with the initiatives was

negatively affected, but also the divide between the engineers and the initiators (i.e. top management, marketing constituents or external consultants) was exacerbated. Those initiatives that implied one-way communication, and those with insufficient cultural authenticity (i.e. the espoused values being true to the everyday lives of employees), were by and large disregarded. Bottom-up approaches whereby employees are truly involved in developing the initiatives proved to be much more efficient. Compelling initiatives such as events, competitions, meetings, workshops, one-to-one conversations, webinars, and management speeches, to name some, appeared to be much more influential modes of communication to enhance the level of employees' buy-in and engagement with the corporate brand/values-building initiatives.

8.3. Personal reflections

One of the accusations made about engineers and engineering contexts is that engineers are brand-averse and that corporate brands are perhaps not a very sensible concept to engineers. When this research was launched and when it was exposed to other scholars at conferences or during internal meetings, initial reflections were along the lines of: 'engineers don't care about branding and why should they?' and 'don't engineers think branding is for the marketing department to handle?' These views and predominant assumptions about engineers in the mainstream marketing and corporate branding literatures were among the motivations for this thesis; to find out what engineers themselves actually think about corporate branding.

Although this study found some (limited) evidence to support such presumptions about engineers, it found plenty of evidence that surprisingly showed engineers' significant affinity with, attentiveness to, and curiosity towards corporate branding-related

concepts and activities. The corporate brands in all the cases examined proved to be meaningful to engineers and yielded clear brand associations in their minds.

Interestingly enough, engineering brands also entailed emotional attributes and connotations with which some engineers demonstrated strong engagement and identification (*'...like...the music you listen to...regardless of whatever music it is, it stays with you...'*). This finding somehow debunks the myth and discredits the presumption that engineers are brand-averse, or that they perceive corporate brand initiatives as total 'fluff'.

As explained, when there was cynicism, engineers did not question totally the very relevance of the corporate brand, its significance or its positive implications. Instead, they raised questions and offered insightful recommendations to enhance the way corporate brands and brand initiatives are operationalized, managed and communicated. Thus, engineers' cynicism and rational inclinations can, and did in this thesis, serve as an insightful source for refining, (re-)defining and adapting many of the extant corporate branding theories.

Another interesting observation was that engineering consulting firms are becoming ever more brand conscious, and carry out relatively advanced corporate branding programs (internally as well as externally). Increased competition, changes in the market, and new client preferences such as corporate social responsibility (*'the values may have shifted. So now at the moment values are very much on green'*) were mentioned among the factors leading to increased corporate brand awareness among engineering consulting firms.

It was unexpected to find that CEB Tech. had acquired EH marketing consultancy to drive its corporate branding program in-house and in a more concentrated and

professional manner. In an interview with an EH brand consultant, she noted that they are increasingly receiving inquiries from other B2B clients to bring their corporate branding activities into shape. All this implies that extant understanding in the corporate brand literature lags behind the advancements of branding in engineering-intensive contexts and B2B settings more generally.

The impression gained is that engineering-intensive consulting firms in particular, and B2B businesses in general, will continue developing and advancing their corporate branding programs. In the meantime, although insights from extant corporate branding theories can be constructive, a more focused research attention needs to be nurtured to adapt the theories to the very specificities of the knowledge-intensive consulting sectors. Given that extant theories are by and large developed in consumer-based contexts, more needs to be done on the corporate branding of knowledge-intensive consultancy contexts.

Finally in this regard, another observation was that the classic divide between engineering and marketing on corporate branding was not evident in the case studies of this thesis. Apart from a normal level of distinction and separation, all in all, engineers appeared to be much more attentive to the role and implications of corporate branding than one would expect. Marketing-awareness and brand-orientation appeared to be a strong cultural orientation and attitude in engineers' reflections (*everyone's to be marketing-aware these days*).

Although in most cases engineers prioritized engineering excellence and expertise over corporate branding *per se* in bringing about business success, corporate branding as a concept as well as a set of initiatives was not devaluated. For example, in response to the question "How much of your business success is dependent on engineering as

compared to corporate branding?’ on average a ratio of 3:2 was in favour of engineering technical proficiency. This shows that engineers by no means regarded the role of corporate branding as insignificant.

8.4. Managerial implications

This thesis can be insightful not only for corporate branding scholars, but also academics in other disciplines, e.g. marketing, management, and industrial engineering, who may find its findings and contributions pertinent. In particular, this thesis reveals several aspects that can be insightful for practitioners; managers, consultants and engineering employees can benefit from the findings of this thesis in different ways. A number of managerial implications are now summarized.

First, it appears that corporate branding initiatives need to be more interesting and compelling in order to engage engineers. As shown, adopting conventional approaches in the conduct of corporate branding initiatives made many engineers take them ‘with a pinch of salt’, ‘as a given’, or consider them ‘mere management speak’ which are hardly any different to those pursued by other firms. As corporate brands and values need to be distinctive to enhance employees’ identification with them, the initiatives as well need to be more distinctive, innovative and compelling to gain the interest and mind-space of engineers. It is recommended that managers and employees put more creativity and earnestness to devising compelling initiatives (in a bottom-up manner). Social events, innovative presentations and inter-personal connection between employees and managers – particularly founders – proved to be more efficient and engaging modes of corporate branding.

Second, it was shown that when corporate branding is top-down in its approach and conduct, or when there is a physical and/or emotional disconnection between engineers and those who devise branding initiatives, there is a high risk that the initiatives will be disregarded or, in extreme cases, resisted. It is recommended that managers encourage bottom-up approaches to corporate branding activities. In doing so, more power should be delegated to engineers to take control of the initiatives. Engineers need to be empowered to conduct corporate branding from A to Z; to develop the initiatives, conduct training, and communicate values through storytelling, to name a few aspects. Brand consultants and managers can always serve as facilitators and mentors for corporate branding efforts instead of being the direct points of initiation. In bottom-up approaches, the cognitive barrier will also be more effectively eliminated – i.e. engineers devise initiatives in a syntax that is familiar to themselves.

Regarding the two points mentioned above, engineers can, for instance, devise visuals of some of their ‘sustainable’ or ‘innovative’ projects with a few introductory lines of text next to them in the form of posters. These visuals are perhaps more engaging, authentic, and familiar to engineers than having three or five ‘values key words’ on a poster hung on their office walls. As another example, instead of having brand training carried out solely by (external) marketing or branding professionals, (cynical) engineers who are convinced of the positive results of ‘living’ the corporate brand can serve as much more potent and influential sources of storytelling. Hence, informed engineers can be deployed to run branding workshops.

Third, it was seen in all the cases examined that employees’ intrinsic motivations and an inspirational organizational culture were among the most potent driving forces of a successful corporate brand because engineering consultancy is highly dependent on human capital (*‘we are consultancies, so we sell people’*). Therefore, managers should

invest considerably in enhancing organizational culture and staff morale. Particularly during financially hard times, commitment to the organization's corporate brand values and the organizational culture appeared to be significant determinants in retaining talent and surviving financial turmoil. Facilitating socialization, maintaining face-to-face contact with employees, and transparency in the communication of initiatives were among the factors mentioned which enhanced organizational culture.

Fourth, managers should acknowledge the power of consultants' personal brands and try to leverage them to create synergy with the corporate brand. Plus, corporate branding initiatives should not threaten the individualistic, collective or local autonomy of engineers (i.e. personal brands). Adequate flexibility and room for local adaptation need to be planned for in corporate branding initiatives. Engineers' individualistic qualities and local contribution should not be diluted solely for the sake of maintaining a uniform corporate brand.

At the same time, uniformity in the presentation of the corporate brand should not be misconceived as mere 'sameness'. The partnership style of organization is typically at the core of consultancy firms where creativity, collaboration, and project-based procedures are central. Thus authentic versatility and openness are essential characteristics of the engineering consulting setting, without which the creativeness and agility of the corporate brand can be undermined. Corporate branding initiatives that connote unnecessary bureaucratic limitations or destructive incorporative uniformity need to be minimized.

Fifth, engineering and corporate branding should be considered as complimentary aspects of the engineering consulting business, not as two separate 'functions'. Separation between the two through departmental structures, procedures or

responsibilities appears to cause confusion, tension and division. It is essential that managers define corporate branding as an orientation and mindset, rather than a function, for engineers. Interweaving corporate brand values and initiatives into the everyday practices of engineers appears to be a better way of engaging engineers, rather than calling these items ‘corporate branding activities’ *per se*. In this regard, engineers’ cynicism towards branding or marketing activities need not be exaggerated or overestimated. Instead, engineering cynicism can constructively be interpreted as a sign of engagement. In this sense, engineers’ cynicism should be deployed as an insightful source to modify and enhance corporate branding initiatives; engineers can be empowered and assigned branding activities with a decent level of management support.

Finally, sixth, the ethical reservations and values of employees need to be taken into account by managers and key decision-makers at all times. Corporate behaviours that breached employees’ ethical or personal values appeared to negatively affect engineers’ commitment, identification with the organization, and engagement with the corporate brand. Particularly when these values were outlined by the corporate brand and then (intentionally or unintentionally) breached, engineers’ reactions appeared to be strong. Misalignments in values amongst employees, as well, appeared to cause considerable internal tensions. Relative value alignment among the corporate brand and personal brands proves to be a significant integrating factor; breach of values, value ‘policing’, and undue sensitiveness to personal values equally proved to be destructive to employees’ self-concept.

8.5. Limitations

This thesis is constrained with a number of practical and interpretive limitations. As discussed in Chapter Three, the methodological approach, findings and interpretation of data could have been different depending on the philosophical underpinnings, level of access, and interpretive capacity. In this part of the chapter, the limitations of the research are more succinctly outlined and, accordingly, directions for future research are then introduced.

The data collection procedure was bound considerably by the level of access granted by participating firms. Managers' concerns about engineers' time (*'when I'm managed...its people make sure that I've got plenty of work to do'*) as well as serious security reservations (particularly in the case of JC) made open access extremely difficult to attain. If more open access could have been secured, perhaps ethnographic and culture-based approaches (in a smaller number of cases) would have been enabled, giving another insightful method for data collection.

Another limitation is that three case studies are, in fact, an insufficient sample to draw generalizable conclusions about the perceptions of engineers of corporate branding and corporate brand initiatives. As discussed in the quality criteria (Chapter Three), the purpose of this thesis is also not to draw conclusions as such. Instead, it was aimed at providing further empirical light and insight on engineers' perspectives on the concept and practice of corporate branding. With the six propositions that were generated as a result, future studies are closer to running quantitative surveys in engineering- or other knowledge-intensive settings in pursuit of more generalizable conclusions.

Looking beyond this thesis, the focus here was solely on the corporate brand concept and initiatives. Future research can look into different aspects of engineers' perceptions,

not only on corporate brand-related concepts, but also other marketing or management phenomena.

Last, but not least, one limitation is my interpretive capacity and experience as the author of this thesis. Although all of the interviews were reviewed by two supervisors experienced in interpretive approaches, the quality of the interpretations could have been enhanced with more experience. In light of these main limitations as well as the findings of this thesis, a number of directions for future research are proposed in the following section.

8.6. Directions for future research

The inductive approach of this thesis created more questions than answers. Six propositions were generated based on each of the *organizing themes* of this thesis. Each of these propositions can serve as the basis, inspiration or starting point for future research. In this part, these directions are briefly reviewed.

First, the inter-animation between the corporate brand and personal brand(s), as discussed extensively in this thesis, still promises to be an interesting and vital line for future research. The implications of personal brand(s) in relation to the corporate brand or to other personal brand(s) – even personal brands of clients and associates – can be further explored. The power discourse among the corporate brand and personal brand(s) equally promises to be an insightful line of research. Critical (and Foucauldian) approaches appear to be appropriate to unveil the dynamism and power discourse between various brand types. Also, the moderating impact of project size, seniority of personal brands, market characteristics, and the state of inter-organizational relationships, as surfaced in this study, with respect to the mutual

implications/relationship of the corporate brand and personal brand(s), can be further surveyed.

Second, the way corporate branding is operationalized in practice, i.e. the ‘how to’ questions in the conduct of corporate branding, have been less discussed in the literature and deserve more extensive research. This thesis revealed (some of) the disengaging factors in the conduct of corporate branding and engineers’ interactions with corporate brand initiatives. More research is deemed necessary to identify the impacts and implications of the disengaging factors outlined in this thesis, and to find other factors that can lead to corporate branding failure. In this regard, future research can further explore the implications of top-down approaches, and identify the ways in which bottom-up approaches to corporate branding can be facilitated and enhanced. Plus, the moderating impacts of employees’ age, seniority, and educational background on ‘penetration’ of corporate brand initiatives is worthy of further research.

Third, the implications and tensions between the two organizational forms of corporation vs. partnership were surfaced and discussed in this thesis. Corporate brand associations with corporations (e.g. ‘steady’, ‘bureaucratized’, ‘managed’ or ‘big’) and partnerships (e.g. ‘agile’, ‘humanized’, ‘led’ or ‘flexible’) and the respective (positive and negative) implications are worthy of further research. The implications of the presence of founders (in partnership-style organizations), as compared to managers (in corporate styles) for the corporate brand are also worthy of further research. More insight is called for to identify the ways in which knowledge-intensive firms can leverage corporate branding initiatives with minimal negative associations of incorporation. More needs to be known as well on how the partnership style of organization can be nurtured, and professional partners’ buy-in to corporate branding

can be enhanced. More identity-based research is also needed to explore the identity reflections of employees in interactions with incorporative corporate branding activities.

Fourth, the inter-dynamism between the engineering and branding dimensions were revealed to some extent in this thesis. While the state of separation between the two elements of engineering and branding in engineers' perceptions were discussed, more research is deemed necessary to explore the implications of the engineering-branding or engineering-marketing divide.

Furthermore, the importance of 'emotions' was shown in this study. Emotional engagement was associated with the branding side, while rational engagement appeared to be associated with the engineering side of the corporate brand. Respectively, engagement with the 'hard' side of the business – i.e. engineering challenges – was said to be more rational than engagement with the 'soft' aspects – i.e. corporate branding. Future research can delve further into such engineering-branding dichotomies and dynamisms and unveil further implications. The ways in which the engineering vs. branding disconnection can be mitigated can also be the subject matter of future research.

Fifth, the implications of economic downturn for the corporate brand were discussed in this thesis. Due to its recency, the 2008 onwards economic downturn has not been discussed in depth for its implications for the corporate brand. This thesis showed two main threats during periods of financial turmoil: first, firms become susceptible to breaching their own brand values to survive; and second, pay lip-service to organizational culture and employees' emotional states. More implications can perhaps be identified in future research. It was also shown that economic downturns are opportunities for corporate brands to prove their level of commitment to their values

and enhance stakeholder trust. This and other opportunities can also be further explored in future studies.

Sixth, the association between the corporate brand, organizational culture and identity formed a strong theme in this study. It was shown that authentic corporate brands align their espoused values with the reality of organizational culture. It was also shown that unless there is alignment between the corporate brand, culture and identity in employees' perceptions, corporate brand initiatives would most likely be disregarded. Engineers also defined the corporate brand as an organizational identity type. These associations, although by large corroborated extant corporate brand theories, call for more identity-based or culture-focused research to unveil the ways in which the corporate brand and branding initiatives can be enhanced. Culture-based and/or identity-based approaches to corporate branding research can facilitate researchers with insightful angles to explore further the viewpoints of non-marketing constituents.

8.7. Summary

This chapter provided the final concluding remarks and summaries. In the first part, it started with the literature and provided a very brief review of what corporate branding means in theory. Different dimensions of corporate branding were touched on and simultaneously the findings and contributions of this thesis were provided on each part. This was intended to demonstrate how engineers' perspectives have enlightened extant definitions, conceptualizations and implications of corporate branding. Following a brief review of the literature and theoretical contributions of this thesis, in the next part, personal reflections were provided. Then, six key managerial implications, in line with the six organizing themes of the thesis, were suggested. Limitations of the thesis and directions for future research were also discussed in the final parts.

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Appendix I. Request of Access Letter

Dear [name of the contact person],

Following our conversation, here is a very brief summary of the research process as well as why and how I intend to carry it out:

My PhD will focus on engineers' perceptions of, and contributions to, the corporate brand in the case of an engineering consultancy. As a leading brand in the field, I would be grateful to have your support in granting access to some participants for the purpose of face-to-face interviews. The outcome promises to be particularly valuable to the participating company in the following ways:

- Further insight as to how engineers comprehend and reflect upon marketing and corporate branding initiatives.
- The impacts and implications of corporate brand-related activities on engineers' practices, attitudes and behaviour.
- Insightful understanding of the burdens or success elements in engaging engineers with the corporate brand values.

My findings are intended to enhance internal communication as well as to identify innovative and more efficient resource allocation mechanisms for corporate branding and/or marketing activities. Interviews are, of course, confidential and anonymous and each will take about 30 minutes (or perhaps we can conduct focus groups in case time is still of major concern). In total, I would expect to interview a minimum of 10 engineering professionals at different levels of the organization as well as 1-2 of branding/marketing/communication executives. I am happy to sign NDAs if necessary.

Please let me know if you have further questions. For further details I also enclose the actual academic proposal.

Many thanks again for your kind support thus far.

Best regards,

Alireza Sheikh

Appendix II. Consent Form

Consent of Interview and Utilization of Information

I understand that this interview is a part of PhD research work conducted by Mr. Alireza Sheikh, student of University of Leicester, School of Management. The interview contents will be kept anonymous and used for analysis done within his PhD research work only. The interview transcript will be given back to me for approval of contents.

I hereby give my approval for the interview contents to be used in the interviewer's PhD research thesis.

Name:

Email:

Position and years in this organization:

Signature and Date: