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BUILDING BETTER ORGANIZATIONAL REBRANDS: EXPLORING THE EMPLOYEE VIEWPOINT

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Abstract

While organizational rebranding as abusiness phenomenon has become commonplace,it is accompanied bya startling failure rate and typically high cost. Employees play an important role in representing an organization's brand, but researchers have virtually ignored the employee perspective of these initiatives. This qualitative case study addressed that gap by exploring the employee viewpoint of a rebranding initiative including the employees'suggestions on ways to be engaged to strengthen buy-in and alignment with the new brand. Based on employee input, current rebranding theory was reinforced and two new barriers to success were discovered and proposed. This study concluded that with a better understanding of employee viewpoints, organizations are able to generate better rebranding outcomes for their stakeholders, including customers, organization leaders, organizers of these initiatives and, of course, for employees.

Keywords: Branding, rebranding, organizational rebranding, employee perspectives on rebranding initiatives.

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1.INTRODUCTION

Organizational brands can be powerful, and it is risky to rebrand and potentially alienate stakeholders with a change. [1] Despite its high failure rate and cost, rebranding has become commonplace [2] yet rebranding failures are rarely studied for lessons learned.[3] Overall, the increased popularity of organizational rebranding coupled with the substantial risk of failure raises interest about how to increase the chances of a successful rebranding outcome.

Employees play a critical role in representing the brand of an organization to customers.[4] Still, little is known about how to engage employees in a rebranding initiative to ensure they are united in representing the brand and contributing to a successful outcome.[5] Better understanding the employee viewpoint in a rebranding initiativemay lead to building better rebrands for all stakeholders.

Specifically, the purpose of this researchstudy was to explore the employee perspective by seeking the answers to two research questions:

1. How do employees describe their rebranding experience?
2. What are the employees' suggestions for how to engage them in achieving buy-in and alignment with the new brand?

By reporting employees' descriptions and suggestions for a rebranding initiative, the research findingsaddressed the shortcoming in the literature on the topic. Further, the employees' viewpoints were compared with findings from prior studies including the research [6] which established a list of enablers and barriers to successful rebranding initiatives. During analysis of the employees' viewpoints for this study, it was discovered that the findingsnot only confirmed the list [5] but also identified two new barriers to a successful rebranding initiative - the lack of a clear business strategy and the inadequate consideration of employees. By filling the current research gapwith the addition of the employee perspective and with the proposal to expand the list of barriers to successful rebranding initiatives with the identification of two new barriers, this study provides stakeholders with some important answers to increase the likelihood of success for these high risk initiatives.

2.RELATED LITERATURE

Definitions

Corporate rebranding differs from product rebranding in that corporate rebranding involves multiple stakeholders and considers their relationships to one another along with changes to culture, identity and image, including from any new logos or taglines with new meanings.[7] Corporate branding is also considered more strategic than product branding; it should include internal branding with the employees and typically is controlled by senior management, including the chief executive officer.[8] In this article, the termorganizational rebrandingis used interchangeably with corporate rebranding as the lessons of corporate branding and rebranding apply across all types of organizations.[5,9]

The evolution of rebranding practice and theory

Organizational rebranding is considered to have started in the 1990s .[10] A seminal rebranding study[8]in

2008 by Merrilees and Miller created a theory of rebranding based on a compilation of the findings from case studies of four organizations. While "employees" are not directly identified in the theoretical contributions listed in Table 1, internal branding, which involves employees, is listed twice. Additionally, stakeholder management, which would include the employee audience, is reported.

Enablers and barriers to success rebranding

In 2014, researchersevolved and advanced thetheory of corporate rebranding by specifying six enablers and five barriers,[6] as listed in Table 2,that inform rebranding practice and improve corporate rebranding outcomes. Enablers are the essential drivers that enable the rebranding to be successfully achieved, and the most critical enabler was found to be leadership. Barriers impede the rebranding process and inhibit success. The most significant barrier to a successful outcome was found to be anautocratic rebranding approach, which also ties to leadership. Enablers can help to prevent or overcome barriers. Thus, managers should endeavor to adopt enablers to overcome barriers and to promote strong rebranding outcomes.

While employees are not called out as an enabler group by researchers, their involvement can be inferred in the principles of brand understanding, internal branding activities, stakeholder coordination, and an integrated marketing program, which would combine both internal and external marketing plans. The first two barriers of an autocratic approach and stakeholder tensionsimply consideration of the employee audience in a rebranding initiative. The authors emphasized that corporate rebranding should be supported by stakeholder input along with a consideration of their needs [6] but employees are not explicitly mentioned by the researchers.

3.Successful rebranding

Existing organizational rebranding research has typically focused on the leadership, the consumer perspective, or successful examples.Rebranding failures are rarely studied for lessons learned.[3] While the act of organizational rebranding is now considered mainstream, rebranding literature has described rebranding initiatives as "risky" and [11] has stated these initiatives fail more often than they succeed.[12] Overall, rebranding has an even higher degree of difficulty than branding because it poses a higher degree of risk regarding the possibility of confusion among stakeholders, especially customers.[13]

Described organizational rebranding as a "strategic event or series of events" (p. 99), and, to be successful,it must be aligned with the overarching organization strategy. Also noted rebranding should be conducted with an understanding of the organization's culture[10] and the expectations of its stakeholders, which would include employees.Specified that successful rebranding should receive input from employees.[14] However, literature regarding employee involvement in rebranding is "limited despite its importance".[15]

3.1The employee factor

Employees are the most significant factor in projecting an organization's brand.[16] An organization's brand is not merely the sum of a logo and advertising. It comes from the people within the organization and how they communicate in all forms and with all stakeholders. As such, to be successful, rebrands cannot be merely forced on employees.[4] Employees are an essential part of an organization's brand, and they have to understand what the brand stands for, so they can "live the brand".[17] Organizations cannot assume they will have employee support for the new brand, even though it will be required to fulfill the new organizational brand promise.[16] Researchers reported that it is dangerous to put employees on the receiving end of a rebranding initiative, and it is naïve to adopt an externally driven, public relations-based approach to organization brand management, which can lead to a weak rebranding outcome.[18]

As rebranding is often a driver of change, the new brand does not always reflect the cultural status quo. An essential step in a rebranding initiative is to first share the rationale for the rebranding (the purpose) to create support, understanding, and commitment for the rebranding, to have a chance of being accepted by employees.[10] Suggested that leadership should communicate the desired change and its implications clearly and reasonably and reconcile the rebranding within the context of the true culture.[18]

With employee buy-in, a rebranding is more likely to be successful. Conversely, without employee buy-in, a rebranding is likely to fail.[5] When employees actively participate in a rebranding initiative, they generate a stronger brand commitment compared to weaker commitments from employees who received imposed guidelines based on behavior compliance.[19] Reported positive rebranding results when communications with employees were participative, changes aligned with core values,[20] and leaders clearly explained the rationale for the rebranding. Unfortunately, while internal branding activities have been found to be critical to communicating and delivering the brand promise to customers, organizations invest relatively little to ensure their employees understand how to translate brand messages into customers' experiences.[21] Indicated that investments in employee training are often minimized in favor of "non-human" elements, such as investments in the rebranding graphics or a new customer-service facilities.[22] This is despite the determination that investments in training more directly impact creating positive customer experiences as these experiences come from the interaction customers have with employees in the organization.

Overall, the relationship between employees and brands is still under-developed in research.[23] Considering the vital role employees play in brand delivery, current research lacks comprehensive examination of rebranding from an employee perspective.[24] This study addresses this issue with an in-depth study of employees' reactions to the rebranding of their organization.

4.METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to explore how employees view the rebranding process.Noted that a qualitative approach may be needed if the topic is new and the subject has not been addressed with a particular group of people, such as employees.[25] The present study fills the gap in the literature by exploring the employees' views about rebranding initiatives and their perspectives of ways to engage them in achieving buy-in and alignment with the new brand. The qualitative approach offered employees a voice, something largely missing in rebranding literature. Employees shared their perspectives on the initiative and made suggestions about how they thought employees should be engaged in a rebranding initiative to achieve buy-in and alignment. In qualitative studies, it is the power of the study to collect thick, rich descriptions from participants that can offer a deep understanding of the questions under study. [26]

Specifically suggested that case studies are an excellent fit for program evaluation.[27] "Case studies are the hallmark research approach for the corporate rebranding studies" (p. 174).[28] Given the good fit and strong endorsement, case study was selected for the study design. Timing played a key role in the selection of the particular organization for the case study. The organization's rebranding had been recently launched, and the employees had fresh perspectives to share. Leadership of the organization endorsed third party interaction of a researcher with their employees to collect objective data about the rebranding. The organization and its employees provided a bounded system, clearly defined in time and place for the case study.

Data for case studies typically comes from interviews, direct observations, participant-observation, documentation, archival records, and physical artifacts. [27] Data came from all of these sources for the study with individual and group interviews as the primary method of data collection. Thirteen employees of the organization were purposefully selected for interviews from the population of more than 100 full-time employees at the participating organization, and nine employees were selected as focus group members. In total, more than20 employees were interviewed representing approximately 20% of the employee population. Through participant-observation of an all-employee session, there was exposure to nearly all of theorganization's employees. The organization is an affiliate of a parent organization. One member of the board of the parent organization was also interviewed.

Data collected from individual interviews of the purposely selected employees were triangulated with observations of the all-employee meeting, data from the focus group, notes from the review of documents, existing archival information, and physical artifacts. Themes were established based on the convergence of data from the multiple sources and the perspectives from multiple participants. Excerpts from the triangulated data are introduced in later sections as Tables 3, 4 and 5. The manual thematic analysis of the interview transcripts was supplemented by word count analysis and keyword analysis. Member checking was used with several participantswho all confirmed the accuracy of themes and transcripts.

5. MATERIALS - THE CASE ORGANIZATION

The Organization:This was a single case study of the employees at an organization in California that recently experiencedorganizational rebranding. "ORG" is the pseudonym for the organization featured in the study. In the face of years of steadily declining business, ORG's leadership team initiated a rebranding initiative that engaged employees and customers and was led internally by the marketing team and key leaders. The initial focus was to radically upgrade the organization's website to more closely align messaging with organizational culture and historic values to reach customers with similar interests. ORG is part of a decentralized group of affiliate organizations that is managed by the board of a parent organization known the "parent" or the "administrators."In parallel to ORG's own internal efforts to rebrand and increase business, the parent privately made separateplans also aimed at increasing ORG's business. The administration wanted to shift the delivery of ORG's product from a combination of online and brick and mortar delivery operations to totally online delivery.This strategic shift was to be enabled by the administration's planned acquisition of another organization witha more comprehensivetechnology platform.In order to advertise the anticipated online delivery channelchanges which were designed to reach a much broader customer base, the parent made a decision to rebrand ORG. This initially resulted in two simultaneous organizational rebranding initiatives which were eventually blended together just prior to external launch.

Over the years, ORG had already begun a slow shift toward increased online delivery. During that timeORGhad faced two rounds of layoffs, and the staff had been downsized to match decreased business and also due to fewer staff were required to support the increase in online delivery. There was never any communication by the administration or ORG's leaders about a shift in strategy towards online delivery. Employees of ORG used pseudonyms to share their perspectiveof the organizational rebranding.

6.Themes

The case study was organized according to three descriptive themes that emerged from coding analysis of the interviews regarding the participants' experiences with the rebranding initiative. The three descriptive themes were derived from 42 subthemes that emerged from 76 preliminary codes that resulted from the analysis of data. The themes generated were:

- Context - reviewing the background of an organization offers important context for a rebranding initiative
- Descriptions - employees offer rich descriptions of their rebranding experiences
- Suggestions - employees create meaningful suggestions for ways to engage them to achieve buy-in and alignment with a new brand

7.Context

The context theme was based on employee descriptions and provided important insights into the organization regarding its values, culture, vision, strategy, customers, overall communication and leadership approaches, and decision to rebrand. A review of the situation facing the employees in the case study regarding the fundamentals of their organization established the context for the second and third themes. Table 3 provides further details and selected verbatim responses to outline the state of the organization at the time of the rebranding through the eyes of the employees.

ORG faced many challenges as it rebranded. The industryhad changed dynamically with a major shift towards online delivery, and ORG had faced years of declining business culminating in layoffs and increased involvement from the parent. The values and vision were no longer clear to employees and the type of customer had changed. There had been little communication with employees who wondered about the future of the organization. One interviewee précisedthe context of the present situation from the employee viewpoint: "I mean stuff has happened in a short amount of time... It's like, what's next?"

8.Employee descriptions of their rebranding experiences

Given there were initially two rebranding initiatives, employees had different definitions of the scope of the rebranding. They shared their impressions of the new tagline introduced by the parentand made historical references to previous ORG taglines. The organization's website was a focal point of the employees' descriptions of the rebranding. Interviewees mentioned increased business as a key indicator of the success of a rebranding initiative.

Employees considered the initial rebranding effort led by ORG, which was conducted in collaboration with employees, to be a positive experience. However the same employees expressed a negative response to the parent's rebranding of ORG. Other than the board member from the parent and ORG's president, not one interviewee expressed a positive opinion about the tagline developed by the parent for ORG as part of its rebranding efforts. Table 4 provides illustrative verbatim responses for the various aspects mentioned above.

Employee suggestions for ways to achieve buy-in and alignment in a rebranding

Employees offered many suggestions for how to achieve buy-in and alignment in a rebranding initiative with better communication as the unanimous choice. Examples of better communication mentioned were communicating a clear vision for ORG and sharing success stories. Employees also suggested it is essential to offer an opportunity for input, for the organization to listen, and for employees to be able to talk about changes to the organization. Sharing the context for decisions was mentioned as a way to help align employees and for leadership to explain what things are not changing. Engagement and involvement were also identified as ways to align employees along with trust, transparency, and internal branding activities. Table 5 provides selected verbatim responses for the various aspects mentioned above. One interviewee summed up the value of the suggestions and the challenge facing the organization,"I think for [the rebranding] to work you need buy-in at all levels."

9.FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The findings of the study were organized around the emergent themes. During analysis, a timeline of significant rebranding events that took place at ORG was created. One significant observationfrom the timeline was that the rebranding initiativesby ORG and the parent were both launched before the business strategy was decided by leadership. A comparison of the data with List of enablers and barriers to successful rebranding initiatives resulted in the other two major findings.[6]

Major Finding 1: The rebranding initiatives launched before the business strategy was decided.ORG employees were confused by two independent rebranding initiatives that were both launched at ORG without any communication of the parent's efforts and prior to final business decisions being made or communicated about ORG's strategy. Triangulation of the interviews and observation of the timing of the external launch of the rebranding confirmed the finding.Employee descriptions were corroborated by examination of external marketing materials. Taken together, the data confirmed that the two rebranding initiatives were launched months before the date that business strategy was decidedas reported by the president and board member.

Organizational rebranding is a strategic event or series of events and, to be successful, it must be aligned with the overarching organizational strategy. The potential for creating an empty brand message is significant if leaders do not "walk the talk" and demonstrate the new strategic direction regarding the organization's culture .[10] Internal marketing should precede external marketing so that employees can deliver the brand promise via external marketing.[25] Additional research supports that employee alignment with organizational strategic goals enhances organizational outcomes, and that high-performing organizations are characterized by employee alignment with goals.[30] So, if the organization's goals are not yet known, employees cannot possibly be aligned with the

Table 1:Case studies that drove original corporate rebranding theory

Year	Researchers	Case study organization	Theoretical contribution There is a need:
1995	Ewing, Fowlds, and Shepherd	Mazda (South Africa)	To be sensitive to the existing customer base, for strong advertising, and for internal branding
2003	Schultz and Hatch	LEGO Group	To be relevant today while maintaining the cultural heritage
2004	Daly and Maloney	Vodafone takeover of Eircell (Ireland)	For strong internal branding and a period of dual brands during the transition in a takeover
2005	Merrilees	Canadian Tire	For stakeholder management and a creative integrated marketing strateg

Note. Data collected from Miller and Merrilees (2008).

Table 2:Enablers and barriers to successful rebranding initiatives

Enablers	Barriers
Strong rebranding leadership	Autocratic rebranding approach
Developing brand understanding	Stakeholder tensions
Internal branding activities	Narrow brand re-vision
Continuity of brand attributes	Inadequate research
Stakeholder coordination	Inadequate customer consideration
An integrated marketing program	

Note. Data collected from Miller et al. (2014).

Table 3: Setting the context for the rebranding at the organization

Selected interviewee verbatim responses
Culture and Values
“We’ve gone through ‘reorg’ for two years straight.”
“What [this organization] was founded on, was to make [its products] accessible to a population that would not necessarily have access to it, which was the working adult.”
“If this [social justice] is still a core value, it is diminished. It doesn’t have the same force that it used to. I think it is good we are giving a testament to the original, but the value of it is much lower than it once was . . . completely reshaped and redefined.”
Vision
“You need a vision, or else you’re just reduced to the mundane.”
“Of course, I’ll do whatever [the boss] wants me to do. I think he’s a wonderful boss, but I don’t think he even knows where this vision is going; and if there’s not a vision, how much energy and effort am I going to put in?”
“I think there just more clarity is needed on what the vision is for how this new platform will fit in with the ORG mission and vision. And how it is an add-on rather than a substitution.”
Strategy
“Employees wondered “all the time” if the strategy is to put 100% of [the products] online.”
“The reality is that we have to be competitive. We have to change. And the [product] is struggling, and I want the [product] to live. So, I make compromises. Let’s move the [products] online because that’s where the [customers] are.”
“I think from a business standpoint, if [the new product] does not become the new core [of our business], then we will end up shutting the doors. That’s the question I can see, we all can see. Will we be one of many groups that will walk away from the total brick and mortar?”
Customers
“In the six years that I’ve been here, we have half the [customers] that we did when I started.”
“I think the [customer] has stayed somewhat the same.”
Another focus group member suggested, however, that the core customer was changing. “I just look at the [customers] that I work with, and when you sit here and talk, this is what comes to mind is, “I came to this [organization] for this [product] but no longer.” They came for the mom and pop, customized, warm and friendly, face-to-face, intimate. You know, more personalized type of experience, and now it’s become this corporate, cutthroat, black-and-white situation.”
Leadership and Communication
“ORG is part of an authoritative kind of organization,” which results in “people. . . standing around wondering what’s happening and they’re waiting on a higher authority.”
“I’ve been here 10 years. I feel is that there’s these decisions that are being made, which are above my pay grade, which I get; but I can’t be a good soldier and do what I do, if I don’t have all the information or if I’m being told one thing and something else is happening.”
“Communication. It’s a humongous blind spot. It’s always been like that.”
“Unfortunately, human nature, if we don’t have an explanation, we’re going to make one up that’s going to make sense to us, usually based on past performance. And so in our group, [we are] pretty good with coming up with doomsday scenarios, very creative, very creative—some of the things that come out. So that’s what it’s like, and then it starts this panic.”
“A lot of people think there’s been mixed messages [from leadership]. I think it’s a lack of trust.”

Table 4: Employee descriptions of their rebranding experiences and thoughts

Selected interviewee verbatim responses
"To me it's inclusive." [the internally-led website project]
"It's very jarring." [the parent's tagline for ORG]
"That's a bad tagline [from the parent]. I mean it really didn't say anything about ORG or anything. It's horrible actually."
"There's a particular ad I was very intrigued by. It says something like, "Hey, [get your product] the same way you stream TV. [Obtaining our products] is as easy as easy as turning on your TV? But it is actually not. It is much more difficult, and it's actually not for everybody because some people may not be able to do it online."
"I think a successful outcome [of the rebranding] would be that the [employees] embrace change and be excited about various different additions to the core [products] and are seeing it's not a scary thing."

Table 5: Employee suggestions for ways to achieve buy-in and alignment

Selected interviewee verbatim responses
"Communication. It's bringing your employees along with you on the road to decision making. But when decisions have been made [explain] why they've been made. Communicate those appropriately, quickly and walk the rationale behind it."
"To offer that direction or a vision of kind of where we're at, helping them understand that we know that it's a tough spot right now and that we have been tightening up things. But this is the hope, the light, for the future."
"We need a clear vision of where we are going."
"I think the biggest thing at this time is definitely communicating with all levels of how it's working [the new strategy for online delivery]. Because I think there are pieces that are already working."
"From the executive level, we need to spend more time understanding the employees, the staff, of kind of where they are at what the challenges are and hear them out."
"I think if the market research been presented, I think it would have settled the room to have a little bit more belief."
"This orchestra isn't quite coming together. We're each playing our own little piece. It's just not coming into harmony yet. We need to get the whole symphony playing the same correct way."
"I think part of buy-in is involvement and not that autocratic-type of involvement where it's superficial and talking at the troops. That you're using what I'm bringing to the table. Maybe not everything—you deciphering between what is valuable and what's not. But not just throwing it out."

The enablers and barriers list [6] is designed to identify ways to increase the likelihood of successful rebranding initiatives. The list does not currently include any criteria about the importance of business strategy, the alignment of the rebranding with business strategy, or the sequencing of a rebranding initiative relative to a decision about strategy which leads to Proposition 1.

Proposition 1: The research list on rebranding enablers and barriers should expand to include lack of a clear business strategy as a barrier (or as an enabler or as a new rebranding principle)

Once the business strategy and goals are known, internal marketing should precede external marketing, as an organization should not promote a product or service before the employees are ready to provide it. [31] By adding lack of a clear business strategy as a barrier to [6] research list, it calls attention to the importance and the sequence of the alignment of rebranding initiatives with business strategy. Alternatively, if not added as a barrier the presence of a clear business strategy could be considered as an enabler. Either way, the sequence of making a strategic decision relative to taking rebranding actions matters.

Proposition 1, nicknamed 'Business (strategy) Before Branding,'should be a fundamental first step in the process of rebranding, and as such, could have even larger implications for rebranding theory. As is suggested in the Recommendations for Future Research section, a future study could explore a broader alternative for this proposal as a new principle of rebranding. This would mean an addition to [8] list of six rebranding principles. The possible addition of a seventh principle, for business strategy to be decided prior to rebranding an organization, would be a significant proposal to rebranding theory and deserves further investigation.

Major Finding 2. The employee perspective of a rebranding initiative aligns with rebranding research on enablers and barriers

The second major finding was made upon completion of the thematic analysis process. It was observed that the employees' descriptions of the rebranding initiative at ORG and their suggestions for how to achieve buy-in and alignment of employees in a rebranding initiative seemed to match with [6] list of enablers and barriers to successful rebranding initiatives that was introduced in Table 2 of this study. So a side-by-side comparison was prepared.

The list [6] was compared with the themes generated by the research and the finding was confirmed. Of the eleven enablers and barriers, only the integrated marketing program enabler was not mentioned by participants of this study in either their descriptions or their suggestions. In [6] research that analyzed 76 organizations, it was not a requirement for an organization to display allof the enablers or barriers. Rather, researchers used the list as a reference in the evaluation of the success or failure of rebranding initiatives. In addition, an even closer examination of the original list of enablers and barriers led to the observation that employees were not listed on either the list of enablers or barriers, and this omission led to the third and final major finding.

MajorFinding3:Employees'descriptionsandsuggestions indicate inadequate employee consideration.

As reported, researchers have identified employees as the most significant factor in projecting an organization's brand.[16]Although employees play an important role in representing the brand of an organization.

It was observed that employees are not mentioned on the current list from [6] enablers and barriers for the success of rebranding initiatives. Inadequate customer consideration is listed as a barrier. In reporting the employees' descriptions and suggestions, it was recalled they shared numerous examples of inadequate employee consideration throughout the rebranding initiatives at ORG. Therefore, the transcripts were reviewed once more, and code numbers were noted for instances where employees' descriptions and suggestions expressed concern about lack of an employee perspective on the rebranding initiative at ORG and that it may have a negative impact on the rebranding. The results were clear and overwhelming. The discovery that, from the employees' perspective, the inadequate employee consideration during the rebranding was evidence of a barrier to the success of the initiative became the third major finding.Major Finding 3 led to Proposition 2.

Proposition 2. Enablers and Barriers Should Include 'Inadequate Consideration of Employee Responsesas a Barrier

There is support from research reports about the importance to consider employees in a rebranding initiative. Literature regarding employee involvement in rebranding is "limited despite its importance",(p. 237).[15] Additionally, employee roles have been overlooked in rebranding literature,[7] and successful rebranding requires input from employees.[14] Employees are critical to the success of implementing the rebranding process, and research supports that they should be engaged early, openly, and honestly.[7] Employee participants in this study expressed concern when the opposite was true. The implication is that inadequate employee considerationis a barrier to the success of a rebranding initiative.

Reconciliation of themes, major findings and propositions

Table 6 is provided as a reference guide for how to reconcile the three themes with the three major findings and the two propositions.

CONCLUSION

As said in his introduction to Corporate Brand Personality, "Your people are your brand" (para. 4).[22] Employees communicate the brand's promise across all contact points, and their behavior can become a competitive advantage if they genuinely believe in the brand's values .[32]This study raises awareness that the perspective of employees about rebranding initiatives has not been well researched to date despite the powerfulimpact of employees on an organization's brand. The study concludes that with a better understanding of employee viewpoints, organizations can increase the likelihood of success for these high risk initiatives for their stakeholders, including customers, organization leaders, organizers of these initiatives and, of course, for employees.

Theoretical insights

This study contributes to the body of organizational rebranding knowledge in several ways. First, it adds the employee perspective from a single case and organizes it into defined themes. Second, it confirms an accepted list of organizational rebranding enablers and barriers by comparison to the employee perspective and third, it proposes the addition of two barriers to success. Lastly, in the Recommendations for Future Research section that follows, it highlights potentially productive avenues for future research, which could further extend organizational rebranding theory.

Analyzing the descriptions and suggestions made by employees led to the three major findings of the study:

1. The rebranding initiatives launched before the business strategy was decided.

Table 6: Reconciliation of Themes, Major Findings, and Propositions

Theme	Major Finding	Proposition
1 **Context** Reviewing the background of an organization offers context for a rebranding initiative.	1 The rebranding initiative(s) launched before the business strategy was decided.	1 The research list on rebranding enablers and barriers (Miller etal., 2014) should expand to include 'lack of a clear business strategy before rebranding' as a barrier.
2 **Descriptions** Employees offer rich descriptions of their rebranding experiences.	2 The employee perspective of a rebranding initiative aligns with Miller etal.'s (2014) rebranding research on enablers and barriers.	2 The research list on rebranding enablers and barriers list (Miller et al., 2014) should expand to include 'inadequate consideration of employee responses' as a barrier.
3 **Suggestions** Employees create meaningful suggestions for ways to engage them to achieve buy-in and alignment with a new brand.	3 Employees' descriptions and suggestions indicate 'inadequate employee consideration.'	
1 Summary		
2 [Combination of the three themes]		

2. Employees' descriptions and suggestions indicate inadequate employee consideration.
3. The employees' perspective of a rebranding initiative aligned with [6]rebranding research on enablers and barriers.

The third finding reinforced existing literature and the first two major findings led to two propositions to expand the [6] list of factors that impact a successful rebranding to include:
1) Lack of a clear business strategy before rebranding, and
2) Inadequate employee consideration, as barriers.

Managerial implications

The findings of this study can inform rebranding practice and improve corporate rebranding outcomes for leaders of organizational rebranding initiatives.

Implication 1: Leaders should develop an understanding of enablers and barriers, in general, and how they relate to employees.

Implication 2: Employees should be engaged early, openly and honestly in internal branding. Activities should be developed to align the employees' roles with the brand strategy on behalf of the customer.

Researchers report that the customer perceives employees as credible and help to humanize the brand, and that this behavior has been found to be especially significant in organizational rebranding initiatives .[33] There are positive rebranding results when communications with employees are participative, aligned with core values, and leaders clearly explain the rationale for the rebranding.[20]

Both of these first two implications support from the developing brand understanding enabler and counter the autocratic rebranding approach and the proposed inadequate employee consideration barriers. Leaders that are able to adopt enablers to overcome barriers are more likely to promote successful rebranding outcomes.

Implication 3: Poor organizational communication can amplify an organization's business problems

According to participants, ORG's declining business led to changes in branding and a strategic shift to increase the online delivery of its products. In the face of major layoffs employees reported a lack of communicationabout thestrategic implications of the significant acquisition and the parent's rebranding of ORG that emphasized online delivery. Employees expressed how this lack of communication led to other issues, such as lack of trust, fear/panic/uncertainty, lack of alignment, and lack of excitement for the rebrand. These issues could lead to a further lack of business.

Poor communication was not likely the root of the (business) problem (declining business), but based on the descriptions of the employees, poor communication seemed to exacerbate the business problem. Fixing the communications alone will not solve the underlying problem of declining business, however, leadership can listen to its employees to glean helpful information. Employees can offer rich descriptions and meaningful suggestions. Listening to a description of their concerns can help leaders to understand the root of the problem and identify possible solutions.

Recommendations for future research

First, while the present study is focused on the employee viewpoint, as it had been previously ignored, this does not imply that studies should only view stakeholders' views in isolation. Future studies could take a multi-stakeholder view and explore the interactions between stakeholders. Proposed a new organizational brand model[9] from a customer experience-centric perspective described with traffic light references. Given brands are co-created through experiences between an organization and its stakeholders, especially employees,[4] future researchers could explore the interaction between employees and customers in a rebranding initiative.

Secondly, this exploratory study could be replicated to gain greater generalizability for the propositions including, lack of a clear business strategy and inadequate employee consideration as barriers. The researchers studied 76 cases from 61 articles to develop their list of the enablers and barriers.[6] The two propositions from this study to expand the list to include lack of a clear business strategy and inadequate employee consideration as barriers resulted from a case study of one organization. More organizations could be studied further by other researchers. Also, the study could be replicated at an organization that was not facing a downsizing or declining sales for the same purpose.

Most importantly, as first mentioned in the section that introduced Proposition #1,future research could explore the possibility of establishing the requirement for a clear business strategy prior to rebranding as a new principle of rebrandingin place of the proposal to institute lack of a clear business strategy as a barrier to a successful organizational rebranding. To be successful, organizational rebranding must be aligned with the overarching organization strategy[10] and employee alignment with organizational strategic goals enhances organizational outcomes.[30] The requirement for a clear business strategy prior to rebranding was dubbed 'Business (strategy) Before Branding,' to implythat knowing an organization's strategy should be a fundamental first step in the process of rebranding and that the sequencing is important. Expanding the list of six principles that form the foundation of rebranding theory to seven principleswould be a significant addition to rebranding theory and as such, could have even larger implications for rebranding theory and deserves further study.

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