
Original Article

The corporate brand identity matrix

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ABSTRACT The lack of a widely agreed framework to help define and align corporate brand identity constitutes a serious managerial problem and a shortcoming of the academic literature. In response, this article provides such a framework, the Corporate Brand Identity Matrix (CBIM), which draws upon the relevant literature, enriched by hands-on corporate experience gained by its application in three international corporate branding case studies. Corporate brand identity is explored internally, externally and by focusing on the 'brand core'. The CBIM offers academics and managers a theoretical and practical guide to the describing, defining and aligning of corporate brand identity. It is a tailored alternative to existing frameworks, which have often been designed for product brands, not corporate brands.

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INTRODUCTION

A serious practical problem for management is the lack of a widely agreed framework that can help to define a corporate brand identity and also to align its different elements so that they come together as an entity. This dislocation between theory and practice is not only frustrating for those in charge of corporate brands but, worse, may derail the brand-building process and ultimately jeopardise overall corporate strategy. A well-defined corporate brand identity is the bedrock of the management and overall long-term building of such a brand (Kapferer, 1991, 2012; Urde, 1994, 2003; Balmer and Greyser, 2003; Aaker, 2004; Balmer, 2008; Hatch and Schultz, 2008;

Balmer *et al.*, 2009; Burmann *et al.*, 2009; de Chernatony, 2010). The brand management discipline has long acknowledged that the strategic management of brand identity is a key activity. The focus, however, has typically been on product branding, corporate branding having been accorded far less attention.

This imbalance has placed corporate brand strategists at a disadvantage compared with their product-focused counterparts. The term 'brand management' normally assumes that the responsibility is for brands at the product level (Low and Fullerton, 1994), and product brand managers benefit from an array of established conceptual frameworks based on theory and tested in

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practice. This is especially true with respect to fast-moving, image-based consumer products (Ries and Trout, 1986). Advertising agencies, brand consultancies and such brand-focused companies as Procter & Gamble, Nestlé or DuPont have developed proprietary models specifically designed for the purpose of defining and aligning a product brand identity. Managers responsible for the corporate brand are not equipped with a comparable toolbox. In practice, they are typically obliged to transfer principles and frameworks developed for product brand management, or to use improvised hybrid models, in a context that is in fact distinctively different.

For example, the international engineering company ABB, subject of a case discussed in detail later in this article, was faced with the challenge of building a corporate brand that would succeed in being relevant to different customer groups and multiple non-customer stakeholders, across the five divisions of the company.

There are three likely general consequences of forcing a product brand framework into a typical corporate brand identity context such as in the case of ABB. First is the neglect of such essential internal aspects of the corporate brand identity as the organisation's culture, core values and mission. Second is probable oversimplification of the positioning and the value proposition. Lastly, the adopted framework could place too much reliance on image advertising as a means of communication and undervalue the importance of personal business relationships. Just as corporate brands differ from product brands (Balmer, 1995, 1998; Balmer and Gary, 2003; Schultz *et al*, 2005), so does their management (Knox and Bickerton, 2003; Esch *et al*, 2006; Hankinsson, 2002; Ind and Bjerke, 2007), and so should their professional tools.

The very description 'corporate brand' signals that there is an organisation behind

the brand, and that it is a part of the corporate brand (Alvesson and Berg, 1992; Balmer, 1995; Schultz *et al*, 2005). This constitutes one of the key differences between a corporate brand and a product brand. That distinction is manifested in language. The company will typically speak of itself as 'we', internally and in public discourse, while customers and other stakeholders will speak of it as 'they'. A product brand, on the other hand, will be called 'it' by everyone. This significant difference has far-reaching implications for both the understanding and management of corporate brands, and for the design of relevant frameworks. The mission, vision and core values of the corporation and its culture and competences are vital elements of a corporate brand's internal component, often simply absent from frameworks developed for product brands.

The establishment of a relevant managerial framework for corporate brand management is furthermore motivated by the increasing strategic importance accorded to these brand assets in theory and practice (Hamel and Prahalad, 1985; King, 1991; Aaker, 2004). The rise of corporate brands has been driven by their power as an element of strategy (Balmer and Gary, 2003), as a resource (Grant, 1991, 1996; Barney, 1996; Knox and Bickerton, 2003), as a competitive tool (Kapferer, 2012), as a contributor to brand performance (Harris and de Chernatony, 2001; Gromark and Melin, 2011), as a source of equity (Burmam *et al*, 2009) and as a vehicle for integrated corporate-level marketing (Balmer, 1998; Brexendorf and Kernstock, 2007; Balmer and Greyser, 2009).

In business, the trend is to place more emphasis on the corporate brand (Augustsson and Larsson, 2012). Typically, the intent is to progress from offering customers branded products to providing them with broader 'customer solutions', with the corporate brand in the limelight. Knox and

Bickerton (2003) offer practical guidelines for managers of the corporate brand, emphasising that the ‘conventions of corporate branding’ should focus on the importance of setting the ‘coordinates’ of the brand’s identity, articulating the brand proposition, positioning the brand, communicating it consistently, driving corporate branding deeper into the organisation, and monitoring the branding strategy for relevance and distinctiveness. The consequent shifts in a company’s strategy for its corporate brand may be radical, elevating that from being no more than exploitation of the company name or names to finding a way to represent and symbolise the entire organisation.

The purpose of this article is to provide a managerial framework for the definition and alignment of corporate brand identity. The proposed framework, the ‘Corporate Brand Identity Matrix’ (CBIM), provides a template for management in the analysis, definition, coordination and building of corporate brand identity for improved performance.

THE LITERATURE: BRAND IDENTITY FRAMEWORKS

A brand can be thought of as a ‘sign’ that is intended to acquire and communicate meaning (Levy, 1959; Guiraud, 1971; Mick, 1986). The management of brands can thus be regarded as the management of the meaning of signs. According to the seminal semiotician Charles Sanders Peirce, ‘A sign, or representamen, is something that stands for something in some respect or capacity. It addresses somebody, that is, creates in the mind of that person an equivalent sign, or perhaps a more developed sign’. In the context of the present study, the ‘object’ in question is the organisation and the sign is the corporate brand identity, which Balmer (2010) describes as a ‘distillation’ of the total corporate identity.

When that corporate brand identity is communicated and interpreted, it will create an equivalent or more developed sign in the minds of customers and non-customer stakeholders. The corporate brand identity is thus the outcome of a process of encoding. The task of responsible management is therefore to define the corporate ‘sign’ and align it into a single entity (the focus of this article), communicate it (a process that falls beyond the scope of this article) and thereby initiate a decoding process in the hearts and minds of receivers (Shannon and Weaver, 1964; de Saussure, 1983). This acquisition of meaning happens in a social setting, and a corporate brand is a social construction (Blumer, 1969; Solomon, 1983; Silverman, 1993). Management’s own description of the corporate brand identity is only one view (Alvesson and Berg, 1992), being an intended meaning that will differ in various respects from those perceived and interpreted by others (Balmer and Greyser, 2002, 2003). Given the purpose of this article, the perspective adopted is that of management and, in particular, corporate brand management engaged in the process of defining brand identity.

This review of the literature discusses the evolution from the early product brand models focusing on image to identity-based product and corporate brand frameworks. It includes both established practice-oriented models, and widely cited, influential theoretical identity frameworks that are relevant to the topic of this article. The aim of the review is to provide a sound theoretical foundation for the proposed CBIM and to position the study in relation to the theoretical gap identified, that is, the lack of a widely agreed managerial framework for the defining and aligning of a corporate brand identity.

It has been proposed that, in principle, there are two different approaches to the defining of a brand (Knox and Bickerton, 2003; Baumgarth *et al*, 2011; Urde *et al*, 2011).

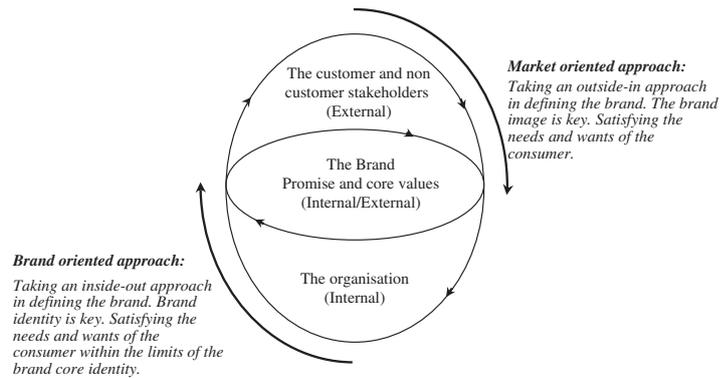


Figure 1: The market and brand-oriented framework (Urde *et al.*, 2011).

Figure 1 shows schematically that these *outside-in* and *inside-out* perspectives, respectively, reflect the market- and brand-oriented paradigms: they are different, but synergistic. This conceptual framework, generally used in the review and categorisation of existing brand models, was the point of departure for the construction of the new and original corporate brand identity framework introduced in this article. It was chosen for the explicit and logical structure that it offers, clearly distinguishing the internal, core and external components of a corporate brand's identity.

Product branding

The concept of the *augmented product* (Levitt, 1960, 1981) expanded on the product–brand relationship, and on associated tangible and intangible benefits. The need to define the brand and coordinate brand communication was recognised in the 1960s by advertising agencies and their customers, primarily in the fast-moving consumer goods sector. The Ted Bates agency developed *the Brand Wheel*, consisting of five concentric fields, representing attributes, benefits (functional, emotional or symbolic), values and brand personality, around the 'brand essence' at the hub. Other proprietary models following a similar logic are Unilever's *Brand Key* and

Johnson & Johnson's *Bull's Eye*. In the academic literature, the seminal *Brand Concept-Image Model* (Park *et al.*, 1986) reinforces the idea of selecting, implementing and controlling a brand image over time. Such models were primarily designed for image-driven product brands and were intended to 'satisfy the needs and wants of the consumers' (Kotler, 1984), which is characteristic of a market-oriented approach (Kohli and Jaworski, 1990; Hooley *et al.*, 1998). They are not concerned with the internal aspects of the brand, which seriously limits their applicability to the defining of corporate brand identity.

The influential *Brand Identity Prism* (Kapferer, 1991, 2012), drawing upon the pioneering work of Asch (1946), shifted the focus of the earlier models from 'image' to 'identity'. The prism's six facets correspond to the elements of a brand's identity: physique, relationship and reflection plus personality, culture and self-image. The emphasis on self-image and reflection, respectively, describing 'what I say to myself through my choice of brand' and 'what others say about or think of my choice of brand', makes the Brand Identity Prism more suitable for analysis of product brands than corporate brands. However, Kapferer's inclusion of culture, and the distinction made between internalisation and externalisation, positions the model as a bridge

between those relating separately to product brand and corporate brand identity. The importance placed on the identity defines the model as one of the early brand-oriented frameworks.

Corporate branding

The management task of defining and aligning identity is typically more complex than in the case of product brands, because of the distinctive characteristics of corporate brands (Knox and Bickerton, 2003). For example, management needs to take into account the fact that: most corporate brands have multiple customers and non-customer stakeholders; they cover broad ranges of products, services and solutions; and an organisation, with its own culture, is an essential part of the brand. The corporate identity is a crucial source in the definition of the 'corporate brand identity', which describes the defining attributes of any organisation, all of which therefore have a corporate identity (Melewar and Jenkins, 2002; Balmer, 2010, 2008). Corporate brand identity in turn describes a 'distillation of corporate identity' (Balmer, 2010, p. 186). From a management standpoint, the definition and alignment of corporate brand identity is the formulation of a strategic intent: how management wants the corporate brand to be perceived by internal and external stakeholders. Consequently, corporate brands 'are born out of corporate identities, but live in the minds of groups and individuals' (Balmer, 2010, p. 186).

Existing corporate brand identity frameworks typically have a *core identity* (essence) and an *extended identity*. Core identity is defined in the *Brand Identity Planning Model* (Aaker, 1996, p. 85) as 'the timeless essence of a brand'. While it is a useful theoretical overview in which brand identity is a central part, it is too general to work effectively as a managerial framework specifically for corporate branding. Collins and Porras

(1998) advance the discussion of the essence of a company's identity in their *Core Ideology Model*, which underlines the relevance of the purpose and the core values as key elements of a corporate brand's identity. This model also provides useful insights relevant to the topic of this article but it too does not constitute a managerial framework. Its proponents define purpose as 'the organization's fundamental reason for existence beyond just making money' and core values as 'the organization's essential and enduring tenets' (Collin and Porras, 1997, p. 73). These are in turn constituent parts of such strategic branding processes as those proposed by Knox and Bickerton (2003), de Chernatony (2010), Keller *et al* (2012) and Melin (1997). The vision of the brand and its values is the starting point when de Chernatony (2010) describes the 'strategic process for building integrated brands' (p. 76) and the brand essence as management's identification of the central characteristics that will define the brand, and thereby expresses a brand-oriented approach. The *Market and Brand Orientation Framework* positions core values at its centre, together with the brand promise, in such a way that the brand core is 'the strategic focal point' (Urde *et al*, 2011, p. 3). It furthermore distinguishes three kinds of value: 'internal', which is related to the organisation; 'core', which encapsulates the brand; and 'external', which is intended to appeal externally to relevant customers and non-customer stakeholders.

The extended identity typically consists of elements that reflect the core identity. For example, in Aaker's *Brand Identity Planning Model*, the value proposition and position are included, to 'provide texture and completeness' for the brand identity, the brand position being 'the part of the brand identity and value proposition that is to be actively communicated to the target audience and that demonstrates an advantage over competing brands' (Aaker, 1996, p. 176).

Brand communication and visual identity programmes are other expressions of the corporate brand identity guided by the core identity (Olins, 1989; Mollerup, 1997). Management needs to adapt the extended identity over time, however, ‘to preserve the core and stimulate progress’ (Collins and Porras, 1998, p. 81).

The different elements of a corporate brand identity framework need to be aligned, that is, come together as an entity (Farquhar, 2005). A corporation may in fact have multiple identities that need to be aligned (Balmer and Greyser, 2002, 2003). *The AC3ID Test* (Balmer *et al*, 2009) maps six identity types, thereby clearly making the point that identity is not a ‘monolithic phenomenon’. Its originators also call attention to the alignment between what is promised (covenanted) and how that affects the identities of the corporate brand, which Balmer *et al* (2009, p. 7) describe as a

‘dynamic congruence rather than a perfect alignment among the different identity types’. The *Corporate Branding Tool Kit* (Hatch and Schultz, 2001, p. 131) focuses on the conjunction among vision, culture and image, emphasising that ‘to get the most out of a corporate branding strategy, the three essential elements must be aligned’. Both these frameworks are centred on the aligning and managing of different types of identities, but are not concerned specifically with defining a corporate brand identity.

Table 1 offers an overview of the key elements of the product and corporate brand identity frameworks reviewed and discussed here. It shows that they are structured as primarily *internal*, both *internal and external* (core) or *external*. The arrows illustrate the market-oriented and brand-oriented approaches to defining brand identity (Urde *et al*, 2011). The theoretical foundation summarised in the table is one of

Table 1: Key elements of product and corporate brand identity frameworks

Market oriented approach: Defining brand identity from the outside in	
External	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Attributes, benefits and consumer values (<i>Brand Wheel</i>: Ted Bates) • Self image and reflection (<i>Brand Identity Prism</i>: Kapferer) • Value proposition: (<i>Brand Identity Planning Model</i>: Aaker) • Position (<i>Brand Identity Planning Model</i>: Aaker) • Discriminator and reason to believe (<i>Brand Key Model</i>: Unilever) • Image (<i>Brand Concept-image Model</i>: Park, Jaworski and MacInnis) • Relationship (<i>Brand Identity Prism</i>: Kapferer; <i>Brand Identity Planning Model</i>: Aaker)
Core: External and Internal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Essence (<i>Brand Wheel</i>: Ted Bates) • Kernel values (<i>Brand Identity Prism</i>: Kapferer) • Covenant (<i>AC3ID test</i>: Balmer) • Core and extended core (<i>Brand Identity Planning Model</i>: Aaker) • Core values and promise (<i>Brand and Market Orientation Framework</i>: Urde, Baumgarth and Merrilees) • Personality (<i>Brand Identity Prism</i>: Kapferer) • Visual identity / Expression / Communication (Olins; Mollerup)
Internal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Culture (<i>Brand Identity Prism</i>: Kapferer; <i>Corporate branding tool kit</i>: Hatch and Schultz) • Mission and Vision (<i>Brand Vision Model</i>: De Chernatony) • Purpose (<i>Core ideology model</i>: Collin and Porras) • Organizational values (<i>Brand and Market Orientation Framework</i>: Urde) • Organisational culture (<i>Brand vision model</i>: De Chernatony. <i>Corporate branding tool kit</i>: Hatch and Schultz) • Core values (<i>Core ideology model</i>: Collin and Porras)
Brand oriented approach: Defining brand identity from the inside out	

the starting points for the development of the new CBIM framework explored in this article.

Towards a new framework

This article has so far addressed the need for corporate brand managers to have at their disposal a managerial framework for the strategic process of defining and aligning corporate brand identity. The literature review has confirmed that there is a critical theoretical shortcoming in this regard. The product brand models typically neglect the internal component central to corporate brands and are primarily designed for an outside-in, image-driven approach. This rather one-sided market-oriented approach tends to underestimate the significance of the organisation and its culture as a source of identity and the foundation for a corporate brand.

Corporate brand identity frameworks are first of all rare, and second limited to either certain theoretical aspects, such as the alignment of an identity, or broad conceptual overviews that have less obvious application to management. Several useful descriptions of the strategic branding processes do exist, outlining key elements of such tasks, but do not necessarily explain in detail how those are to be integrated or managed in practice. Although the various models offer some degree of understanding, they are limited in their ability to establish explicit guidelines for application and subsequent action on the part of managers. There thus exists a clear theoretical gap to be filled, and the literature relating to both product and corporate branding offers a solid foundation on which to draw in the development of the new framework proposed here.

METHODOLOGY

The findings of this study and the conclusions drawn from them were generated by a

multi-method approach to data gathering and analysis, which Gummesson (2005) identifies as a common feature of contemporary qualitative research. A formal review of the literature relevant to the management of corporate brand identity yielded a consolidated comparative understanding of the various models and frameworks currently available to planners and managers with responsibility for this vital aspect of business strategy. That overview then informed the development of a new and original framework, the *Corporate Brand Identity Matrix*, or CBIM. This combined analytical tool and operational guide in turn formed the basis of a structured case study investigation (Yin, 1989, 1993) of the management of three real-world corporate brands in real time. This method offers the potential for the generation of concepts, categories, models and general theories from empirical data (Perry and Gummesson, 2004).

The choice of the case study method was further motivated by the opportunity to study corporate brand management at first hand, a form of action research (Lewin, 1946; Argyris, 1973), in which 'the output results from an involvement with members of an organization over a matter which is of genuine concern for them' (Eden and Huxham, 1996, p. 75). In the present case, the aim of developing a managerial framework for corporate brand identity coincides with the 'genuine concern' of the case companies that shared interest, providing a rare opportunity to combine the case study method with action research.

The fieldwork was facilitated by personal access to the management processes of defining and aligning three corporate brand identities. Specifically, the resulting case studies describe and discuss the application of the CBIM framework over a 3-year period from 2009 to 2011 by strategic brand managers at three multinational, stock-exchange listed companies: ABB (power

and engineering), Cargotec (engineering and logistics) and Trelleborg (polymer technology). Their scale and scope provided the opportunity to apply the matrix to a variety of issues related to corporate brand management. Of particular relevance to this article is the fact that the brand strategies of all three have a clear corporate brand focus. Each case illustrates a separate aspect of the total process: *describing* (ABB), *defining* (Cargotec) and *aligning* (Trelleborg) the corporate brand identity.

Multiple data sources were exploited in all three case studies, including archival records; internal documents relating to business strategy, positioning, brand strategy (for example, corporate brand platforms), and corporate culture (for example, the 'our-way' kind of documents); codes of conduct; market research, customer and employees surveys; and advertising and communication initiatives. The ABB case further involved personal coordination of six workshops attended by 80 managers in total, at which the focus was on description of the corporate brand identity. At Cargotec, the opportunity was to observe and lead the application of the CBIM to the task of defining the corporate brand identity, in 12 workshops in 10 countries involving 110 managers. The CEO and the executive team took an active part in the process during those workshops, providing their expert input into the use of the matrix, and also in meetings and interviews. In the Trelleborg case, in-depth analytical and exploratory discussions with corporate brand management were followed by three workshops at the head office, additionally involving the communications department, which examined how the matrix was applied to achieving congruence within the corporate brand identity.

The development of the matrix was further refined during its use as a workshop model in executive education programmes in Scandinavia. Participants analysed more than 50 business-to-business and business-

to-consumers corporate brands encompassing manufacturing, retailing, services, institutions and not-for-profit organisations, during full-day sessions. They applied established brand identity frameworks typically used in product brand management, such as Kapferer's Brand Identity Prism, in parallel and in combination with the new CBIM. These 'bench tests' delivered insights into the strengths and weaknesses of the available alternatives, and into managers' expectations of the new model.

This purpose-designed methodology, combining the case study and action research approaches, permitted the drawing of confident generalisable conclusions and the discussion of the theoretical and managerial implications of the CBIM.

A NEW MANAGERIAL FRAMEWORK: THE CBIM

This section first explains the criteria that guided the development of the new framework, before discussing its structure and the integration of its nine constituent elements into a three-by-three matrix.

Developing the CBIM framework

On the basis of inputs from the literature review and the case studies presented in the next main section, two sets of criteria governed the process by which the CBIM was developed, respectively: theoretical and managerial.

From a theoretical point of view, a usable framework for the defining and aligning of a corporate brand identity needs to:

- include the internal component;
- balance the external and internal components, and link them into a coherent entity;
- define the 'core' and 'extended' elements of the corporate identity, and the key relationships between the two;
- distinguish between different types of 'values and promises';

- clarify what differentiates the corporate brand identity.

From the managerial point of view, such a framework needs to:

- provide a structured and comprehensible overview of the corporate brand identity;
- guide the identification and selection of different types of ‘values and promises’;
- guide relevant internal and external communications;
- inform discussion of key correspondences between the different elements of the corporate brand identity;
- suggest means of leveraging the corporate brand identity, and guide the creation and maintenance of competitive value propositions.

Bearing in mind these 10 key requirements for the contributions to be made to theory and practice, the logic and structure of the *Market and Brand Orientation Framework* (Urde *et al*, 2011) were chosen to form the basis of the new and original three-by-three CBIM matrix shown in Figure 2.

The selection and specification of the nine elements were guided by the theoretical and managerial criteria established at the outset. A first theoretical foundation was the key identity elements from existing brand identity models, as earlier summarised in Table 1. For each horizontal row in the

CBIM, the key identity elements were considered, grouped and regrouped. The objective was to select ‘labels’ for the nine elements using established terminology that would ‘work and fit’ in a managerial context. This selection process was iterative between the theoretical and the empirical, which is typical for case study research. The resulting matrix is the outcome of discussion and bench-testing of each tentative version within the case companies. Their feedback inspired the development of the framework, for example, in the inclusion of the ‘competences’ element, which was viewed by the informants as a vital component of an effective corporate brand identity, but had not been included in the original theoretical foundation. Another example of action research helping to shape the final framework was the labelling of the ‘mission and vision’ element, based on such verbatim comments as ‘it’s better to group these concepts together since we often confuse them’. The resulting matrix is therefore not limited to the accumulation and re-structuring of elements of existing models, but is a unique managerial framework that has been developed and tested in co-operation with managers.

Elements of the CBIM framework

The nine elements of the CBIM in Figure 2 define the totality of a corporate brand’s

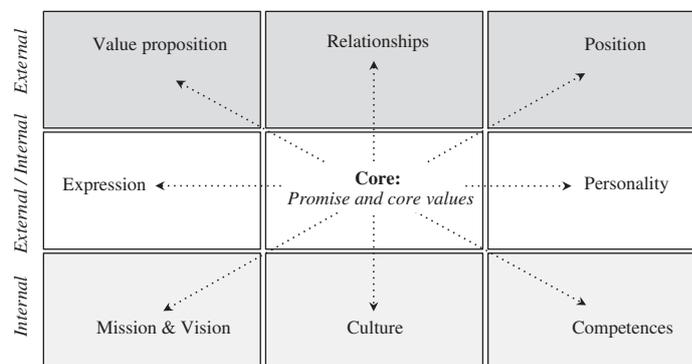


Figure 2: The CBIM.

identity. Its internal (sender) component is described in terms of three characteristics of the organisation: its 'mission and vision', its 'culture' and its 'competences'. The external (receiver) component comprises 'value proposition', 'relationships' and 'position'. The matrix is completed by three elements that are both internal and external. 'Personality' describes the corporate brand's individual character, whereas 'expression' defines the verbal and visual manifestations of the brand. The 'brand core', consisting of a brand promise and supporting core values, is at the heart of corporate brand identity.

Three aspects of the framework demand comment before the individual elements are discussed. First, the arrows radiating from the centre symbolise the fact that all elements of the matrix are interrelated and form a structured entity. The content of one element 'echoes' that of the others, with the core as the centre of the framework. In a coherent corporate brand identity, the core reflects all elements, and every element reflects the core.

Second, the CBIM differentiates between three types of value: 'organisational' (bottom row); 'core', summing up the essence of the corporate brand identity (centre of middle row); and 'external' (top row), for transmission to relevant customers and non-customer stakeholders.

Third, it allows for a market-oriented, brand-oriented or combined approach to the process of defining and aligning corporate brand identity. Typically, a market-oriented approach is initiated by considering the external element, such as the value propositions. In a brand-oriented approach, the internal elements and the core constitute the foundation and the point of departure.

Internal elements

The three internal elements in the matrix relate to the realities of the organisation and

its values. Its mission and vision, the corporate culture and its various competences are the bedrock of the internal component of the corporate brand identity. The emphasis placed on these elements is a distinguishing feature of the CBIM. It is worth noting that not all internal values are relevant in the definition of the corporate brand identity, aptly described by Balmer (2010) as a 'distillation'.

The corporate mission is vital to the corporate identity, in explaining why the corporation exists and what engages and motivates it, beyond the aim of making money (Collin and Porras, 1998). A company's vision extends the mission by formalising its view of where it is heading and what inspires it to move forward (de Chernatony, 2010). In the definition of corporate brand identity, mission and vision are sources of commitment (Senge, 1990) and willingness to support (Greysier, 2009) from the organisation itself and beyond (Alvesson and Berg, 1992). For an organisation with a brand-oriented approach, the mission typically represents a point of departure in the process of defining corporate brand identity (Urde, 1994, 1997, 1999).

The culture of an organisation is a broad reflection of its corporate attitudes, values and beliefs, and of the ways in which it works and behaves (Hatch and Schultz, 2001; Schroder and Saltzer-Morling, 2006). From a strategic point of view, this element in the CBIM represents a source of differentiation and potential competitive advantage (Brexendorf and Kernstock, 2007; Burmann *et al.*, 2009). Kapferer (2012) describes the corporate culture as a source of the brand's 'aspiration' and its products; services and solutions are not only representations of its culture, but also a means of communication. Heritage and track record (Urde *et al.*, 2007; Beverland, 2009), country of origin (Balabanis and Diamantopoulos, 2011) and iconic leaders (Holt, 2004) are potentially significant aspects of a corporate

culture that influence the nature of the corporate brand identity.

The inclusion of competences as an element in the CBIM confers extra strategic relevance relating to the creation and maintenance of sustainable competitive advantage. Those encompass an organisation's capabilities and processes (Grant, 1991, 1996; Stalk *et al*, 1992; Leavy, 2003), while its core competences (Prahalad and Hamel, 1990) are particularly important in the definition of corporate brand identity. The competitiveness and value of a corporate brand as a resource are reflected in the answers to such strategic questions as what the organisation is particularly good at, what special knowledge and ways of working make it stand out, and what it does better than the competition.

Internal–external elements

'Personality' and 'expression', located to either side of the 'brand core' in the middle row of the matrix, bridge the internal and external components of the corporate brand identity.

The 'brand core' is defined here as an entity of core values supporting and leading up to a promise. This positions core values at the heart of the CBIM, underlining their pivotal role and importance. An appropriate question to initiate a strategic discussion about a corporate brand core would thus be: 'What do we promise and what are the core values that sum up what our brand stands for?' In the CBIM, the brand core is its centre; it is ideally coherent with the other elements, and vice versa. The emphasis placed on the brand core and its role in the integration of corporate brand identity is a key aspect of the new framework. The corporate brand promise gathers the core values together as a meaningful whole (Urde, 2009). It is communicated externally and has a guiding role internally for the organisation's 'living the brand' initiatives as discussed by Ind (2007),

Burmann *et al* (2009) and Baumgarth (2010). The importance of a brand core is its capacity to give focus, guidance and coordination in the management of brands. A defined core permits a dynamic approach to corporate brand building over time.

In the CBIM, the personality element defines the combination of characteristics or qualities that form the corporate character. Keller and Richey (2006) note that corporate brand personality differs from product brand personality, which typically relates to consumer and user imagery for a specific product brand. A corporate brand personality is more dependent on the personality of the employees representing the corporation. A relevant question that a responsible manager might ask, relating to this element, could therefore be: 'What combination of human characteristics or qualities forms our corporate character?' This personality is to a large extent shaped by the way it is expressed (Bernstein, 1984), a correspondence indicated in the matrix by the arrow between the two elements.

The expression element is concerned with verbal, visual and other forms of identification as part of a corporate brand identity. A question that might be posed to elucidate this element is: 'What is unique or special about the way we communicate and express ourselves, which makes it possible to recognise us at a distance?' 'Expression' is made up of a combination of tangible and intangible features, typically tone of voice, design, graphic style and logotype (Olins, 1989; Mollerup, 1997). A corporate brand's expression also comprises its brand prototype, a flagship product, which is representative of the brand's qualities (Kapferer, 2012). The CBIM embraces visual identity as part of the corporate brand identity, but not at its heart.

External elements

A defined corporate brand identity represents the way in which the corporation

wants its brand to be perceived externally. The three external elements in the top row of the CBIM will influence that image and reputation to a significant extent. They need to be consistent with the brand core and with the other elements in the framework. For corporate brands, typically serving multiple customer groups and stakeholders, they furthermore need to be carefully integrated and adapted to the needs and expectations of target audiences. According to Kapferer (2012), a brand identity creates a model with which audiences can identify, that mirrors the customer's self-image and creates a reflection of it. In the CBIM framework, it is important to note that self-image and reflection relate to customers and non-customer stakeholders. These are aspects that need to be considered early in the process of defining corporate brand identity.

The value proposition element of the CBIM concerns the combinations of appealing arguments directed to customers and non-customer stakeholders (Frow and Payne, 2011; Rintamaki *et al*, 2007). An effective value proposition should lead to a favourable relationship between customers and the brand and ultimately to positive purchase decisions (Aaker, 1996, 2004), as well as a favourable reputation (Greyser, 2009). The CBIM draws attention to a key management challenge, namely, the formulation of specific value propositions, which are at the same time consistent with a broad and overarching brand core. This particular issue will be discussed in the ABB case study.

Relationships, and how they are built over time, reflect and define a corporate brand identity. This is an element that defines a mode of conduct, and the choice of a brand is, as Kapferer (2012) puts it, also a choice of a relationship. In the CBIM, the correspondence between relationships and culture is emphasised by a vertical arrow. The way an organisation with a corporate

brand delivers service to its customer, works with them and relates to them needs to be reflected in the corporate brand identity. Given that a corporate brand typically has multiple audiences to which it has to relate, multiple relationships have to be integrated, in that one forged with one stakeholder group potentially influences relations with others (Fournier, 1998; Farquhar, 2005).

The position element defines how management wants the corporate brand to be positioned in the market, and in the hearts and minds of key customers and non-customer stakeholders (Keller *et al*, 2012). It is closely related to the corporate brand identity (Kapferer, 2012), but must not be confused with what is usually meant by 'positioning'. In the CBIM framework, the position is included as a point of reference for the process of positioning that follows the definition of the corporate brand identity. The choice of an intended position is a way to differentiate the brand identity (Esch *et al*, 2006). The link between the position and the mission and vision is emphasised by a diagonal arrow in the CBIM. This implies a need to align the organisation's reason for being and its direction with the intended position.

Using the framework

As a management tool, the framework is designed to support all those working operationally or strategically with the corporate brand identity. In Table 2, each of the framework's elements is described by 'indicative questions', the purpose of which is to initiate the discussion of a particular element in practice.

APPLYING THE MATRIX: THE CASE STUDIES

The three case companies illustrate different applications of the CBIM in business practice: first, to *describe* the corporate brand

Table 2: Indicative questions for the application of the CBIM framework

<i>Element</i>	<i>Indicative questions</i>
Value proposition	What are our key offerings and how do we want them to appeal to customers and non-customer stakeholders?
Relationships	What is our intended position in the market, and in the hearts and minds of key customers and non-customer stakeholders?
Personality	What combination of human characteristics or qualities forms our corporate character?
Core	What do we promise, and what are the core values that sum up what our brand stands for?
Expression	What is unique or special about the way we communicate and express ourselves making it possible to recognise us at a distance?
Mission and vision	What engages us, beyond the simple aim of making money (mission)? What is our direction and inspiration (vision)?
Culture	What are our attitudes and how do we work and behave?
Competences	What are we particularly good at, and what makes us better than the competition?

identity; second, to *define* it; and third, to *align* it. The case studies will demonstrate the hands-on experience derived from using the CBIM.

Describing corporate brand identity: The ABB case

ABB's strategy has a clear focus on the corporate brand. ABB is a stock market listed company operating in the power engineering and automation sectors, the result of a merger in the 1990s between the Swedish ASEA and Swiss Brown-Boveri. It comprises five divisions, is present in more than 100 countries and has a current turnover exceeding €30 billion, approximately equivalent to \$39 billion at the conversion rate obtained in 2012.

The ABB corporate brand covers multiple businesses with numerous specialist products, services and solutions. A critical issue for the group's corporate brand management was the implementation of an existing brand identity platform, and adherence to it. Two key challenges were discerned: first, how to further the company-wide understanding of the platform, to explain what it is and what it represents, beyond that of a logotype and a graphic design programme; and second, how the platform could and should be applied in

order to add value at both the business- and product-area level.

At the first stage of the case study, the CBIM was applied to the task of *describing* the ABB corporate brand identity. Existing multiple data sources exploited were: the corporate brand platform (a primary source); the corporate design guide; codes of conduct and documents describing ABB's way of working and its culture; customer research records; and relevant policy and strategy documents. Analysis of the content of this documentation was supplemented by in-depth executive interviews and a sequence of workshops led by the author, to generate the overview of the ABB corporate brand identity. Figure 3 shows the outcome schematically.

At the second stage of the process, staff in the Force Measurement product area (concerned with techniques for measuring tension in steel) took part in workshops, in which they were asked to describe their unit's identity as a part of the ABB corporation. The representatives of this product area thus made specific contributions to the overall description of the corporate brand identity, relating to unique competences relevant to their unit, more targeted value propositions to be put to their customers, and a sharper description of their position. With specific reference to the

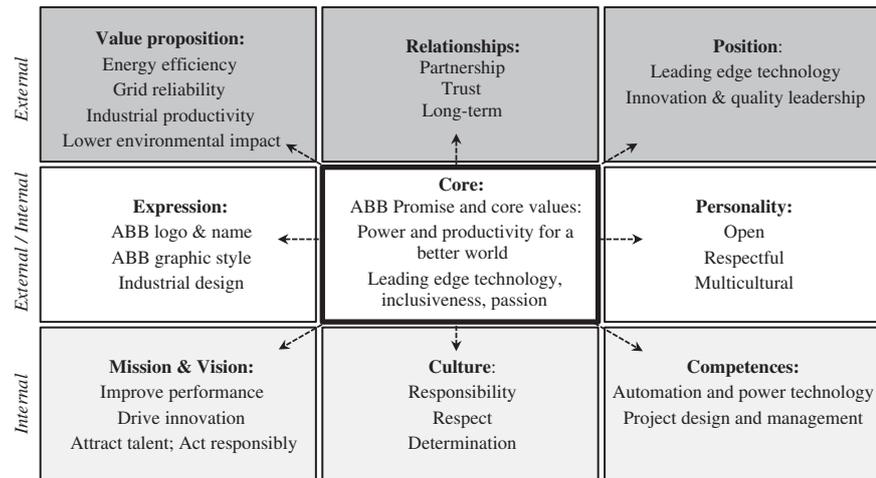


Figure 3: The CBIM as applied to the ABB corporate brand identity.

‘expression’ element, they added the product name Stressometer as being a significant contributor of their business and identity.

This case demonstrates how the CBIM was applied to the describing of corporate brand identity at an aggregated corporate level and at the product-area level. It illustrates the need for linkages to be made between different parts of any corporation. In practice, the process provided a comprehensible overview that improved the general understanding of the ABB corporate brand identity, and also its business relevance at the product-area level.

Defining corporate brand identity: The Cargotec case

This stock market listed Finnish company is in the business of cargo handling. In the run-up to the case study, it had decided to pursue a ‘one-company’ approach, focusing on its corporate brand. A new business strategy, offering customers global logistical solutions, drove the change to the brand strategy. The business idea was to create customer value and competitive advantage by bundling Cargotec’s specialised lifting devices, machines, service agreements and

IT networks into customer-specific solutions. A key objective of the company’s new business strategy was to integrate its service networks. As a result of these initiatives, major international customers, such as Maersk Line, the multinational shipping and container handling operator, are now offered integrated solutions rather than individual branded products.

For Cargotec’s corporate brand management, the task was to build a stronger corporate brand. Its brand portfolio contained three market-leading international daughter brands, Hiab, Kalmar and McGregor, all corporate brands in their own right at the time of acquisition. At the beginning of the case study process, the Cargotec mother brand was generally unknown in comparison with awareness of the daughter brands. The proposal brought to the CEO and the executive team was to ‘let the daughters define the mother’s identity’. The logic was to harness their cultures and track records to a Cargotec corporate identity rooted in the organisation, based on established values and promises earned and offered in the market by the daughter brands.

The CBIM framework was first applied to the task of *defining* the individual identities of the three daughter brands. The

input was obtained in 11 workshops conducted on 3 continents, led by the author, in which a total of 110 managers gave their professional views of ‘their own’ brand – Hiab, Kalmar or McGregor – and then of the ‘new’ Cargotec corporate brand. Each participant prepared for the workshop by filling in the matrix. In the sessions, groups of managers presented the identity of their brands and later discussed in plenary session one aggregated framework for the corporate brand identity.

On the basis of the input from the process, an internal survey completed by more than 3000 respondents rated such proposed elements of the identity as personality traits, ways of working, values and promises. An external survey of customers and non-customer stakeholders provided important additional input and resulted in final adjustments to the proposed Cargotec corporate brand identity.

For management, a fear in any major branding process is that the result will be disregarded by the organisation, as ‘yet another HQ initiative’. To build the necessary legitimacy and engender commitment, initiatives were undertaken to involve staff in the process and to share the frameworks arising from the workshops widely via the corporate intranet.

This case example shows how the CBIM can be used as a structured framework for the defining of a corporate brand identity.

Aligning corporate brand identity: The Trelleborg case

This Swedish polymer technology company has four divisions: Engineered Systems, Automotive, Sealing Solutions and Wheel Systems. The company’s rapid growth over the past decade has been driven to a large extent by acquisitions. Its decision to focus on Trelleborg as the corporate brand was based on the intent to drive growth internationally, to bring clarity to the

corporate structure and to avoid being labelled a conglomerate by the financial markets. The opportunity to leverage the corporate brand and harvest synergies was another important driver of the corporate brand strategy.

In this case study, the CBIM was applied to the alignment between the core and the extended identity, and to the potential gaps between them. Starting from a defined overview of the corporate brand identity, the focus was on the key relations between the correspondences in the CBIM, identified by the arrows in the general version of the matrix in Figure 2. The Trelleborg brand core, defined as ‘Solutions securing values: innovative and reliable solutions that seal, damp and protect’, was a point of reference in these discussions. The structure of the matrix sparked questions and detailed discussions felt to be relevant by the company’s corporate brand management and its Brand Council. Those debated included: To what extent does the Trelleborg corporate culture match the relationships striven for? Is our vision inspiring, and how does it encompass the brand core? Does it point towards the position to which we aspire? One question in particular, relating to Trelleborg ‘personality’ and the way in which it was expressed, provoked special interest among participants with responsibility for corporate communications. From a strategic point of view, debate focused on the extent of the company’s competences in polymer technology and the need for that to be reflected in the value propositions.

This case study thus demonstrates, by application of the CBIM, the role of the brand core and the means by which gaps can be detected and better alignment of the corporate brand identity thereby achieved. In practice, the corporate promise and the core values are frequently disregarded as ‘fine words’ with little or no business relevance.

DISCUSSION

Reflecting on the case studies, the corporate brand is clearly considered as a strategic resource and competitive advantage by all three companies. The main general issue is the perceived vagueness of what that brand actually is and how it may be best used in practice. In the workshops conducted, a first perceived hurdle to be overcome was to expand the product–brand mindset influenced by best practice and by examples that often related to image-driven product branding. In response, before introducing the CBIM to the workshop process, the distinction between product branding and corporate branding was discussed. A second hurdle was the perception that the management of corporate brands is primarily the responsibility of the marketing and branding department. Management understood intellectually that this was not an ideal situation, but was how it seemed to work in practice. To address this issue, participants in the workshops were selected from different managerial levels and functional divisions of each case company. In these settings, different views and perspectives of the corporate brand identity were confronted and consolidated. A verbatim comment by a human resources manager indicated the importance of a broader view of corporate brand identity: ‘Finally our role is clarified in relation to the business’. The inclusion of ‘competences’ as an element of the matrix was suggested by individuals from the case companies as described earlier. The companies’ strategic planning processes typically conform to detailed and established structures. A Head of Strategy said, for example, ‘the corporate brand needs to be a more formalized input into our strategy process’. The CBIM helped to bridge the discussion between different areas of responsibility, in this case with strategy.

The definition of the corporate brand identity was a first crucial step in the provision of an overview and general guidance.

In the workshops, these were called ‘master’ versions. The second essential step, to make those relevant to the different parts of the corporations, was considered in feedback discussions to be as challenging and important as the formulation of the corporate brand identity itself. The localisation and adaptation of the broader corporate brand identity to the specific functional areas was a necessary prelude to its activation.

In some workshops, the participants were asked to describe the current situation and the future aspiration for each element of the CBIM. For example, what was the company’s current culture and how did they want it to evolve? This gave an indication of potential gaps between current and ideal identity, which in turn spurred discussions on how to close those gaps and plan the appropriate management actions.

The application of the CBIM to the description of an existing corporate brand platform suggested the relative strength of ‘official’ values and statements. A technique used was to select key parts of an existing platform and ask participants to include those in their descriptions of the corporate brand identity. The result was that some ‘official’ values and statements were considered to be merely ‘fine words’, whereas others received strong support and were freely elaborated upon with examples from the participants’ own business experience. From a managerial standpoint, ‘hollow values’ that are only weakly rooted internally, or not at all, and lack credibility among customers and non-customer stakeholders demand review and revision.

The importance and influence of the core values and corporate promises varied among the case companies. In one, the brand core was clearly the ‘hub’ of the operation and the point of departure for the completion of the matrix. This can be interpreted as an indication of the strength and level of a corporation’s brand orientation.

Theoretical implications

This article contributes to the field of corporate brand identity by providing a bespoke managerial tool that integrates existing theory into a single framework, which has been developed and tested in cooperation with managers. In so doing, it addresses specific theoretical shortcomings identified in the relevant literature.

The CBIM first places strong emphasis on the *internal* component of a corporate brand identity. It thereby sets itself clearly apart from frameworks developed for product brands, and also from existing corporate brand identity frameworks, by including competences as a critical element of the model. As the diagonal arrow in Figure 2 shows, it furthermore emphasises the correspondence between competences and the value proposition.

The *brand core* is placed at the very heart of the CBIM. In that respect, the new framework is consistent with the logic of most product and corporate brand frameworks; the key difference is in the definition of the brand core as ‘a set of core values leading up to and supporting a promise’. That more complete and relevant definition of the brand core is specifically applicable to corporate brands, unlike, for example, the classic ‘brand essence’ developed by an advertising agency in the 1960s to guide the strategy of product branding. Vagueness in the definition of the core of the brand, whether product or corporate, is a theoretical weakness to be found in many existing frameworks. The CBIM uniquely positions the core values and promise as a beacon to guide the internal and external brand building processes.

A distinctive theoretical feature of the CBIM is its combination of elements surrounding the brand core and the key correspondences between it and those elements, as shown schematically in Figure 2. It thereby provides an overview of the essential relationships to be analysed, measured and tracked in practice, mapping

the domain of corporate brand management and defining its *raison d’être*.

The CBIM furthermore clarifies, defines and explains the roles and function of different types of value as part of a corporate brand identity. Internal values related to the organisation are clearly distinguished from the dual internal–external values related to the brand core, and from the external values related to the corporation’s value propositions, relationships and intended position.

Lastly, the newly proposed matrix integrates the market–orientation and brand–orientation paradigms. The process of defining of a corporate brand identity can take either an ‘outside-in’ (market-oriented) or ‘inside-out’ (brand-oriented) perspective. The CBIM is in that sense balanced, and reflects the theoretical proposition that those paradigms are different but synergistic. It takes particular account of the conceptualisation of brand orientation as a mindset with the brand core identity as its strategic hub.

Managerial implications

The purpose of this article is to provide a framework for the management of corporate brand identity. Accordingly, five implications for corporate brand management are now suggested.

First, the CBIM offers management a structured overview of the corporate brand identity and clarifies what it is, how it works and how to build it. The answers to these questions are vital for the understanding, internal support and commitment from the organisation, its top management and the board. The experience of branding that resides within an organisation has often been gained in the realm of product branding. By using a relevant framework, corporate brand management can avoid the risk of misunderstandings, clashes of models and taken–for–granted best practice.

The CBIM guides the definition of the corporate brand identity and its core, a

necessary point of reference for those charged with managing it. The framework can assist management in this task in two ways. First, the extended identity may lead to the definition of the core identity or, second, that definition of the core may influence the outer elements of the identity. The framework may be used in the selection and definition of values, promises and other elements of corporate brand identity.

Unlike existing frameworks, the CBIM is a management tool specifically designed for corporate brand identity, which can be used in combination with other models designed for product brands. In practice, it is rare to find the strict application of a brand strategy with only one corporate brand or of a multi-branding strategy consisting of only product brands. The responsibility of corporate brand management is therefore often extended to encompass product brands that have different roles and relationships *vis-à-vis* the corporate brand. The CBIM is an alternative, when the unit of analysis is a corporate brand. When the task is to define the identity of a product brand, several established models are available.

The CBIM guides the alignment of the corporate brand identity. Its structure suggests key correspondences among the elements, such as that between culture and relationships, and personality and expression. Do they in fact correspond? Are there gaps that need to be addressed? Does the brand core fulfil its role as the centre? The analysis of such correspondences between the elements and the core raises important issues for managers during the brand building process. It may also be useful in a review or a redefinition of an existing corporate brand identity.

Limitations and future research

The framework presented in this article has been adapted and developed for corporate brand management. It focuses on, and is

thereby also limited to, the definition and alignment of corporate brand identity. Important further insights could be derived from additional research into the application of the CBIM framework, including studies of the actual implementation, communication, measurement and tracking processes in practice. For example, the correspondences indicated by the arrows in Figure 2 could be further evaluated and quantified.

From the managerial point of view, a key task is the closing of ‘gaps’ between a current and ideal corporate brand identity. The CBIM framework shows how such gaps might be identified, and therefore further research on ways of closing them would respond to a critical managerial need. The three case studies in this article analyse brand strategies in which the corporate brand is in the limelight. Further case studies of organisations pursuing alternative corporate brand strategies, such as endorsement, could be used to explore the wider application of the framework.

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