

# Chapter 1

## Framing Organisational Knowledge Through the Brand

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### ABSTRACT

*A brand is one of the most exciting assets of a company. It has the obvious purposes of identification, recognition, and differentiation, which are mostly directed to the external environment. But it is also responsible for transmitting intangible value, and for that reason, in the last decades, research has been demonstrating that the brand is also a fundamental resource for building commitment and citizenship behaviors among organizational internal audiences. There is also academic evidence that highly committed members of staff are more open to take part of collaborative multidisciplinary activities and more predisposed to share their knowledge. Moreover, commitment tends to increase as a result of brand-related participatory experiences. This chapter suggests that participatory and technology-mediated internal branding activities build on brand knowledge conversion and transfer, hence preparing, holistically, the organization and its members of staff for a generic sense on the benefits of knowledge sharing.*

### INTRODUCTION

The ideal decision-making process is currently characterised not only by the complexity of specialist knowledge that it incorporates, which in many cases includes several knowledge domains, but also by the increasing speed of responsiveness that has been transforming decision-making into quick moves with reduced processing time. This knowledge-led context brought up the need of guaranteeing multidisciplinary teams when it comes to make a decision, leading to the inclusion in decision-making boards of members of staff, from diverse backgrounds (not only business management or strategy), and many increasingly well educated, trained and informed individuals. However, in some economies (usually both low- and hi-income ones), employee turnover can be vertiginous, meaning that some organisations lose important knowledge and decision-making influencers, in some cases to their competition. These are justifiable reasons for the organisational promotion of knowledge sharing and, in more depth, for the exploration on the factors that will lead people to share their knowledge. Several studies show that organisational

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commitment is one of them (Oltra, 2005; Scarbrough, 2003; Willem, Scarbrough & Buelens, 2008) and that it depends heavily on the level of involvement employees have with the organisation's culture and values and, consequently, with the brand.

It is mundane that a brand must sustain the differentiation of an organisation (or its products/services) from its competition. Throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century the focus on the external impact a brand would have, via the most diverse communication strategies, was monumental. More recently, the role of internal communication and training of staff members for brand awareness has been increasing and gaining support, both from academia and some acknowledged top managers. In fact, in order to successfully represent the identity and define the image of an organisation, a brand must accomplish an essential condition: to become known. This happens when a certain level of brand equity is achieved, being brand equity a measurement tool of a brand's success, deeply connected to the brand's image residing in its external audiences' minds. However, in order to get this, organisations need to develop an intense internal branding work, providing their employees with access to the relevant information concerning their brand(s). Hence, regardless of their role and position, all staff must, first and foremost, understand the brand so then they can appropriate and use it properly — because, more often than not, the organisational brand is an element of constant presence in the professional life of those representing it (Lelis & Mealha, 2014, 2015).

Today, defining, designing, developing and nurturing a brand is a collaborative activity sustained in value creation, both by the organisation and all its stakeholders. The brand is, therefore, a cultural living manifestation, a symbolic construction based on a dynamic process of social interactions, which are grounded on knowledge.

Therefore, this position chapter is focused on one of the most significant assets in which organisational knowledge management should be heavily grounded — the brand. This is due to its value creation potential, centred on meanings exploration, learning and discovery, and their experimentation, appropriation, transformation, combination, re-representation using any universal, recognisable and transferable code, potentially harvesting unimaginable analogies and scenarios that can become rather relevant for organisational decision-making moments. A model that reinforces the assumption that knowledge management can benefit from a strong internal branding process will be presented and discussed, disregarding any organisational context in particular, but providing generic guidance at content and artefact level. Hence, the underpinning thesis is that managing brand knowledge is a way of managing organisational knowledge.

## **BACKGROUND**

A brand has always been the representation of a promise. When an organisation is designated by its name, an identity is being conferred to it, through a fixed, objective and functional element that makes up its brand. Traditionally, for most organisations, there is a tendency (and necessity) to maintain the organisational brand over a certain period of time, guaranteeing its identification and recognition among audiences. A brand must also lead to the differentiation of an organisation from its competition, in some cases in extremely saturated markets. The American Marketing Association defines brand as

*...a name, term, sign, symbol or design, or a combination of them, intended to identify the goods and services of one seller or group of sellers and to differentiate them from those of competition (Keller, 2003).*

This is considered the classic definition of brand.

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