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THE NARRATED BRAND

An Exploration into how Employee Narratives
Construct the Brand of a Large Service Organisation

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Abstract

This research grew out of a response to Gummesson's (1998) view that we need to challenge traditional views of marketing. Views linked to relational marketing, service-dominant logic, and experiential marketing represent some of the main paradigm shifts in marketing which challenge the traditional transactional view. Within these theoretical shifts the term 'brand', already ubiquitous due to its long history (Stern 2006), has been recast and enlarged. The importance of service branding had already been established by Berry (2000). Then within a service-dominant logic framing (Vargo and Lusch 2004a; 2004b; 2008), the brand was given a central relational, co-creational role (Brodie, Glynn and Little 2006). In an experience economy the brand is enlarged even more to include the whole consumption experience (Haathi 2003). The brand is also posited as a socially constructed text (Hatch and Rubin 2006).

In this study I have focused on the experience of employees in constructing the brand of a large service organisation which has a strong brand and relies on employee 'buy in' to fulfill its brand promises to its customer base. I used a narrative approach in designing the study, and then generating and analysing data (both verbal and visual). This method, combined with a three-phase focus group and individual interview design, created a rich picture of one particular organisational context. My aim was to explore how employees constructed the brand by revealing a complex picture of the brand experience of the participants who took part.

The main findings reveal a multi-faceted brand that is viewed from various perspectives. This construction is contradictory, paradoxical, and complex. I highlight theoretical touch points from the accepted canon which both inform and are informed by the views of my participants. In doing so I present a narrative construction of the brand which can be incorporated by these various branding frameworks but which is not fully explained by them either. The narrated brand reveals the brand ultimately as a mutable mirror from and through which the narrator constructs her/his brand identity.

Thus the narrated brand revealed in this work presents an unstable (Harding 2007), identity-based view of the employee's brand experience which affirms the adoption of a narrative approach in such qualitative research.

This thesis, therefore, makes three main contributions: a theoretical one in that this study reveals a complex view of the employee perceived brand; a methodological one in that the use of narrative analysis is enlarged within the marketing discipline, and, in particular, in relation to the brand as it pertains to the employee; and a managerial one in that unveiling the complexity of the employee's construction of the brand may help organisations better understand how current models and systems (which may be either simple or complicated) map onto the complex brand realities experienced by employees. Finally, this study, though limited to a qualitative, single embedded case study, provides a rich way ahead for further research into the construction of the brand experience to be conducted and extended.

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Chapter One: Introduction

Scholars have to accept that the neat traditional marketing model is not a reality. The discipline of marketing will not make progress unless it changes its paradigm, broadening and updating its mental images and research techniques (Gummesson 1998, p.248).

1.1 Overview

The aim of this research was to explore the brand in a service context, within a contested theoretical landscape, and from an internal (employee) perspective. I chose to use a narrative approach to designing the study, and generating and analysing data (both visual and verbal) in order to create a rich picture of one particular organisational context. This introductory chapter outlines the main purpose of the study, introduces the theoretical framework relevant to the research, describes the research problem and overarching research question, details the main contributions this research has made, and provides an overview of subsequent chapters.

1.2 Background

Over time, words take on new meanings (Stern 2006). Within the evolving theoretical landscape of marketing, resides the term 'brand'. Marketing did not invent this term, but it has certainly borrowed, changed and ultimately claimed it as its own. Stern (2006), in her historical analysis of the term 'brand', asserts that it is rich in historical usage, and useful in a marketing context to capture what is often referred to as the intangible assets of the firm. According to Stern (2006) 'brand' is likely to be used metaphorically because of its long and poetic past. She states that the word is possibly 1500 years old and argues that its survival over so many centuries is a sign of its vitality. In addition, Stern (2006) shows the origins of its dual existence as both a

noun and verb; i.e. it is linked to the Old Germanic word '*brinn-an*', which means 'to burn' (verb), and also appeared in the late 5th Century A.D. in the poem 'Beowulf' as a synonym for 'sword' (noun). Thus, the term 'brand' is both a process and an entity. She reveals that it was in 1922 that 'brand' appeared in a marketing context, as the collocation 'brand name', and since then a raft of other collocated brand terms have appeared (e.g. brand architecture, brand harmony, brand entropy, brand orchestration, brand essence, brand research, brand personality, brand communities and service brand). Brand is now a multi-faceted concept with multiple meanings and therefore may be diversely interpreted (Brodie, Glynn and Little 2006; de Chernatony and Cottam 2006).

Another word at the heart of my research is 'service', which has become the centre of a debate which was not necessarily initiated, but certainly brought into focus by Vargo and Lusch (2004a). Their call for changes to be made to the marketing paradigm to acknowledge the service nature of all economic activity (service-dominant logic) pulls together threads of past ideas from a number of theoretical contexts including relationship marketing and services marketing. Their call for change has generated new ideas not only from a 'service' perspective, whereby the term 'service' is used as a superordinating term, but also in the realm of branding. For instance, Brodie et al. (2006) emphasise the service nature of all brands, service-centered or not, as an extension of the framework developed by Vargo and Lusch, (2004a). Also, Merz, He and Vargo (2009) view the brand as the "collaborative, value co-creation activities of firms and all stakeholders", and brand value as "the stakeholders' collectively perceived value-in-use" (p. 328). Thus, there has been a shift in perspective about the term 'brand' which mirrors the shift in perspective about 'service', and marketing more generally.

Accompanying, this shift in perspective is a growing concern with the brand consumption experience. The importance of the service brand had already been

established by Berry (2000). According to O’Cass and Grace (2004), experience with the service brand provides a strong basis upon which consumers attach meaning to that brand, and ultimately brand attitudes emerge through consumption behaviours. They call for our knowledge of service brand communications to be examined and compared across a broad range of service types, whether they are what they term a “pure” services situation or a “tangible dominant” services context (O’Cass and Grace 2004, p 251). Furthermore, Brodie et al. (2006) call for a deeper understanding of services as they are constituted in the customer’s experience.

Therefore, these recent research streams call for or suggest a theoretical framework which reflects a deeper understanding of the ways consumers construct meaning around and relate to brands within a range of service industry contexts, and a broadening of the meaning of ‘brand’.

1.3 Research Problem

I assert that a service organisation’s brand should be explored in a rich, qualitative way in order to gain insight into the enlarged role of the brand in this context and within an evolving theoretical landscape. Furthermore, a particular context which has been under researched is that of internal branding (Berthon, Ewing and Hah 2005; Punjaisri and Wilson 2007; Vallaster 2004). This study, therefore, explores how employees experience a particular brand as a socially constructed (Muniz and O’Guinn 2001), textual (Hatch and Rubin 2006) phenomenon, which is co-created (Haathi 2003). I interpret the term ‘co-created’ here to mean ‘read’, and this reading is framed as the employees’ experience of the service organisation’s brand. By employing narrative analysis, I provide both theoretical insight and further the use of this methodology and method in relation to exploring the experience of a service organisation’s brand from an internal (employee) perspective.

1.4 Research Question

The overarching research question for my research is therefore: ***How do employee narratives construct the brand of a large service organisation?*** The literature review unpacks this question.

1.5 Research Paradigm

A commonly held belief is that “what cannot get measured does not exist” (Gummesson 1998, p. 244). Certainly in the past, within the marketing discipline, positivist approaches have been lauded as the tools which can somehow obtain an ‘objective truth’ about a marketing situation. Interpretive research has gradually caught up, however, and is increasingly seen as a welcome partner to metric-based methodologies. I selected an interpretive approach for this research because of the nature of the research question and the type of data that was required in order for it to be adequately explored. Using Crotty’s (1998) framework, this approach is more broadly labeled as a social constructionist, interpretivist (hermeneutic) approach. These epistemological and theoretical paradigms (respectively) map onto discourse analysis as a methodology. Within the discourse analysis methodology, narrative analysis is positioned as a type of discourse analysis and also as a method. Furthermore, in order to provide a ‘thick description’ (Geertz 1973; Hudson and Ozane 1988), I chose to employ an embedded case study research context.

1.6 Context

In the past, agriculture and manufacturing dominated the world’s economies, but services are now taking centre stage in both developed and developing nations (Paton and McLaughlin 2008; Paulson 2006). The services sector of the economy is diverse with a wide array of industry types and service industries accounting for most of the growth in new jobs (Varoglu and Eser 2006). Nevertheless, what is clear is that new

technologies, such as the Internet and e-mail, have helped drive an increase in service-based industries. Accompanying this rise in service-based industries is a changing business landscape characterised by “deregulation, emerging markets, new forms of globalization, convergence of technologies and industries and ubiquitous connectivity” (Prahalad 2004, p. 18). These changes have also altered the nature of consumers as well as companies, whereby consumers are more informed, networked, active and global, and companies can fragment their value chains in ways that before were not possible (Prahalad 2004). Thus the economic world is increasingly being characterised as more service-oriented and more complex compared to more traditional views of predominating economic systems.

The research site is within the context of a large service organisation within Australasia. The organisation has a large number of staff and a nation-wide presence. For the purpose of this study only one region was targeted. The reasons for targeting only one region were two-fold. First, it was more realistic, given the size and geographic reach of the company, to have repeated access to employees from one region rather than employees in multiple regions. Second, in order to limit the scope of the study, I decided that the main variables for selection would not include regional differences. The rationale for selecting this type of site was that it showcases the changing business environment due to technological as well as other factors: e.g. increased competition, and technological competition, and therefore the need to have a strong brand presence; a changing external consumer base which is more and more educated about product offerings and therefore prone to churn; plus, with certain service offerings (e.g. finance, airlines, IT), the tendency for consumers to look for peripheral cues. Also, the company’s positioning clues, coupled with the business’ reliance on employee ‘buy in’, in order to effectively communicate and deliver on its brand promises, made it a fertile location for investigating the brand from an employee

perspective. The context would also be close to a 'pure' services situation (O'Cass and Grace 2004).

Furthermore, the term 'services' sits within the changing landscape of the service revolution, the increasingly apparent re-casting of the world's economy in terms of the service nature of all offerings, spurred along in part by technological advancement and newly formed time-space encounters and 'realities'. Karmarkar (2004) argues that:

In the end, the survivors of the service revolution will be those who understand that opportunities lie in removing and supplanting links of the information chain and also in understanding how the chain is being restructured. Once they understand their own information chains from end to end, companies must begin reorganizing strategies, processes, and people for the challenge ahead (Karmarkar 2004, p. 107).

For the management of a service organisation such as the one explored in this thesis, having a better understanding of the role branding, within this new economy, can play in their particular context will ultimately give them a competitive advantage. Therefore, gaining a competitive advantage by fostering a strong internal brand, coupled with having a better understanding of the role the brand can play in value (co)-creation, processes provide key managerial motivations for this research.

1.7 Document Map

Following this introductory chapter, the thesis is divided into five more chapters: Literature Review, Methodology, Findings, Discussion, and Conclusion.

1.7.1 Chapter Two: Literature Review

The second chapter provides an outline of the literature which relates to both the theoretical and methodological focus of the research. First, the theoretical literature is drawn from historical and more recent discussions about both 'brand' and 'service' and how this relates to changes in the marketing paradigm. Vargo and Lusch (2004a)

provide a focal point for the conversational threads which feed into this debate as well as those authors who have entered the conversation subsequent to their article being published. Then the implications of this re-framing of 'service' are explored in relation to value creation and an enlarged view of the brand. Furthermore, literature which frames either marketing systems and/or brands as experiential, socially constructed and textual are explored. Lastly, within the theoretical framework, internal branding (within an internal marketing context) is introduced as the initial focus for my study. I write the word 'initial' here because the project developed in ways that are richer than this initial parse of the literature. This outcome is characteristic of the transformational capacity of a discourse approach (Motion and Leitch 1996).

In addition to providing an exploration into the theoretical literature streams, this chapter also focuses on narrative analysis in terms of its historical background and the rationale for utilising it as a research framework, given the nature of the overarching research question. Studies from organisation and marketing contexts are used as exemplars.

1.7.2 Chapter Three: Methodology

This chapter provides a detailed overview of the methodology which was used in the study. Crotty's (1998) four tiered framework is used to structure the discussion. First, I declare my epistemological choices (i.e. social constructionist). Second, I outline my theoretical position (interpretivist/ hermeneutics). Third, I explore my choice of discourse analysis, the assumptions associated with this methodology, and the place of narrative analysis as a subset¹ of a discourse analysis methodology. Last, I discuss

¹ Crotty's (1998) categorisation of epistemology-philosophy-methodology-methods denotes narrative analysis as a method only rather than a methodology and a method. However, I have taken the approach of those within the management discipline who view narrative as a subset of discourse analysis (e.g. Brown & Humphreys 2006). I have justified this deviation from Crotty's (1998) approach by assuming that narrative analysis is merely subsumed by and therefore included in the term 'discourse analysis' at the methodology level.

the methods that were employed; namely, an embedded case study approach which uses narrative analysis as a method of analysis, and a multi-modal approach to data generation (participants provided visual and verbal narratives). Included in this discussion is my choice of interview types and also design (i.e. a three phase focus group plus individual interview process). I also acknowledge that my reading of these narratives is only an approximation of the 'realities' the participants presented in their visual and verbal texts.

1.7.3 Chapter Four: Findings

This chapter is divided into three main parts. First, I present the findings of the focus groups which were held in Phase One and Phase Two. In order to present a multi-faceted account which highlights the relationships between various actors, I present various narrative threads that arise from these relationships, which are framed as mutual imbrications. This term arises from Harding's (2007) post structural account of organisations and selves as being mutually constitutive. Thus I extend Harding's (2007) perspective by including 'self', 'organisation', 'brand' and 'other actors' in various mutually constitutive relationships. At the end of this section I bring all the narrative threads together to create a socially constructed view of the service brand experienced by the various participants involved. In the second section, I present the common themes which arose from the Phase Three interviews and which also resonated with the focus group findings, thereby confirming the socially constructed nature of the findings. In the third section, titled 'Vignettes', I compare and contrast the verbal and visual narratives of the 15 participants who took part in all three phases of the study. This approach, which is outlined more fully in 'Chapter Three: Methodology', provides the reader with a complex and mutable view of the brand.

1.7.4 Chapter Five: Discussion

In this chapter I compare the findings with the accepted canon of brand literature from marketing. I also employ literature from managerial and organisational literature streams. I ask the following question: 'If I use a particular brand perspective how does my data speak to these different constructions or lenses?' I highlight the theoretical touch points which both inform and are informed by the views of my participants. In doing so I present a narrative view of the brand which can be incorporated by these various branding frameworks but which is not fully explained by them either. I argue that using a narrative framing of the brand provides the reader with a complex, 'experienced' construction of the brand, which I label 'The Narrated Brand'. The narrated brand reveals the brand ultimately as a mutable mirror from and through which the narrator constructs her/his brand identity. Thus the narrated brand which is revealed in this work presents an unstable, identity-based view of the employee's brand experience which confirms, by foregrounding the complexity and reflexivity of the findings, the strength of using a narrative approach in qualitative research. However, I make it clear that my approach is not to replace the accepted canon with a narrative framing of the brand, but rather to provide a different perspective which enriches how the brand is perceived and potentially modelled.

1.7.5 Chapter Six: Conclusion

In the concluding chapter I highlight the main findings; then I furnish the reader with my main contributions, namely theoretical, methodological and managerial. I also list any limitations that need to be considered by the reader and also suggest how this study could be extended or repeated.

1.8 Contributions

The contributions this study makes are three fold. First, in light of the large body of extant literature on the external consumer's perspective, the proposed study furthers

our understanding of the employee experience of the brand within a newly contested theoretical landscape. Second, the study makes a methodological contribution by enlarging the use of narrative analysis, a methodology that has been thus far been under-used in marketing, but which is well-represented in other fields. Third, the findings of this research will have a number of managerial implications which emerge from attaining a complex, rather than normative, view of the employee experience of a particular service brand.

1.9 Summary

Recent marketing research streams are changing the theoretical landscape in such a way that traditional views of 'brand' are being challenged to incorporate a changing view of economies, of value creation and or consumer experiences. There has been a call for a deeper understanding of the ways brand consumers construct meaning around and relate to brands within a range of industry contexts. I have framed 'brand' as a socially constructed text which is experienced, or 'read', by the consumer. Much has been written about the external consumer; thus I argue here that a focus on the employee construction of the brand will provide insight into how the brand is constructed by employees and how branding contributes to the value creation processes that are derived from the employee-brand interaction. This perspective is particularly relevant to a service-oriented organisation, given the importance of branding within a service context, and with the expanding role services are playing on the world economic scene. Thus, this research provides theoretical insight, methodological advancement, and managerial wisdom with respect to how brands are constructed through employee narratives.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

2.1 Overview

The context of my thesis is the employee perception of the brand within a large services organisation. In order to unpack this view I have explored the literature pertaining to both branding and services, and then also service branding. I particularly look at how these terms have been recast as marketing theory has advanced. In addition, I also explore the internal (employee) view by incorporating literature pertaining to the internal and corporate brand. This provides a managerial view of the brand in this context. In order to establish the use of narrative analysis to explore the employee view of the brand I enlist studies which use narrative analysis. I explore narrative both broadly to provide a sense of its wide-reaching application beyond and more narrowly to highlight its use within a marketing context. My aim in this chapter is ultimately to present an alternative research framework which builds on recent developments in marketing theory.

2.2 Brand

Sidney Levy, is described by Harris (2007) as being an early proponent (before his time) of conducting research on brand image, symbolism and cultural meaning in marketing, and of adopting an interdisciplinary perspective and philosophical pluralism; according to Harris (2007), Levy's ideas have resulted in the richness of the existing literature on branding and cultural meaning. Thus Levy's (2003) view of what 'brand' means provides a useful starting point. Cited by Harris (2007), one of Levy's (2003) recent assertions is that "the brand exists in people's minds as a symbolic entity, an integrated resultant of all their experiences with it in the marketplace" (p. 11). In line with this view that brands exist in people's minds, brand is framed as an extension of the self by some (e.g. Belk 1988; McCracken 1986; Schau and Russell 2005), and as

part of a socially constructed alternative reality where identity is transformed, by others (Kozinets 1999; Schau and Gilly 2003; Schau and Muniz 2006). For example, Schau and Gilly (2003) reveal how consumers use brands and hyperlinks to create multiple, nonlinear cyber self-representations, thereby providing a theorisation of consumers' commercialised, non-linear self-presentation in cyberspace. Consumer culture theory research (Arnould and Thompson 2005) shows that many consumers' lives are constructed around multiple realities which are at least in part facilitated through consumption experiences. Furthermore, brands can be framed, as expressions of self, as mirrors of the self, and a way of expressing the self to others, and consumers actively construct themselves with brands which have meanings relevant to their self concept (Schau and Russell 2005). People use products and brands to represent desired self-images and to present those images to others (Escalas 2004). The brand can be framed, therefore, as a reflection of, or even the very fabric of, 'self'.

Furthermore, brands can be framed as having associated personalities, again a subjective phenomenon within the minds of consumers, and this phenomenon is referred to as brand personality. Freling and Forbes (2005) use this kind of lens in their qualitative study designed to explore participants' associations of brands with certain personality types. They found the brand personality phenomenon was not limited to tangible products with participants describing brand personalities for services such as restaurants and airlines, thereby undermining somewhat a traditional view that branding is somehow the domain of goods or commodities. Also going beyond the brand/commodity association, the brand is constructed by Bergstrom, Blumenthal and Crothers (2002) as:

[T]he sum total of all perceived functional and emotional aspects of a product or service. Therefore, we argue that everything, and everyone, is 'branded' (whether they like it or not) because all actions communicate a meaning of some kind. ...[and] Branding - the verb - is about adding a

higher level of emotional meaning to a product or service, thereby increasing its value to customers and other stakeholders (pp. 133-134).

Again the link between meaning and value creation is established.

Another view, with a focus more on the company, is that the brand can be a representation of a company's promise to its consumers by others (Aaker 1996; Ambler and Styles 1996; Krell 2006). Balmer and Gray (2003) define the corporate brand as having at its core "an explicit covenant between an organisation and its key stakeholder groups, including customers" (p. 982). Similarly, Brodie et al. (2009) also draw on the view that the brand is a set of promises, a covenant. Ambler and Styles (1996) make the point that these promises are perceived within the minds of the consumers of the brand. The relationship between the customer and the brand represents the processes of personal and social identification customers associate with the core brand values (Anderson 2005).

In summary, the brand is many things; for example, the brand can represent and stand for a product, person, organisation or symbol, but, as Ambler and Styles (1996) assert in relation to who perceives the various promises a particular brand imbues, the brand ultimately exists within the mind of the consumer.

2.3 From 'Services' to 'Service'

To fully understand how views of 'brand' have enlarged the term's scope an understanding of developments in marketing theory is also required. I start here, therefore, with the shift from 'services' to 'service'. There are of course multiple threads in the story of how marketing has become what it is today. What seems to be a commonly held view, however, is that marketing inherited a goods-dominant view of economic activity from economics, which provided assumptions of rational choice, functional utility of products, researcher objectivity, a single reality, and independent marketing elements (Harris 2007), and this view has privileged the movement of goods

and restrained attempts by service marketing scholars to understand exchange relationships (Vargo and Morgan 2005).

Within this goods-dominant framework the term 'services' was initially subsumed until there was an effort to separate it out in its own right. Shostack (1977) was one who articulated the breaking free of services marketing from goods marketing in an attempt to carve out a path for services marketing, in acknowledgement of the special qualities of the service phenomenon. For example, it is a commonly held view that when comparing commodity-based and service offerings, it is harder for competitors to replicate service quality compared to product quality and price (Parasuraman and Grewal 2000). Growing recognition for services to be treated in a different way from goods led to the emergence of service or services marketing. However, according to Grönroos (1997) even though services had been given some autonomy, services marketing was still restricted by the '4 Ps' (Product, Price, Place and Promotion), and services were defined more often by what they lacked in relation to goods (notably intangibility, inconsistency, inseparability and inventory, or the '4 Is'). These categories became, therefore, within this goods-dominant view, just another way to somehow commoditise services. Also, Shostack (1977) concludes:

[S]ervice marketers are in urgent need of concepts and priorities that are relevant to their actual experience and needs, and [...] marketing has failed in evolving to meet that demand. However unorthodox, continuing exploration of this area must be encouraged if marketing is to achieve stature and influence in the new post-Industrial Revolution services economy (Shostack 1977, p. 74).

Thus, clearly, there was a sense that a gap exists between theory and actual experience which marketing had yet to bridge.

In addition, Grönroos (1989) clearly distinguished services from goods but acknowledged that services go far beyond what is traditionally called the service sector, making the point, therefore, that what is meant by the term 'services' is not

necessarily well-understood or clearly defined. The lack of clarity concerning this term has been exacerbated by an increasing complexity within the world's economic environment. Most recently, according to Tyler, Patton, Mongiello and Meyer (2007), the landscape for services business markets has become blurred because of deregulation, globalisation and information technology, particularly the Internet and e-commerce. The complexity and diversity of service business management literature between 1974 and 2007 reflects this blurring. The comments of Grönroos (1989) and Tyler et al. (2007) reveal, therefore, a need to clarify the meaning of 'service'.

Two authors who have attempted to address issues of theoretical relevancy and definitional clarity in relation to service(s) are Vargo and Lusch (2004a; 2004b; 2008). They argue that there has been a shift away from the narrow goods-based manufacturing model, towards a broader perspective within marketing theory, which they term 'service-dominant logic'. Vargo and Lusch's (2004a) challenge (in their initial article published in the *Journal of Marketing*) is to the traditional dichotomy between goods and services. They argue that this dichotomy has existed from the inception of marketing as a discipline and has marginalised services while giving primacy to goods (things). While Vargo and Lusch's (2004a; 2004b; 2008) ideas have caused contention in academic marketing circles, their article is a good starting point because they have invited marketing theorists to examine the traditional paradigm and consider a more integrative way of framing marketing theory.

Much literature of late around services, therefore, has been focusing on the service aspect of both goods and services in an attempt not just to bring services out from beneath the shadows of a goods-dominated paradigm, but to subsume both goods and services into an integrative construct, 'service', thereby reflecting the idea that service is part of every marketing interaction and stimulating a reinvention of the marketing paradigm. Thus, 'service' becomes a superordinating term (Vargo and Lusch 2004a; Lusch and Vargo 2006; Brodie et al., 2006), and an acknowledgement of

the service element in both goods and services. As Lusch and Vargo (2006) state, service in service-dominant logic is the singular form, thereby indicating a process of doing something, rather than units of output (indicative of the commoditisation and goods-dominant view of services). Service becomes, within this framework, the “common denominator of exchange and thus is hypernymic to goods” (Lusch and Vargo 2006, p. 285).

The movement from ‘services’ to ‘service’ is necessary, according to Vargo and Lusch (2004a), because the former is a product of a goods-based model, while the latter is more reflective of a consumer orientation. The meaning of the word, therefore, is in part indicated by its restricted linguistic form (singular rather than plural) as well as its use in context. Srivastava (R. Srivastava, personal communication, Oct. 2007) is of a similar view that the differentiation that has been created between goods and services is an artificial one, and it is often the service component that surrounds the tangible commodity that makes the difference. Vargo and Lusch (2004b) conclude that ‘service’ may provide “a better foundation for a normative perspective for all of marketing, including issues of social responsibility” (p. 333).

In their initial article, Vargo and Lusch (2004a) put forward eight foundational principles, updated to ten more recently Vargo and Lusch (2008). Three of the updated fundamental premises highlight the central role the customer plays in a service-centred view, particularly in relation to value creation: FP6 (“The customer is always a co-creator of value”); FP8 (“A service-centred view is inherently customer-centred and relational”); and FP10 (“Value is always uniquely and phenomenologically determined by the beneficiary”) (p. 7). Overall, challenges to what is meant by ‘service’ as opposed to ‘services’, signifies a call for the adoption of a more integrative theoretical paradigm.

2.4 Contextualising the Service-Dominant View

To fully understand the service-dominant logic framework proposed by Vargo and Lusch (2004a, 2008), the reader needs to also look at what came before and what has been happening in parallel with this US-based interpretation of marketing theory, and beyond to those writers who go further. It is from this perspective that an understanding of what the brand may mean, in the context of my research, emerges.

A criticism of service-dominant logic is that it is merely a restatement of ideas from various marketing moves that have come before. For example, Ballantyne and Varey (2006) assert that while Vargo and Lusch (2004a) attempt to show that service is at the centre of each marketing interaction, this non-traditional view is not new and has been proposed by others within other research streams (e.g. services marketing, relationship marketing, network theory, consumer culture theory and integrated marketing communication). Indeed their view has emerged from a variety of theoretical contexts, but what Vargo and Lusch (2004a) achieve is to bring these ideas together and continue to extend them (Vargo and Lusch 2008). Furthermore, they are the first to admit that the movement they champion is historical, evolving, and somehow larger and independent from themselves (Lusch and Vargo 2006). However, in order to create a richer, more geographically balanced picture of the various threads that feed into this conversation about what we mean by 'service', the focus now turns to others who similarly argue for a broader, more integrated marketing paradigm. For the purposes of this text, discussion is restricted to relationship marketing and services marketing literature streams because they are the most relevant, and they are key words in the discussion of value creation (refer to section 2.6).

Firstly, relationship marketing, a term coined by Berry (1983), is represented by a body of literature that has been heavily influenced by Nordic perspectives and emerged both as an alternative to transactional marketing and also exclusively for services, with US contributions to a general relationship marketing concept only really becoming

visible during the 1990's (Gummesson, Lehtinen and Grönroos 1997). The growth in relationship marketing happened in relation to deregulation of market systems which in turn created high levels of change and complexity, and in relation to new information technologies which have improved exchange links between organisations and data collection (Ballantyne, Christopher and Payne 2003). With a focus on multiple relationships within the marketing environment, not just the customer-supplier dyad, relationship marketing offers a broader focus than conventional marketing (Gummesson 1998). Thus, relationship marketing emerged at least in part due to an increasingly complex marketing environment.

For Gummesson (1998) relationship marketing offers, in the face of what he and others perceived as a "weakening marketing paradigm" (p. 243), and in relation to services marketing, a new paradigmatic direction. In addition, Gummesson et al. (1997) similarly suggest that at the core of business, both historically and currently, sit relationships, networks and interaction, and they suggest that the (then) current interest in relationship marketing reflects a closing of the gap between marketing theorists and marketing reality. Furthermore, within this paradigm the role of the customer is active, not passive. This view is similarly held by service-dominant logic proponents, whereby the customer is a co-creator of value. The fundamentals of what theorists such as Gummesson et al. (1997) and others like them were proposing a decade ago is captured in the following:

Perhaps it is a realization that marketing is not an infinite number of brands of coffee or toothpaste in the supermarket, or the Coke and Pepsi battle. However important these issues may seem to those temporarily involved, they should not set the agenda for the development of general marketing theory. Perhaps they are only a limited part of, or even a brief interlude in, the history of marketing and business? (Gummesson et al. 1997, p. 15).

Thus, the limitations of exclusively utilising a goods-centred framework are clearly signposted, and relationship marketing is offered as a more realistic theoretical framework, compared to more traditional views, of the marketing world.

More recently, Ballantyne et al. 's (2003) suggestion that value exchange will be the "foundation stone of relationship marketing" (p. 161) where value is, in part, a mutually interactive process which is created and shared through the interactions of networks of relationships, is also very similar to Vargo and Lusch's (2004a) framing of the co-creation of value. Ballantyne et al. (2003) recognise that:

[T]he new scientific world-view of chaos and complexity might inform our thinking about the nature of marketing networks and the patterns of relationships within this context (p.164).

Clearly theirs is a movement away from traditional constructions of the marketing paradigm and relationship marketing is positioned in terms of value creation within a network of relationships.

As well as, and connected to relationship marketing, services marketing emerges as another thread which are connected to the ideas of Vargo and Lusch (2004a). Berry's (1995) argument that "virtually all market offerings have a service component (from manufactured goods to pure services)" (p. 243), is a precursor of the service-orientation view which rests upon the assumption that there is a service element in all product offerings. Grönroos (2006a) provides a comprehensive overview of the inception and development of services marketing in Europe:

[T]wo internationally recognized schools of service marketing research started to develop in the early 1970s (Berry and Parasuraman, 1993), one based in the Nordic countries (see Grönroos and Gummesson, 1985) and the other in France (Eiglier and Langeard, 1976; Langeard and Eiglier, 1987). Both these schools of thought took the standpoint that a new marketing perspective was needed. For example, Grönroos (1978, 1982) and Gummesson (1979; 1991), representing the Nordic School, argued that

marketing must not remain a business function on its own and be the responsibility of a marketing department. They also demonstrated that customer preferences were influenced by a number of resources and interactions - employees as well as physical resources and systems - outside the scope and responsibility of a marketing department. Customers were also found to be a 'resource' participating as co-producers in the service production process (p. 318).

Views such as the need for a new marketing perspective, the need for marketing's role with the organisation to be recast, the importance of all stakeholders in the marketing process, and the idea that customers are co-producers, are evidence that services marketing shared many of the assumptions formulated by the proponents of service-dominant logic.

However, despite the obvious similarities between the above statement and the service-dominant perspective, Grönroos (2006a) directly compares the findings of Vargo and Lusch (2004a) with the approach of the Nordic School to also highlight differences. While acknowledging that there are many aspects in common between the Nordic and service-dominant logic perspectives, one of the key points of difference is that the former's conclusions have emerged from contextualised studies of services, whereas the latter's assertions are derived through analysis of how the service concept has been marginalised in the traditional (classic economic theory-based) approach (Grönroos 2006a). In addition, a point of difference is that the former propose that goods do not render services and customers do not consume goods as services, but goods "are one of several types of resources functioning in a service-like process, and it is this process that is the service that customers consume" (p. 330). According to Grönroos (2006b), suppliers do not deliver value to customers:

[...] they *support customers' value creation* in value-generating processes of these customers, and possibly get involved in the co-creation of value with customers, by providing them with resources such as goods, services, ideas,

information, call centre advice, service recovery and complaints handling, payment and invoicing procedures, ensuring customers are using the most recent technologies and software - a whole host of various resources needed by customers (p. 400).

However, despite these differences, the common assumption is that an integrated, process-oriented framing of the marketing paradigm is needed to better close the gap between theoretical frameworks and the marketing practice.

2.5 Beyond Service-Dominant Logic

The previous two sections review parts of the conversation which threads into or at least complements the service-dominant logic framework. This overview is by no means complete, but merely highlights the existence of other conversations specific to relationship and services marketing literature streams which came before or alongside. Additionally, there are also threads in the conversation which go beyond service-dominant logic, building upon its premises or offering alternative views. Again, what is commonly agreed upon is the need to enrich our view of marketing theory.

There are some who disagree with some of the basic premises of service-dominant logic. First, Ballantyne and Varey (2006) prefer the term 'enabler of exchange' as opposed to 'unit of exchange' (Vargo and Lusch 2004a). They argue that their term is more reflective of the process nature of the phenomena being referred to. In addition, Ballantyne and Varey (2006) assert that there are three rather than one enablers of exchange; namely "knowing through knowledge renewal [...] relating through relationship development, and communicating through [...] communicative interaction" (p. 342). Therefore relating, communicating and knowing are posited as value-creating activities. They assert that relationships are always present wherever there is an interaction between two or more parties, that communication in a marketing context is best framed as a dialogue which facilitates interactive learning, a dialogue based on trust, and lastly they assert that the quality of relationships between

employees is based on trust, which in turn has a strong impact on the rate of knowledge renewal within the firm. Similarly, Rust's (2006) view of service-dominant logic is that a further step would be to shift the focus more from product to relationship. Thus these authors push Vargo and Lusch's (2004a) framework even further forward both in terms of analysing value co-creation, and looking at how this applies to an organisation particularly in terms of relationships.

In addition, Lovelock and Gummesson (2004) suggest that there are several histories of services in marketing and projected futures. They raise the issue of the applicability of current framings of services marketing in Internet and non-face-to-face situations and suggest that the traditional view, which treats services marketing as a "sub-discipline of manufacturing-based marketing management" (p. 22) and constrains the concept of services within the four unique characteristics of services framework, is based upon a weak and patchy theoretical base. They assert that while the division of goods versus services in the past helped focus attention on a crucial but neglected field, the services framework fails to support the paradigm that services are different from goods and therefore an integrative view is needed. As an alternative to Vargo and Lusch's (2004a) use of service to integrate marketing, Lovelock and Gummesson (2004) suggest two other alternatives. Firstly, they suggest that a more fragmented view could be adopted which reflects the differences between manufacturing-based activity and services, but also different types of service (e.g. e-services, tangible services, intangible goods etc.). Secondly, they suggest that a paradigm based on a rental/access paradigm could be adopted.

In addition to Ballantyne and Varey's (2006) call for adjustments to the framework suggested by Vargo and Lusch (2004a) and Lovelock and Gummesson's (2004) suggestion that alternative paradigms could be adopted to further develop the marketing framework, particularly as it relates to services, Schembri (2006) also compares her own view with that of the service-dominant logic proponents, and

elaborates on the eight foundational premises that Vargo and Lusch (2004a) put forward, challenging these premises at an ontological level. Schembri (2006) argues that:

[W]hile Vargo and Lusch go some way towards advancing our understanding of marketing, their argument continues to be grounded in rationalistic assumptions as per the traditional goods-dominant view of marketing. In this way, Vargo and Lusch's service-centred logic is inadequate and incomplete. In order to move beyond these limitations, a focus on the customer's experience is advocated as the point of departure for a new service orientation within marketing. Effectively, the customer once again becomes central to the concept of marketing and theory is advanced (p. 390).

Schembri's (2006) comments, while still centred on the idea of the customer, illustrate an emerging body of literature which focuses on an experience-centred view of marketing, and this is a view that is adopted within the current research paradigm and which will also be discussed in relation to how the service brand can be framed. In addition, Shembri (2006) asserts that knowledge and skills are important resources, as do Vargo and Lush (2004a), but distinguishes between their attachment to institutionalised knowledge rather than organisational knowing.

Another author who displays an experience-centric view is Haahti (2003) who suggests that the term 'experience economy' could replace that of 'service economy', and in an experience economy "the memorable, personal experience is revealed over a duration for the customer/guest to absorb or immerse her/himself in the experiences as a flow of staged and co-created sensations" (p. 305). Haahti's view is an extension of Pine and Gilmore's (1999) use of the term 'experience economy'. Her challenge to the traditional services construct, and the idea that the consumer is an active co-creator of the experience, is similar to what is presented in the service-dominant logic paradigm. What stands out about both Vargo and Lusch's (2004a) and Haahti's (2003) texts is the

idea of co-creation (of experience, of value, of meaning). While Haahti's (2003) concept of an experience economy is centred on the complex experiences associated with the tourism sector, her comments could be extended beyond this context and into every consumption experience, whether that is drinking a can of soda, or scuba diving in the Seychelles.

Lastly, Peñaloza and Venkatesh (2006) call for a paradigmatic shift from marketing techniques and concepts to markets as a social construction, and present six facets as key to their view: "(1) revisioning the creation of value in markets to include meanings; (2) reconsidering the efficacy and limits of working from the perspective of the marketer; (3) incorporating consumer subjectivity and agency; (4) reformulating the nature of relationships between consumers and marketers from individuals to social beings inhabiting communities; (5) addressing more explicitly cultural differences in the form of subcultures within nations and international differences between nations in level of development; and finally, (6) exhorting the importance of marketer reflexivity" (p. 301). Their view is, by their own confession, transformative, socio-historically situated, culturally sensitive and organic. It is in line with that of Ballantyne et al. (2003) who state that business situations may be seen as "being constructed of dynamic complexity rather than everyday detailed complexity" (p. 164), and Gummesson's (1998) view that new views of the customer's role in a network environment are replacing traditional organisational formats with "more organic, integrative, network-based, and process-oriented approaches" (p. 246). It is this complexity, this organic-ness, this socially constructed, marketer reflexive world within which my research is situated, and it is within this space that gaps start to appear. For example, Peñaloza and Venkatesh (2006) call for more work to be conducted which frames consumers, marketers and firms in social groups,

[...] with researchers situating market agents, practices and discourses in their particular place and time [...] and] viewing marketer and consumer subject positions and market phenomena as social constructions (p. 312).

Thus, their call for a paradigm shift in marketing implicates not only marketing theory but also the methods utilised to explore and examine theoretical frames and constructs.

2.6 Value Creation

A recent definition of the term 'service' makes explicit the connection between service and value: "Service is a kind of action, performance, or promise that's exchanged for value between provider and client" (Spohrer, Maglio, Bailey and Gruhl 2007, p. 72). Thus, any discussion about service and how it has evolved within an evolving theoretical landscape logically leads onto a discussion about value creation. This section, therefore, introduces a traditional view of value and then explores how value is evolving in terms of co-creation of value, networks, knowledge and brand value. There are many ways value can be framed and again, as in the previous section, this part of the discussion is not exhaustive, but has as its central purpose to provide a snap-shot of the theoretical landscape from the angle of value creation, and also to provide a bridge between service and the brand.

The traditional view of value can be encapsulated by Porter's (1985) value chain, which, according to Gummesson (2007c) is supplier-centric, starting with inbound logistics (material), proceeding with operations (manufacturing and assembly), then outbound logistics (marketing and sales), and ending with service (spare parts with surrounding activities):

The chain imposes several restrictions on marketing. It is limited to goods and manufacturing; value-added becomes a euphemism for cost-added; and its stages are sequential, while to produce a desired outcome an iterative mode is required (Gummesson 2007c, p. 134).

According to this linear view, the customer does not play the role of an active co-creator but becomes a passive recipient of the value creation process.

Just as the way the marketing concept is constructed maps onto how goods and services are framed and on value creation, Ballantyne et al. (2003) argue that how you view the nature of value will delimit your view on the nature of marketing relationships. I would also argue that how you view marketing relationships will delimit your view on the nature of value creation. A more recent, integrated view is that value creation takes place in a network of activities involving not just two but multiple stakeholders such as intermediaries, employees, shareholders, and the wider society (Gummesson 2007c, p. 136). Thus service systems comprise service providers and service clients working together to co-produce value in complex value chains or networks (Spohrer et al. 2007, p. 72). This idea taken to its logical extreme is suggested by Maglio, Srinivasan, Kreulen and Spohrer (2006) who suggest that the global economy is a large service system and “[in] this service system complexity is a function of the number and variety of people, technologies, and organisations linked in the value creation networks” (p. 81). Thus within a more integrated view of marketing systems value creation is elevated from being merely something which is created in the end user relationships to being something which is created within a network of marketing relationships (Brodie et al. 2006).

Linked to this enlarged view of value creation is the concept of co-creation, a central assertion of service-dominant logic where value is co-created by both buyers and seller. Within this framework value creation becomes a dynamic process. Gummesson (2007c) offers an explanation of value within a service-dominant logic framework:

A supplier offers a value proposition, but value actualisation occurs in the usage and consumption process. Thus value is the outcome of co-creation between suppliers and customers (p. 117).

Gummesson (2007c) suggests, however, that this process can be extended beyond the customer-supplier dyad into the complex and adaptive networks that make up society; therefore his version of co-creation includes all customer activities throughout the usage and consumption process. This extension of the role of the consumer enlarges the role of value co-creation within marketing systems, and creates a more active role for the consumer at every level. For example knowledge workers depend on their knowledge and social networks to “solve problems, be productive, continually develop, and generate and capture value” (Maglio et al. 2006, p. 82).

As well as knowledge, loyalty is connected to the creation of value. Srivastava (R. Srivastava, personal communication, Oct. 2007) locates gaps around our understanding of customer loyalty and the generation of advocacy, and makes the connection between these processes and the creation of value. Brodie et al. (2006) also discuss at length the link between loyalty and value creation. Srivastava (R. Srivastava, personal communication, Oct. 2007) also links value creation, as do Brodie et al. (2006), to the role of the brand. The former makes the point that if there can be a better understanding of how the brand is understood by consumers, then out of this clarity there can arise an understanding of how value is created both for and by the consumer. Similarly, Berry (2000) makes the link between customer experience, brand meaning and brand equity, arguing that “just as customer experiences disproportionately shape brand meaning, so does brand meaning disproportionately affect brand equity” (p. 130). This connection between brand meaning and value creation suggests there is a need to connect my research with value co-creation in the broadest sense; i.e. within a network of consumers rather than the more restrictive customer-supplier dyadic model, and with the consumer framed as an active co-creative resource (Vargo and Lusch 2004a).

A common way of framing brand value is by focusing on the measurement of market productivity. For example Doyle (2001) asserts that “the value-creating

potential of a brand is determined by its differential advantage and its market economics” (p. 26). While this kind of approach is not the focus of my research, the importance of brand strategy and management having as an end goal the creation of value which has a positive financial effect, both in the short and long term future of the organisation, is acknowledged. Srivastava, Shervani and Fahey (1998) write about brand strength as opposed to brand value, distinguishing the former from the latter by asserting that brand strength is the most important (and involves positive attitude, perceptions, behaviour), while brand value is merely the added financial value that can be extracted by the company. They further assert that being able to deliver promises to customers, which is a central outcome of effective strategic alignment, is part of the answer to building brand strength; i.e., organisations with strong brands tend to be those that can deliver their promises to consumers (Srivastava et al. 1998). Their view of value is limited to the financial aspect of brand equity while brand strength takes on a bolder, more all-encompassing role within the value-creation paradigm. Similarly, strong brands provide economic benefits that add materially to the value of the organisation (Brodie, Glynn and van Durme 2002).

Another view is that the brand is at the centre of the value creating process (e.g. Brodie et al. 2006; Brodie et al. 2009). Brodie et al. (2009) use assertions by Davidson (1997) to support this view. Davidson (1997 cited in Brodie et al. 2009) suggests that value is the unseen value-adding processes inside the organisation that give the organisation’s brands their competitive advantage, and according to Brodie et al. (2009) central to those value adding processes are the values, intellect and culture of the organisation. Therefore, if the latter is explored, it seems reasonable to assume that the former is likely to be revealed. These comments (Brodie et al. 2006; Brodie et al. 2009) support an investigation into the processes inside the organization, given the central role they play in the value creation process.

Lastly, linked to 'organisation' is the concept of community. Thus literature around brand communities proved useful here in terms of providing a community-based view value creation. While Muniz and O'Guinn (2001) have brand communities as their focus, much of what they say and do has relevance and implications to the brand community of an organisation. Muniz and O'Guinn's (2001) list of core community commonalities are listed as follows: consciousness of kind, or the "intrinsic" connection felt by members for one another along with difference from those outside the community; the presence of shared rituals and traditions which give life to the community's "shared history, culture and consciousness"; and a felt sense of duty or obligation to the community as a whole (p. 413). An organisation could be constructed in this way, and in turn the internal consumers in an organisation might accept or resist belonging, and this accepting or resisting belonging may be reflected in construction of the brand and relationships facilitated by the brand. In Muniz and O'Guinn's (2001) view, a brand with a powerful sense of community will generally have greater value than one that has a weak sense of community, and they suggest that brand community has value to the larger discourse of community, modernity, and consumer culture; and therein lays the connection to organisations. Muniz and O'Guinn (2001) argue that brand communities reveal the socially situated nature of brands, and that "while the meaning of a brand is acknowledged as an important quality [...] it has been given surprisingly little research attention, and even less from a sociological perspective" (Muniz and O'Guinn 2001, p. 428). Thus, they too identify brand meaning with the strength and therefore value of the brand. This link is corroborated by Heilbrunn (1995) who proposes that the brand truly exists and has value because of the meaning consumers project on it.

Thus, from a financial view of value to a brand community view, it is clear that brands can be a powerful source of value, and connected to this value (co-)creation is the need to further understand what brands mean to those who consume them.

2.7 The Service Brand

Traditional views of the term 'service brand' link it to branding associated with services as opposed to goods (e.g. Berry and Parasuraman 1991). Thus the term initially represented a resistance to the view that brands are solely intended to represent commodities. Furthermore, the importance of branding has been widely recognised in the service setting (e.g. Berry, 2000; O'Cass and Grace 2004) because customers have to deal with an intangible offering, and I argue that this role is still important and has not suddenly disappeared due to the paradigmatic changes in marketing identified thus far. Berry's (2000) service-branding model suggests connections between the company's presented brand (controlled communications), the external brand (uncontrolled communications), customer experience, brand awareness and meaning and finally equity. He asserts that there is a direct relationship between brand meaning and brand equity. The connection between brand meaning and value creation is also established in the previous two sections.

However, just as services have been superseded by service, for some, the term 'service brand' no longer means merely the branding of services, but represents an integrative view where 'service' superordinates the branding of goods and services (Brodie et al. 2006; Brodie et al. 2009). This assertion is an extension of Vargo and Lusch's (2004a, 2008) service-dominant logic framework. It is clear to see, therefore, that a reframing of what is meant by 'service' has had an effect not only to how value is framed but also on what is meant by the term 'service brand'. The brand is positioned in my research, therefore, as branding within a service economy whereby service is an integrative term rather than part of a dichotomy and where the brand is deployed in an enlarged role.

To explore this re-framing of service brand further, I will now discuss Brodie et al.'s (2006) article in more depth. The focus of this article is the role of the brand in light of the service-dominant logic framework. Accompanying this shift in perspective, is a

growing concern with issues around the brand consumption experience (Brodie et al. 2006), a topic not covered in Vargo and Lusch's (2004a) article, and yet central to marketing. What is important about Brodie et al.'s (2006) work is that they continue to broaden the role of the service brand; the service brand provides an initial exploration into the broader role brands can play. As well as mapping onto Vargo and Lusch's (2004a) view of service, Brodie et al.'s (2006) view of the service brand is in line with Grönroos' (2006a) wider framing of the service concept as:

Processes that consist of a set of activities which take place in interactions between a customer and people, goods and other physical resources, systems and/or infrastructures representing the service provider and possibly involving other customers, which aim at solving customers' problems (p. 323).

This new perspective on brands emphasises the service nature of all brands, service-centred or not, and accompanying this shift in perspective is a growing concern with the brand consumption experience (e.g. Brodie et al. 2006; Keller and Lehmann 2006) particularly given its relationship with value creation.

This article (Brodie et al. 2006) is therefore an important touch point for my research in that it brings together the many threads of service(s), value creation and (service) branding. It is within this stream of research that the my study is positioned, particularly in relation to a focus on the service brand experience since within this perspective the brand interfaces with all consumers of the brand, whether they be customers, employees, other stakeholders (Brodie et al. 2009; de Chernatony and Segal-Horn 2003). According to Brodie et al. (2009), the roles of the service brand include being a relationship facilitator, and the service brand is more accurately framed as a "holistic process" and a set of promises. Furthermore, O'Cass and Grace (2004) assert that experience with the service brand provides a strong basis upon which consumers attach meaning to the brand, and ultimately brand attitudes emerge through

consumption behaviours. They call for our knowledge of service brand communications to be examined and compared across a broad range of service types, whether they are what they term a pure services situation or a tangible dominant services context. Thus, recent research streams emphasise a new way of framing the marketing construct which calls for a deeper understanding of the ways brand consumers construct meaning around and relate to service brands.

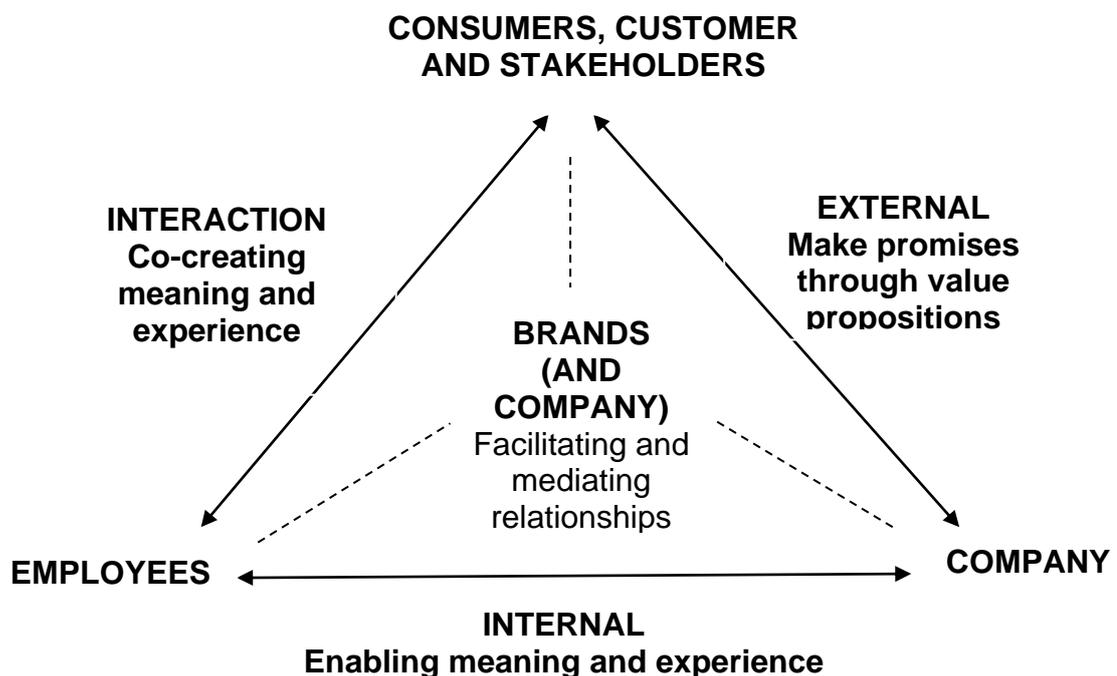
2.8 Modelling the Brand

Brodie et al. (2006) argue that Berry's (2000) model needs to be expanded to include network relationship experiences, and a broader model such as this will emphasise the role marketing plays in value creation in the service economy, and in the co-creation of value through brand experiences. Brodie et al. (2006) suggest that the service brand is a sign system that symbolises the value processes and this is illustrated in their suggested service brand model which pictures the service brand as facilitating the relationships between the firm's customers and other stakeholders, including employees (refer to **Figure 2.1**). This model of the enlarged role of the service brand is, according to Brodie et al. (2006), a synthesis of Grönroos' (2006b) latest definition of marketing² and Caloniuss's (1986 cited in Brodie et al. 2006) triangle to form the Service Brand Relationship Value Triangle (SBRVT). It also reflects what Brodie et al. (2006) term the missing fundamental premise in relation to service-dominant logic. This model summarises what is significant about the assertions Brodie et al. (2006) make, namely: "the experience-centric, co-creation view involves

² Recently, Grönroos (2006b) provided a new definition for marketing which reflects the changing business landscape, focuses on building customer relationships in the long term, and repositions the place of marketing within and organisation: "Marketing is a customer focus that permeates organisational functions and processes and is geared towards making promises through a value proposition, enabling the fulfilment of expectations created by such promises and fulfilling such expectations through support to customers' value-generating processes, thereby supporting value creation in the firm as well as its customers' and other stakeholders' processes" (p. 407).

interactions which extend beyond bilateral interactions between the organisation and its end customers” (p. 364); more attention needs to be given the service brand role as a phenomenon which is “embedded in relationships within the entire marketing system” (p. 365); service brands facilitate and mediate the marketing processes used to realize the experiences that drive co-creation of value” (p. 373).

Figure 2.1: The SBVRT Model (Brodie et al. 2006)



Brodie et al.’s (2006) recasting of the service brand as a relationship facilitator answers calls for a re-framing of what is meant by ‘brand’, a central marketing construct. In turn, the way the brand is re-framed has implications for how we value (co-)creation and of how the relationships of all the actors within the marketing system are also framed, given that the marketing phenomena consists of interactions within networks of relationships (Ballantyne and Varey 2006; Brodie et al. 2006; Gummesson 1998). Brodie et al. (2006) suggest that how value is conceptualised has marketing implications:

[By] viewing the customer as an asset there is implicitly a greater emphasis on marketing strategies that focus on managing the customer base. In contrast, by viewing the brand as an asset, there is a closer integration with a broader range of marketing strategies within the marketing networks, including supply chain management (p. 367).

In answer to possible criticism that the model suggests a brand-centric or inside-out view which does not place enough emphasis on the customer, Brodie et al. (2006) argue that their service brand perspective provides an integrative view which captures the central role it plays within the service-dominant logic paradigm. Subsequently, they call for more attention to be paid to the role of 'the service brand' as a relational asset, and for more attention to be focused on the role that brands play in relationships and business networks. Their SVRBT model, therefore, provided an initial theoretical framework for my research, in that it represents an enlarged and more central role for the brand and constructs stakeholder relationships in terms of value propositions, co-creation of meaning and experience, and the enablement of meaning and experience.

2.9 The Brand as Experience

The experience-centric, co-creation view places experience at the centre of the value creation process. Prahalad (2004) argues that within an experience-centric, co-creation perspective, the brand becomes the experience. Padgett and Allen (1997) describe the service consumption experience in terms of the simultaneous occurrence of production and consumption which results in active meaning construction in association with consumption-related behaviours, thoughts and feelings. Their framing of the service brand image in experiential terms provides insight into the ways consumers actively create meaning in response to marketing stimuli and indicates a lack in previous paradigmatic conventions: "[A] consumer-oriented perspective could be especially helpful for services marketers because their field developed from a managerial orientation, focusing primarily on production issues rather than

consumption issues” (Padgett and Allen 1997, p. 51). Thus I make the assumption that the brand is experienced and, using an experiential view, is also inherently consumer-oriented.

Furthermore, I have adopted the view that the consumption of brands is not just for their physical attributes and functions but also for their meanings (Levy and Glick 1973), and that the experiential aspect of services should play an important role in the conceptualisation of the service brand image (Padgett and Allen 1997). Furthermore, Padgett and Allen (1997) frame the service brand image as “a consumer-oriented concept” and stress “the consumer’s active role in creating meaning in response to marketing stimuli” (p. 50). In conceptualising service as experience they assert that services tend to be higher than goods in experience and credence qualities. They argue that since many services are experiential, they can use the service experience as a consumer-oriented concept for addressing service brand issues. In addition, Padgett and Allen’s (1997) comments also provide a link back to the similarly experience-focused views of Schembri (2006) and Haahti (2004) in relation to the service economy.

2.10 The Brand as Socially Constructed Text

The SBRVT framework (Brodie et al. 2006) suggests that experience is linked to the construction of meaning. In addition, the work of Peñaloza and Venkatesh (2006), which is discussed in relation to moving beyond the service-dominant logic framework (refer to section 2.5), reveals markets as social constructions and calls for consumers to be “re-centred in the context of their lives” (p. 311). Moreover, these authors call for work that focuses on studying consumers, marketers and firms in social groups. For them, viewing markets as social constructions creates an understanding of the relationship between market beliefs and practices. In addition, Muniz and O’Guinn (2001) see brand meaning as being socially negotiated. More specifically, they view brands as social entities which are created as much by consumers as by marketers in

a complex dance of social construction: "This intersection of brand - a defining entity of consumer culture - and community - a core sociological notion - is an important one" (p. 428). Recently, El-Amir and Burt (2010) modelled the retailer as a socially constructed brand. There is a clear call to frame, therefore, marketing issues such as the brand experience as a socially constructed phenomenon, thereby moving beyond the level of individual analysis. Cova (1997) asserts that community is re-emerging and consumption is characterised as a societal (tribal) phenomenon. Therefore, my research takes a social constructionist approach to exploring 'brand' within a network of marketing relationships rather than just from an individual perspective.

In addition to adopting the view that brand can be framed as a social construction, I also assert that the brand can be constructed as text. O'Reilly (2005) emphasises the symbolic nature of brands and also stresses that "all brands are representational texts, and are socially, not merely managerially, constructed" (p. 573). The question 'What is text?' can be answered broadly, whereby text is anything which signifies meaning. Bulmer and Buchanan-Oliver (2006) use the term 'visual rhetoric' for advertising content, whereby "images are culturally bound, symbolic and subject to the viewer's interpretation" (p. 51). Thus images become texts to be read. Brands are viewed by Schroeder (2002; 2005) as inherently visual, and in Schroeder and Zwick (2004), advertising images (which are usually linked to brands) are constructed as "bearers of meaning, reflecting broad societal, cultural, and ideological codes [...] not mere *pictures*, accurately representing some external world" (p. 45). Furthermore, the advertising image can be viewed as an alchemic mirror which embodies the contradictions of them whose gaze it captures (Schroeder and Zwick 2004).

One of the rationales of this study for framing the brand as a socially constructed text is that this is a way of exploring and reflecting something of the complexity of organisations. Organisations can be framed as: "being constructed of dynamic complexity rather than the everyday detailed complexity [...] and business actions and

reactions are no longer linear, mono-causal or exactly traceable back to their cause. Indeed they never really were” (Ballantyne et al. 2003, p. 164). These comments seem to converge with those of the Nordic perspective, and the service-dominant logic proponents (and beyond) in that they are indicative of a move towards a more complex framing of marketing.

Two trends are occurring here. On one hand organisations have always been complex, organic, relationship-based constructions, but they were often delimited by attempts to rationalise and control their existence and processes. On the other hand, the global business environment, aided by technology, is creating an increasing sense of complexity over and above what might be found in a traditional setting. Consequently, organisations are increasingly using branding as a strategy tool in today’s increasingly complex settings (Rooney 1995); thus there has been rising interest in the role that the brand plays within this complexity.

Brown and Humphreys (2006) frame organisations in a similar way; they assert that organisations are socially constructed, constituted as discourse, rather than being independent entities, and within this framing the complexity of the organisation is more fully expressed. Further support for a framing of the brand as a socially constructed text for the purposes of this thesis, comes from an article by Hatch and Rubin (2006), who point to an increasing body of scholarship, particularly in marketing, which draws on a wide variety of theoretical traditions to address the implication of framing brands in this way. They assert that brands are “one of the most text-like artifacts of contemporary business culture” (p. 40) and they exist as symbolic phenomena with their meanings dependent on particular cultural contexts (Hatch and Rubin 2006). Consumers of brand texts may therefore resist the brand meanings originally intended by the company. In addition, Hatch and Rubin’s (2006) description of brands as embodying stories constructed both by the companies that produce them and by their consumers is a key point as the textual, and socially constructed nature of the brand,

which are both “storied” and not “immutable”, suggests there is a need to understand brands in a wider context in this way. Thus, framing the brand in socially constructed textual terms both acknowledged the complexity of its role within marketing theory and also brings together the interface of company and stakeholders, by acknowledging the multiple stories that exist within any particular brand context.

The organisation is also contingent. According to Parker (1992), “[w]hen we write ‘organization’ we must see it as a process/verb that needs disorganization in order to exist” (p. 6). Alvesson, Lee and Thomas (2008) show that individual and collective self-constructions become powerful actors in organising processes and outcomes. Moreover the organisational identity is presented as an imaginary construct (Driver 2009) and fragmented (Sveningsson and Alvesson 2003). Harding (2007) provides her reader with a poststructuralist account of the organisation and self, an account which suggests that there is no such thing as ‘the organisation’ or ‘the employed self’, but instead “mutual imbrications provides organisation/self/self/ organisation” (p. 1761). Harding’s (2007) view of the organisational identity could be helpful in uncovering the contingent nature of the brand experience.

To summarise, these recent research streams emphasise a new service-dominant logic which calls for a deeper understanding of the ways brand consumers construct meaning around and relate to service brands within a range of industry contexts. Thus it is argued that there is a need to focus on the consumer’s experience of the brand, which is a socially constructed text and contingent, in order to further create an understanding of the brand within a theoretical context which is service-oriented, an orientation which is perhaps more open to the complexities of the brand experience as it is perceived by the consumer in terms of trust, promises, value, co-creation and ultimately meaningful interactive dialogue. However, this view needs to be narrowed further. O’Cass and Grace (2004) argue that in order to enhance our knowledge of service brand communications researchers should examine and compare the effect of

communications across a broader range of service types, and, it could be added, from a number of different stakeholder perspectives. The following section provides a rationale for why an internal focus (within the organisation) has been selected.

2.11 An Internal (Employee) View

This section utilises literature mainly from internal marketing and internal branding to make the case that a theoretical contribution can be made within an internal branding context by exploring the role of the organisation's brand from the point of view of the internal consumer's (employee's) experience of the brand.

In the early 1990's, Grönroos (1993) asserted that 'service management' was not a well-delineated concept, despite its increased use by academics and marketing practitioners alike, and in addition, there was an over focus on customer satisfaction. With some foresight, Grönroos (1993) calls for a focus on internal marketing efforts, and also cross-disciplinary research which "will broaden and deepen the service management perspective" (p. 15). Similarly, Barnes, Fox and Morris (2004) state that, traditionally, marketing has tended to concentrate upon satisfying the needs and requirements of customers that are external to the organisation, but more recent trends acknowledge the importance of having an appropriate design and structure in place internally in order to have a customer focus. The services marketing literature has emphasised the role internal marketing plays in supporting the service offering not only by improving and supporting the service performance but also by increasing employee retention rates (Berry 1995).

The concept of internal marketing often refers to employee relationship marketing, which means applying marketing principles to the people who interface with the customers (Varoglu and Eser 2006). According to Barnes et al. (2004), the main point of difference between relationship marketing and internal marketing is that the former recognises the importance of bringing the external customer into the company while internal marketing views the company as a market of internal suppliers and customers.

Both stress the importance of creating and maintaining relationships between the various actors. This definition could be extended out to all employees whether they interface with the customer or not, and indeed Krell (2006) asserts that employees' understanding of the organisation's brand has an impact on their behaviour, whether or not they interact directly with customers. According to Papasolomou and Vrontis (2006), internal marketing is "a mechanism for instilling a 'people' orientation within an organisation as a prerequisite for instilling and strengthening the service, customer, and marketing orientation among organisational personnel" (p. 196).

Papasolomou and Vrontis (2006) propose that the various definitions of internal marketing that have been developed over the years often possess the idea that employees should be viewed and treated as internal customers. There is also a sense in the definitions collected by Papsolomou and Vrontis (2006) that one of the aims of internal marketing is to align employee activities, stem resistance and motivate employees to perform in a way desired by the organisation. Internal marketing is commonly framed as a precursor of high quality service (Barnes et al. 2004; Papasolomou and Vrontis 2006), an enabler of a strong corporate brand (Papasolomou and Vrontis 2006), and a facilitator of knowledge renewal (Ballantyne et al. 2003; Normann and Ramirez 1993; Varey and Lewis 2000), alignment of internal processes with the brand (Harris and de Chernatony 2001) and the value supporting resources and processes that make and deliver promises (Brodie et al. 2009). Berthon et al. (2005) and Papasolomou and Vrontis (2006) view the internal marketing concept as needing more development. In particular, Papasolomou and Vrontis (2006) highlight the lack of a universally accepted and adopted internal marketing program. It could be argued that having such a programme could be unrealistic given the nature of communications processes and realities within organisations and given the cultural and organisational variables that exist. My research is positioned as embracing the complexities of the internal consumption environment, and in doing so it is hoped that

the findings therein will help to close the gap somewhat between theoretical models and 'reality' by resisting reductive, linear approaches to unpacking issues around internal marketing, and internal branding management.

Internal marketing asserts that an organisation's employees are its first market, and terms such as 'internal advertising', 'internal branding' and 'employer branding' entered the marketing lexicon subsequent to this idea (Berthon et al. 2005). Internal branding sees employees as part of the process of brand building and therefore it is important to consider how their values and behaviour can be allied with a brand's desired values (Berthon et al. 2005). It seems, therefore, that internal branding is a subset of internal marketing, and yet considering the enlarged and central role of the brand, as has been suggested by Brodie et al. (2006), then internal branding may also need reframing to reflect this changing role, and this reframing could have implications for the role of marketing within an organisation. Internal branding can be seen as the means to create powerful corporate brands, allowing an organisation to align its internal processes and corporate culture with those of the brand (Vallaster 2004). Furthermore, internal brand building facilitates employee behaviour with a corporate brand's identity (Vallaster and de Chernatony 2006). Vallaster and de Chernatony (2006) point out that while "brand consistent behaviour supports the development of a coherent brand image, and is considered one of the crucial success factors in corporate brand management" (p. 761), achieving brand-supportive behaviour remains mainly normative.

A rationale for focusing on internal branding is that much of the research around brand experiences has focused on the external consumer of the brand. Internal branding has been a relatively recent focus in branding literature and has been more thinly covered (Vallaster 2004). However, there is clear recognition of the importance of the employee/brand relationship when it comes to service delivery (e.g. Buchanan-Oliver, Wong-Ming and Sherrard 2000; Gap and Merrilees, 2006). Mohtashemi (2002)

frames the employee brand as the external face of the brand, inside, which encourages employees to connect with the brand in the same way as external consumer do, usually by internalising brand values. However, while the employee's role as enabler of brand promises has been and is increasingly acknowledged, Vallaster (2004) points to a gap in our empirical knowledge of how this occurs and Vallaster and de Chernatony (2006) call for further research "to understand how corporate branding structures are (re)produced in group interactions" (p. 778).

A number of sources stress the importance for greater investigation into the use of internal marketing within a broad, integrative framework which crosses the area of marketing management and human resources (Gapp and Merrilees 2006; Lings 2004). My research provides an investigation that uses the broad, integrative framework of the service economy and through an investigation of the service brand experience within the organisation, this kind of study will not only contribute to the service branding and internal marketing and branding literature, but will have relevance to organisational culture, business strategy and communication, and human resource management. In addition it is argued that the division between internal marketing and internal branding becomes blurred when the brand becomes the facilitator of relationships, experience and meaning within and among an organisational setting.

The success of a service is often contingent upon the ability of firms to build relationships with customers, and the brand can be an important shaper of the consumer consumption experience (O'Cass and Grace 2004). That building of relationships extends also to the internal customers (consumers) of the organisation and the (service) brand is a vital component of the internal consumption experience. In their case study of a Norwegian collection agency, 'Conecto', Brønn, Engell and Martinsen (2006) assert that uncovering identity starts internally with the internal members of an organisation and in a services context it is important that the gap between conceived identity (image) and actual identity is minimal. Connected to

internal branding is the idea of internal relationship building. Buchanan-Oliver et al. (2000) assert that in order to an organisation to establish, enhance and maintain long term (external) customer relationships, it should focus on creating strong relationships with its internal customers.

2.12 Corporate Identity

Internal marketing and internal branding are linked to corporate identity since projecting a uniform and positive identity is a common aim of business leaders. Brønn, et al. (2006), who explore this issue in a Scandinavian service firm, propose that uncovering identity starts internally with individuals and the organisation. Corporate identity management authors such as Simões, Dibb and Fisk (2005) position management as key in the development and maintenance of corporate identity, paying particular attention to the internal and controllable aspects of the process; they suggest that corporate identity management includes the dissemination of mission and values, consistent image implementation and visual identity implementation. The corporate identity management approach, like the internal marketing and perhaps the internal branding approaches, seems to have a desire for organisational unity and/or alignment as a main goal. According to Motion and Leitch (2002), “[m]ost organizations attempt to communicate consistent messages about their identities, while managing the multiplicity within” (p. 48). Furthermore, the tension between normalisation and differentiation is interpreted by Leitch and Motion (2007) as “the tension between a single identity and multiple identities” (p. 79). Borgerson, Schroeder, Magnusson and Magnusson’s (2009) exploration of corporate identity at Benetton found disconnection and inconsistency. I would argue that there is room to explore the multiplicity and complexity of internal organisational culture, communication streams, informal as well as formal dialogues, and the co-creation of ‘the marketing message’ and lived experience of the internal consumers. Management strategy may benefit by first exploring the organisation’s identity in terms of not only what that identity is hoped to

be, but also in terms of how internal consumers of the brand form their own versions of the brand not only as an object outside themselves, but also as part of their own identity construction. This view of the consumer is supported by Hatch and Rubin (2006), who suggest that consumers may resist meanings originally conceived by managers or agencies and that brands embody stories constructed both by the companies that produce them and by their consumers.

In addition, while research recently exists in the context of uncovering organisational identity by first looking at the internal members of an organisation (e.g. Brønn et al. 2006), there are gaps in the literature around the issue of brand experience within an organisation and organisation and individual identity construction arising from that experience. Yet, as Krell (2006) purports, the larger part of branding which differentiates an organisation from its competitors is how an organisation delivers on its promises, and the people who deliver on those promises are the employees; and this is particularly the case in a service industry where the product being sold is essentially the relationship between the employees and the customers. Furthermore, Brodie et al. (2006) argue that value creation and the enabling and delivery of promises depends on the interaction of the internal consumer with the service brand. The key to value creation for all stakeholders is the integration of the internal and external processes (Heskett, Jones, Loveman, Sasser and Schlesinger 1994) and therefore, the promises made about exchange, meaning and experience should match the delivery of exchange and co-creation of meaning and experience. Thus the importance of the internal consumer's relationship with the brand and subsequent living out of the brand promises is further supported. However, my study is not just about effective service delivery through brand-employee alignment. Instead, it seeks to enlarge our understanding of the internal consumer's experience of the service brand in order to explore a richer textual landscape compared to what has been previously presented within the internal branding literature stream.

2.13 Overview of the Theoretical Context and Focus

The first part of this literature review establishes that a reframing of the marketing paradigm through various theoretical strands has led to a reframing of 'brand', 'service' and 'service brand', which challenges more normative views. Consequently, the service brand construct has been enlarged and centralised as a relationship facilitator between a network of actors within marketing systems. Brodie et al.'s (2006) SBRVT model is employed as an initial theoretical framework. It should be noted that Brodie (2009) presents a further iteration of the model whereby he replaces 'Brands (and Company)' with 'Service Brand'. Furthermore, I chose this model as a starting point as other authors have employed a similar framework. For example, King and Grace (2005) centralise brand loyalty within a triangular relationship between organisation, customers and employees. Also in the field of consumer research Schau and Russell (2005) depict the brand (and self) in a centralised and triangular relationship. In this model the service brand is conceptualised as a superordinating term and is described in experiential, co-creational terms. I employ the assumption, therefore, that the brand is an experiential, co-created, socially constructed, textual phenomenon. I have broadened my view of the brand to also include a management perspective (corporate and organisational views) rather than just a marketing perspective in order to explore the role of the brand as fully as possible within the scope of this thesis. In addition, I have adopted an internal focus in order to explore an employee perspective of the brand of a large service organisation to provide balance to the predominantly external consumer centred view of the consumer-brand interaction. I also chose this perspective to acknowledge the importance of the internal consumer of the brand in terms of the overall marketing and branding process.

2.14 Narrative Analysis

Given the social, textual framing of the brand, a strong argument exists for using a narrative approach. I now discuss why I chose to use a narrative perspective.

Justification for deploying this perspective stems firstly from its establishment in other disciplines as an interpretive approach, and its use in marketing as a source of insight into consumer behaviour.

2.14.1 Why Narrative

First, a consideration of narrative requires a consideration of choosing to focus on language. Language is increasingly being acknowledged as the most important phenomenon in social and organisational research and this has led to an interest in discourses (Alvesson and Kärreman 2000). In relation to studies about human consciousness, language provides a way for researchers to bring forth an inner world “in a process intimately linked to language” (Alvesson and Kärreman, p. 240), and within the discourse analytic tradition, narrative provides a framework which, according to Constantino and Greene (2003) offers an effective way of representing the contextualised meanings of lived experience in a multi-perspectival way. Leitch and Motion’s (2007) exploration of corporate branding shows how a discourse perspective of the corporate brand uncovers a multiple identity rather than single identity view of the brand in that the brand exists in multiple discourse contexts. This contextualised, multi-perspectival framing of lived experience provides a rich alternative to the, often privileged, logico-scientific paradigm. Tsoukas and Hatch (2001) list three main ways narrative ‘corrects’ some of the weaknesses of the positivist approach to research (**Table 2.1**); namely narrative provides contextuality and reflexivity instead of imperfect generalisations, expression of purposes and motives rather than tacit justification, and temporal sensitivity in place of a requirement for consistency and non-contradiction.

Table 2.1: The Limits to Logico-Scientific Thinking and some Narrative ‘Correctives’ (Tsoukas and Hatch 2001)

Logico-scientific limits	Narrative ‘correctives’
Imperfect generalizations	Contextuality and reflexivity
Tacit justification	Expression of purposes and motives
Requires consistency and non-contradiction	Temporal sensitivity

Historically, narrative analysis, which has become a tool for analysing a range of textual types within a number of genres and contexts, has as its origins the traditions of literary criticism (e.g. Frye 1957). Furthermore, there are countless forms of narrative in the world (Barthes and Duisit 1975). According to Hyvarinen (2006) the narrative tradition has ‘travelled’ from its literary origins into other disciplines such as social science, law, health studies and theology where it is used as an effective data analysis framework. Hyvarinen (2006) argues that rather than remaining a static tool, this traverse across various discipline landscapes has transformed it. Thus, as well as being a tool which is used to explore unknown contexts and theoretical terrains, the tool itself is challenged in new ways, and is perhaps enlarged in its usefulness and applications.

I chose a narrative approach for a number of reasons, one of which is to do with Stern’s (1990) argument that “the history of marketing thought can be enriched by adapting a literary historian’s perspective to read marketing theory as text” (p. 329). Similarly, I suggest and assume that the service brand can be constructed as narrative. Stern (1990) argues that by framing marketing theorists’ writings as text the reader is able to read the material with a keener eye for detail. Thus, I argue that constructing the brand as text (narrative) will have a similar effect. Moreover, narrative analysis is, according to Clulow (2005), a method which arises out of a discourse perspective and is focused on the analysis of *talk* where the interest is on uncovering the participants’ “intersubjective understanding of the topic of the social interaction” (p. 985); this

method allows the researcher to uncover and unpack the text through which meaning emerges. Clulow (2005) asserts that this kind of qualitative methodology is suited to reflexive process, “using the systematic analysis of the text of reports and events over time, to enable reflection on events that incrementally [a]mount to a paradigm shift” (p. 985). Conversational texts, therefore, become, along the lines of Gubrium and Holstein’s (2000) framing of them as courses of action immersed into social practices.

Furthermore, the use of narrative is, according to some, not only a powerful way we can understand the human experience (individual and collective) that is not directly open to other forms of analysis (Brown, Humphrey’s and Gurney 2005), but it is more ‘natural’. The premise of narrative psychology is that “people have a natural propensity to organize information about people and their actions in story format” (Padgett and Allen 1997, p. 53). In addition, the narrative mode of thought is to understand the construction of meaning (Padgett and Allen 1997). Collective self-narratives are likely to be fractured, contested and multi-layered, given the pluralism and polyphony that characterise organisations (Humphreys and Brown 2002). Narrative emphasises the presence of multiple, interlinked realities (Barry and Elmes 1997) and is, therefore, well placed to capture the complexity of organisational ‘reality’. Just as traditional research approaches used to study cross cultural organisation (Soin and Schyett 2006) and cross cultural management (Lowe, Moore and Carr (2007) have been found lacking in the ability to capture the complexities of these disciplines and the issues thereof, the same could be proposed about internal branding research. A perceived lack of complexity in the way internal branding has thus far been presented is a justification for exploring this area using an interpretive approach and more specifically, narrative analysis. In relation to an organisational research context, Soin and Scheytt (2006) propose that the embedded nature of organisations means that using a narrative method can be a useful complementary approach particularly when exploring cultural issues, and additionally, the complexity of culture in organisations “exceeds the notion

of an independent variable influencing organisations in an unambiguous and objectively describable way” (p. 59).

2.14.2 Empirically-Based Views of Narrative

Narrative has become a well documented approach in both organisational and marketing research. For example within business, Hopkinson (2003) assumes the organisation to be a site of multiple communities that each make meaning. Hopkinson (2003) draws on social constructionist theory and applies discourse analysis to narratives told by service delivery staff in one network distribution. Hopkinson (2003) asks questions which provide access into what I have tried to achieve within an organisational context, and with narrative, but with the brand as a major differentiating factor. This the current research will to an extent use a similar focus, but it will be extended into a marketing, and more specifically an internal branding, context. In particular, Hopkinson (2003) explores fragmented constructions of an organisation by analysing ten stories, each story being the personal account of an event. Her analysis focuses on how the story positions the story teller relative to other parties to their world, thereby drawing upon the self, the story, and language. She argues that this method uncovers the “cultural modes whereby human beings are made subjects” (p. 1945) and she “traces the social structures, relations and identities within what could be referred to as the ‘organisational worlds’ that the narratives construct” (p. 1947). Hopkinson’s (2003) comment about internal customers acting in ways associated with the external customer raises the question: To what extent can the frameworks and characterisations that are often applied to external consumers be applied equally appropriately to the internal consumers? Hopkinson’s (2003) justification for using narrative centres on the idea that constructions of the organisational world have a narrative logic so that each element of the world supports other elements. One result of her study is that she sheds light on the possible differences between theoretic and performative definitions of organisation.

In addition, in Brown et al.'s (2005) study, they analysed the shared identity narratives at a UK-based tour operator. Consequently, the authors claim to contribute to an understanding and theorisation of organisational identities as narrative construct. They regard organisations as discursive spaces constituted through language practices. They argue that organisations may be characterised by multiple identity narratives which evolve, overlap and compete. Thus, "organisations are constructed through acts of languaging located in social processes of networking, negotiation and exchange" and narratives are constructed as "accounts of value-laden symbolic actions embedded in words and incorporating sequency, time and place" (p. 313). Brown et al. (2005) use the terms 'mainstream views', and 'idiosyncratic versions' of the organisation. Initially, I viewed these labels as potentially useful ones to employ in my study, in line perhaps with 'brand supporting' and 'brand resisting' behavior, two labels used elsewhere. I purport that my study makes a contribution to the theorisation of service brands within organisations as narrative constructs, just as Brown et al. (2005) claims to be making a contribution to the theorisation of organisational identities as narrative constructs.

As well as having been used to good effect within organisation research, narrative has been employed within a marketing research framework. According to Stern, Thompson and Arnould (1998), using narrative text, which in their study was generated from a phenomenological interview, as data, is justified in the interpretive paradigm as contributing to an understanding of the consumer's perspective. In their study they used an interview technique which encouraged participants to contextualise a marketing relationship in their life histories, thereby facilitating the phenomenological study of 'lived meaning':

By looking at a narrative not as a given but as an entity to be studied (Iser 1978), researchers can gain insight into the consumer and the marketing 'others' refracted through the lens of the former's perceptions (Bruner

1987; Pratt 1977; Prince 1982; Scholes 1981). Attention to narrative patterns (Stern 1994, 1995) contributes to deeper understanding of consumer behaviour by focusing on the way that individuals recount their histories - what they emphasize or leave out; their roles as heroes, villains, or victims in the plot; their self-talk; the way they talk about others. In this sense, narratives can be viewed not simply as “a way of telling someone (or oneself) about one’s life” (Rosenwald and Ochberg 1992, p. 1), but, more holistically, as [a] way of telling about one’s relationship to others and the reasons behind them (Stern et al. 1998, p. 199).

According to Stern et al. (1998), the main marketing implication of using narrative is the gaining of insight into the consumer’s view of a marketing relationship, whereby each narrative provides insight into the way that consumers make sense of events in their lives, long considered the major function of stories in human experience. The authors argue that the story is “a repository of information about the cognitive and affective responses to brands, advertising, and interpersonal exchanges” (Stern et al. 1998, p. 196), and by using narrative analysis, “researchers can gain insight into the consumer and the marketing ‘others’ refracted through the lens of the former’s perceptions” (Stern et al. 1998, p. 199).

Other narrative approaches to understanding consumer/brand relationships include Schau and Muniz’s (2006) narrative analysis of the Apple Newton brand community, which highlights the importance of telling stories, both to individuals and to social groups. They draw on Fine’s (1998 cited in Schau and Muniz 2006) assertion that stories are an important aspect of group operation and formation. The brand experience, within an organisation, could, therefore, be explored in a similar fashion, whereby brands are seen as texts to be read and readings of them become socially constructed narratives. Furthermore, automobile memories are the focus of Braun-La Tour, La Tour and Zinkham’s (2007) recent study. They actually chose this product category because it has been heavily researched in the self-concept literature, and therefore provided an opportunity to build on this prior research. In their study, they

interpret memory stories as myths. They observe how participants project themselves and their feelings about cars into their memory stories through their choice of incidents, language, emotional tone, and logic (an approach they describe as being similar to the hermeneutical approach to consumer narratives outlined by Thompson and Haytko (1997). Braun-La Tour et al. (2007) view the stories they collect as being reflective of self-identity and drawing from a cultural code of shared historical meanings and viewpoints. Similarly, visual images are described by Schroeder and Zwick (2004) as “an engaging and deceptive culturally and historically bound visual language system” (p. 45).

According to Heilbrun (1995) the brand can be assimilated to a character, the brand and consumer can be considered as two partners of a dyadic relationship and this relationship exists within a temporal process and therefore has different stages. Heilbrunn uses these assumptions, and the assumption that the brand can be framed as a human character and part of the self to justify the use of a narrative approach in order to frame the brand-consumer relationship as a text. According to Heilbrunn, the term ‘text’ is now widely accepted among semioticians to not only apply to literary texts but other kinds of human productions. Heilbrun frames the brand-consumer relationship as a sequence of events, and as a sequence of functions. Thus a broad view of what text may consist of could be used within a narrower narrative approach.

Escalas (2004) argues that narrative processing builds consumer connections to brands because consumers interpret the meaning of their experiences through stories. Her assumption is that the more meaningful the brand becomes, the more closely it is linked to the self. It could be argued that the organisation, as it is seen through the internal consumers’ eyes, can be more deeply accessed than other more surface level methods (e.g. surveys). If, in addition, brands are framed as mirrors of the self, a self construction (Schau and Russell 2005), then narratives which construct the brand also construct the self (the narrator) and if the self is a collective voice (of fragmented

constructions) then this is another way of accessing the identity of the organisation (as it is constructed by and through narrative). Thus, the brand can be viewed as a reflection of self identity just as visual images in advertising mirror consumer society, exposing the consumer as “exhibited objects for visual consumption” (Schroeder and Zwick 2004, p. 46).

2.15 Research Framework

I propose that brands embody stories constructed both by the companies that produce them and by their consumers, including employees and other stakeholders. Furthermore, this research adds to what Hatch and Rubin (2006) describe as a growing body of scholarship in marketing that draws on various theoretical traditions in order to explore the implications of brands as social text. The advantage of using a narrative approach is that it provides an effective way of accessing participants’ lived experiences of a particular context (Costantino and Greene, 2003), and of gaining insight into users’ perspectives on organisational issues (Alvarez and Urla, 2002). Thus, this study also enlarges our understanding of how using a narrative approach can expand our understanding of co-created meaning and therefore value creation. Moreover, by using narrative, the complexity of the system being studied is more likely to emerge compared to more reductive methodologies. Based upon complexity theory, which represents a move away from a linear, mechanistic lens of the world (Regine and Lewin 2000), my assumption is that organisations are complex, organic systems and therefore the brand experience of an employee within a large service organisation is likely to be similarly complex and organic.

The overarching research question which is at the focus of my research asks:

How do employee narratives construct the brand of a large service organisation?

Subsequent questions connected to the use of narrative are as follows: Question 1:

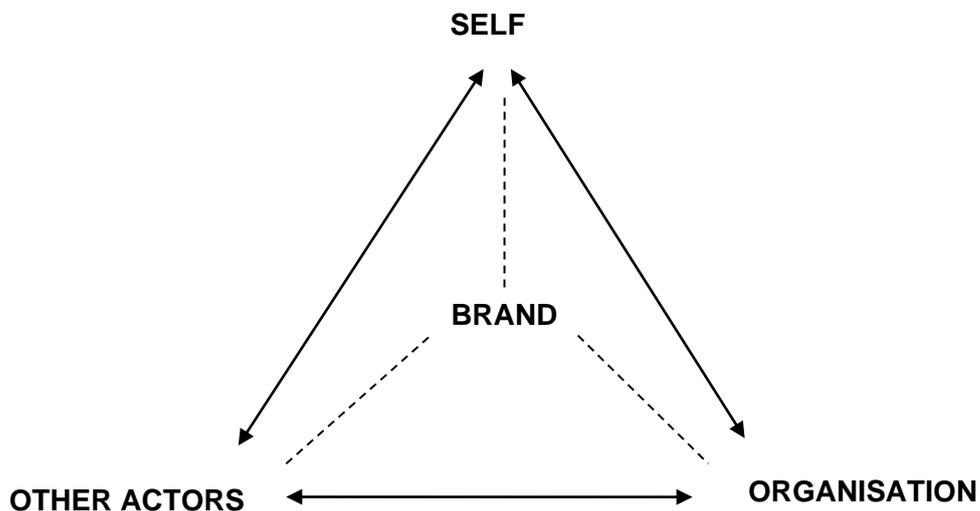
How do employee narratives construct the brand through constructions of the

organisation, brand, self and other actors?; Question 2: How do employee narratives

construct the brand through the constructed relationships between each of these actors?; Question 3: How does using narrative analysis help to unpack the employee-brand experience?; Question 4: What does unpacking the employee-brand experience reveal about value creation?

The first two questions build upon Hopkinson's (2003) focus on how narratives construct the organisation through their constructions of self (the narrator), customer and manufacturer, and their constructions of the relationships linking these three sets of actors. Her research focus created a bridge to my own research focus, i.e. to uncover how brands are constructed through (and as) narratives. Question 3 focuses on the experience of the consumer, which is one way the service-dominant logic framework has been extended in the literature (e.g. Haahti 2003), and the fourth question provides insight into value creation. These questions are illustrated in **Figure 2.2** below.

Figure 2.2. The Employee-Brand Experience



This model provided an initial framework for the study which is outlined in Chapter Three: Methodology. It is not only informed by theories which centralise and enlarge

the role of the brand, but also by the contingent and mutually imbricated conception that Harding (2007) has utilised in talking of identity in organisations. The aim of my research is not to try and reduce the complexity into commonalities, but rather to “generate new insights, and thus contribute to expanding the possibilities for thought and action, through the use of the narrative perspective and the metaphor of complexity” (Tsoukas and Hatch 2001, p. 981).

2.16 Summary

The brand is linked to self identity and also the organisation’s identity and is therefore a powerful marketing tool. During the past decade, what has emerged is an enlarged view of the brand within a newly branded service economy which foregrounds a co-creational, consumer-oriented system of value creation. In addition, the experiential, socially constructed, textual nature of the brand has also been established. What is lacking, however, is research into how employees experience the brand in a large service organisation, given the vital role employees in service industries play in enacting the brand. Furthermore, narrative analysis provides the researcher with a way to unveil the complexity of the brand experience from the employee perspective. The subsequent chapter outlines how this research was performed.

Chapter Three: Methodology

3.1 Overview

This chapter unpacks, using Crotty's (1998) four-tiered model, the research methodology employed for this study. According to Crotty (1998), behind the methods used there lies a methodology which governs their choice and use, and behind this methodology there lies a theoretical perspective, and this theoretical perspective is informed by an epistemology. My aim was to generate qualitative data, given the nature of the research question. This decision is discussed below, as is the decision to adopt a social constructionist approach at the epistemological level. This approach maps onto an interpretive theoretical approach, and more specifically hermeneutics. Within an interpretive framework, the choice of discourse analysis is then explored. Discourse analysis then maps onto the choice of narrative analysis within an embedded case study context. Also provided, is a detailed summary of the methods I employed to locate, generate and analyse the data upon which this thesis is based.

3.2 A Qualitative Approach

First, I used a qualitative approach. Qualitative research is a socially constructed term which is fed by an array of discourses from various disciplines, and which consists of a toolbox of approaches and practices which can be used to explore social and cultural phenomena (Alasuutari 2007). It looks to the human as an instrument for the collection and analysis of data, with the overall purpose of qualitative research being to understand the phenomenon being studied (Cavana, Delahaye and Sekaran 2001). The decision to use this kind of approach was informed by the assertion that qualitative data, which emphasises "lived experience", is suited for "locating the meanings people place on the events, processes and structures of their lives" (Miles and Huberman 1994, p. 10). A qualitative approach allows the researcher to construct meaningful

picture of the situation or process which is being explored. According to Tolich and Davidson (1999), a qualitative approach uses variables that are complex, interwoven, and difficult to measure, providing an 'emic' (insider's) point of view, rather than an 'etic' (outsider's) point of view. Thus, I chose a qualitative framework in order to contextualise, interpret and understand the situation being explored.

3.3 Epistemology

Any discussion around why a qualitative approach is the preferred one for exploring the service brand experience, given the nature of the investigation, should inevitably lead to an uncovering of the epistemological assumptions of the researcher. Epistemological assumptions are defined by Crotty (1998) as the theory of knowledge embedded in the theoretical perspective and therefore the methodology. Questions about how certain things can be known and what counts as legitimate knowledge of those things as "questions of epistemology" (Tolich and Davidson 1999, p. 23). A reflexive approach is required in any attempt to understand the nature of social research and there needs to be an acknowledgement of the way favored techniques point to underlying assumptions or a world view (*Weltanschauung*) (Morgan and Smircich 1980). According to Crotty (1998), objectivism, constructionism and subjectivism are the three ways of knowing (Crotty 1998).

The metatheoretical or epistemological perspective that I chose to frame this research is a social constructionist one. Constructionism should not be confused with constructivism. Crotty (1998) makes it clear that the former should be used when the research focus is on the collective generation of meaning, while and the latter should be reserved for when the research focus is on the individual generation of meaning. Hall (1997) describes the constructionist approach as recognising the social character of language; therefore we construct meaning using representational systems. A social constructionist researcher does not seek the deep structure of reality but instead is interested in uncovering the structure of meanings as constructed by individuals

engaged in a social process (Hackley 1998). Moreover, social constructionists are epistemologically anti-essentialist; in other words they do not seek to discover psychological essences such as emotions or personality, adopting instead a questioning approach to realism (Harper 2006). Thus a social constructionist perspective does not look for an objective reality, but acknowledges that reality is socially constructed.

This view is in line with Peñaloza and Venkatesh's (2006) call to see marketer and consumer subject positions and market phenomena as social constructions in order to uncover the relationship between market beliefs and practice, Schau and Gilly's (2003) positioning of reality as a socially constructed phenomena, and the framing of brands as social texts (Hatch and Rubin 2006). Hackley (1998) argues that:

[...]the benefits of social constructionism in moving marketing researchers closer to a meaningful engagement with the social world of marketing meanings is clear. Rigorous and effective theory building in marketing must be founded on a reflexive understanding of how meaning is constructed in the social world in order to be meaningful in and to the social world of marketing (Hackley 1998, p. 130).

I adopted this perspective because it provides a useful basis for exploring (marketing related) meaning construction within an organisational framework. Within this perspective language is seen as a form of social action which is constitutive and not just descriptive, and it becomes a useful theoretical resource from which to analyse the ways in which a concept emerges historically and within different cultural contexts (Harper 2006).

3.4 Theoretical Perspective

According to Crotty (1998), the epistemological assumptions the researcher holds then inform the researcher's theoretical perspective, and this theoretical perspective provides the context for the methodological approach taken. Using a constructionist

epistemology means that there is a requirement to recognise the different meanings and therefore 'realities' people live within and among. The relativism and lack of objectivity of social constructionism maps, therefore, to an interpretivist theoretical perspective. An interpretivist approach "looks for culturally derived and historically situated interpretations of the social life-world" (Crotty 1998, p.23). I have adopted the assumption that using an interpretive approach furthers our understanding of complex and unpredictable organisational systems (Tsoukas and Hatch 2001), and is therefore useful within an internal branding context.

Furthermore, as an interpretivist researcher, I remain uninterested in realistic assumptions of measuring observable behaviour; instead, I assume that each interactional text is unique, shaped by the individual who created it (Haigh and Crowther 2005). Interpretivists hold to the assumption that researchers are no more 'detached' from their objects of study than are their informants; instead they exist within a context which is specific, historical and cultural, and therefore researchers are affected by what they are exposed to within their field of study (Miles and Huberman 1994). This view is corroborated by Lowe, Moore and Carr (2007) who argue that because the self is an abstraction that we bring forth into the world, a construction in other words, a person cannot differentiate him or herself from another living system and view it objectively.

Klein and Myers (1999) do not use the word 'interpretive' as a synonym for 'qualitative', since qualitative research may or may not be interpretive, depending on the underlying philosophical assumptions of the researcher. In their view research can be classified as interpretive "if it is assumed that our knowledge of reality is gained only through social constructions such as a language, consciousness, shared meanings, documents, tools, and other artifacts" (Klein and Myers 1999, p. 69). While their view, is not directed at a marketing context, I have considered, for the purpose of this

research, that their view is transferable into other disciplines and is therefore relevant to my own pursuits.

One of the controversies over the use of interpretive consumer research has been the issue of how knowledge gained from this kind of research can be evaluated (Szmigin and Foxall 2000). Certainly, findings from my research are not generalisable to a population but may be used to strengthen theory. In addition, a main characteristic of interpretivist research is that the reality of the respondent must be communicated through the researcher's construction of this reality, so while this approach is useful for studying phenomena from the point of view of the consumers involved, the question of whether what is reported is the reality of the consumers at the time is called into question. This issue is dealt with on a more practical level in the methods section through inclusion of multi-modal data generation, the co-creation of data, and researcher reflexivity.

Furthermore, in order to ensure trustworthiness of my research, I have adopted Klein and Myer's (1999) set of seven principles for conducting and evaluating interpretive field studies (refer to **Appendix A**). These principles were written in response to a call to explicitly discuss the criteria for judging qualitative, case and interpretive research in information systems. These principles provide a useful starting point for evaluating the methodology employed to explore the service brand. Despite the perceived risks or weaknesses associated with using an interpretive research framework, these principles provide clear guidance on how to strengthen this approach, and they provide a useful starting point for evaluating the methodology I employed to explore the service brand.

In addition, the benefits of potentially gaining useable insights into how consumers actually consume are notable. However, consumers' experiences "need to be understood in their terms rather than forcing them into some pre-existing structure of the researcher's making" (Szmigin and Foxall 2000, p. 191). It is therefore important

that I am receptive to the meanings and experiences of the service brand which come directly from the consumer. Linking this approach back to the context, an organisational one, I chose an interpretive framework to avoid standardising or objectify the material. Instead, I have sought to “reveal a rich understanding of how practices that are culturally influenced are constituted and perceived in the life-world of the individuals” (Soin and Scheytt, p. 63). Research within an interpretive framework becomes, therefore, a reflection of the participants’ lived experience as it is constructed by the researcher’s (my) own meaningful reality.

Within an interpretivist framing Crotty (1998) lists symbolic interactionism, phenomenology and hermeneutics as possible sub-categories which may be adopted. The main sub-category I have adopted is hermeneutics. The term ‘hermeneutics’ is of Greek origin, ‘*hermeneuiein*’, which means ‘to interpret, to understand’, and hermeneutics as a practice has had a long history within the context of biblical exegesis before travelling into many areas of scholarship:

Not only has hermeneutics been brought to bear on texts other than the Scriptures, but it has been brought to bear on unwritten sources also - human practices, human events, human situations - in an attempt to read these in ways that bring understanding. This outcome squares with the centrality of language in any concept of human being. We are essentially languaged beings. Language is pivotal to, and shapes, the situations in which we find ourselves enmeshed, the events that befall us, the practices we carry out and, in and through all this, the understandings we are able to reach (Crotty 1998, p. 87).

Thus a hermeneutic approach is well suited to any study of human experience as text, given that hermeneutics frames the whole of human life in terms of language. Within the research context, the rationale for using a hermeneutic stance is that narrative and other speech events are ultimately positioned as hermeneutic studies, whereby continual engagement with the discourse as it was delivered gains entrance to the

perspective of the speaker and the audience (Labov 1997). I have also adopted Braun-La Tour et al.'s (2007) view that a hermeneutic approach may uncover the social nature of the text. This framing is well aligned with the overall focus on the way employee narratives construct meaning in a social (organisational) setting.

The hermeneutics process is pictured by the hermeneutic circle as an iterative one, thereby representing a continual movement from part to whole then back to part and so on. Klein and Myers (1999) refer to the hermeneutic circle as the most fundamental principle of hermeneutics and see this principle as the foundation to all interpretive work of a hermeneutic nature, and "the circle metaphor suggests that we come to understand a complex whole by our preconceptions about the meanings of its parts and their interrelationships" (Klein and Myers 1999, p. 71). What is useful about Klein and Myer's (1999) discussion is that they explain what is meant by 'parts' and 'whole'. 'Parts' can be parts of an historical story, parts of a sentence, a sentence within a larger text, or the interpretive researcher's and participants' initial understandings in a study. The term 'whole' consists of the shared meanings that emerge from researcher/participant interactions. The process of discovering these shared meanings may involve various iterations of the hermeneutic circle: "During repeated cycles of the hermeneutic circle, all of the suggested principles can be applied iteratively, forming a complex web of interpretations" (Klein and Myers 1999, p. 73). Thus, within their framework hermeneutics becomes a foundational principle in interpretive research for all other principles.

3.5 Methodological Approach

Out of this constructionist/interpretivist lens, various compatible methodological approaches emerge, such as ethnography, phenomenological research, grounded theory and discourse analysis, for example, and by declaring a methodological stance the researcher is declaring his or her plan of action, and rationale for the methods that have been chosen to conduct the research (Crotty 1998).

3.5.1 Discourse Analysis

I have chosen discourse analysis as a methodology to guide the choice of methods. One rationale for choosing discourse analysis in this context is that by making language the locus of analysis to explore experience, the extremes of solipsism and positivism are avoided (Manning 1979). This moderate view maps onto a social constructionist/interpretivist/hermeneutic framework. Focusing on employee narratives is a way of creating this kind of locus.

Discourse analysis is an important but relatively neglected resource for research into processes of social and cultural change affecting contemporary organisations:

It has the capacity to put other sorts of social analysis into connection with the fine detail of particular instances of institutional practice in a way which is simultaneously oriented to textual detail, the production, distribution and interpretation/consumption of texts, and wider social and cultural contexts (Fairclough 1993, p. 158).

Discourse analysis has also been somewhat under-used in a main-stream marketing context (Hackley 2001), but a discourse perspective is employed in relation to various organisational contexts by Motion and Leitch 1996; Leitch and Motion 2007).

Advertising is particularly suited to discourse analytic exploration “since it is constructed through the linguistic negotiation of several parties” (Hackley 2001, p. 44).

Jardine (2005) also demonstrates that discourse analysis is able to provide an important contribution to the study of advertisements. These organisation and advertising-related comments support the use of discourse analysis to explore internal branding, which uses marketing communications to communicate to a variety of stakeholders within within an organisational context.

The term ‘discourse analysis’ is, according to Hepburn and Potter (2004), often used ambiguously, but for the purposes of my study, the following assumptions about

discourse analysis are employed. First, I assume that language is not a transparent, neutral vehicle for communication. Instead, as Easthope (1983) suggests,

Because of the graphematic, the ineluctable materiality of language, no text can ever be fully permeated by conscious intention - the text will always mean for its readers something other than it means for its author. In every text, written or spoken...there will always be some 'gap' between intention and reading (Easthope 1983, p. 15).

Therefore, "the discourse analytic object of study is discourse itself rather than some mechanism subsisting beneath the level of discourse" (Hackley 2001, p. 43). Second, I also adopt Fairclough's (1993) interest in discourse at the level of discursive practice as well as the order of discourse, the totality of discursive practice of an institution, and relationships between them. Thus language becomes a form of social practice. The rationale for including this assumption is that language, and more specifically the way people use language, is increasingly being viewed as an important phenomenon in social and organisational research. (Alvesson and Karreman 2000). Furthermore, discourse analysis may be used as a way to focus on how people use language as a way to construct versions of their worlds and what they might gain from these constructions (Jardine, 2005). Third, I also adopt Hopkinson's (2003) framing of discourse analysis. Hopkinson (2003) highlights the multiple and fragmented construction of one organisation in member-generated texts. She assumes that meaning is never complete, but instead meaning is continuously created through competing views. In summary, I have chosen a discourse analysis methodological approach because it allows language to be treated in a way which highlights its physicality (and lack of transparency) as an object, its use as social text, and its complexity as a vehicle for constructing worlds within worlds

The degree of linguistic analysis is an issue in any textual analysis. Hamston (2006) uses Bakhtin's (1981 cited in Hamston 2006) theorisation of language as

dialogue and uses a fine-grained linguistic analysis in response to Bakhtin's (1981) call for a profound understanding of language. According to Hamston (2006), Bakhtin's (1981) framing of dialogue in this way:

[A]cknowledged the mutuality of the individual and society; the language an individual speaks, the larger social discourses; and the ongoing dialogic process and discourse-change. Language as dialogue therefore encourages an ethical agency which foregrounds the linguistic basis of 'becoming' and of discursive change (Hamston 2006, pp. 57-58).

The decision to conduct a degree of linguistic analysis is really a decision about what Alvesson and Karremen (2000) term 'language sensitivity'. They write about the trap of on one hand focusing too narrowly on the details of language which can lead to linguistic reductionism and "a somewhat peripheral position seen as esoteric by organisational participants" and on the other hand just glossing over linguistic features and only focusing on aggregated patterns, thereby inadequately representing "the operations of discourse" (Alvesson and Karremen 2000, p. 1145). Their comments suggest that a balance between these two extremes is preferable. While my primary motive was not to focus on linguistic detail I was, in my analysis, sensitised to language features and patterns which emerged, and which, upon inclusion in the overall analysis, contributed to an understanding of the meaning of the texts. In addition, Hamston (2006) stresses the importance of having extraordinary conversations and creating an extended conversation with participants. I therefore employed the idea of having an extended, and evolving, conversation with participants, the design of which is detailed in the section dealing with methods employed.

3.5.2 Narrative Analysis

Narrative analysis is both a methodology and a set of methods.³ Narrative analysis is positioned in this section as a sub-set within the wider frame of discourse analysis. I have adopted Riessman's (1993) view that the researcher does not have direct access to another's experience, but can only know ambiguous representations of it. Ultimately, by abandoning any attempt to treat participants' accounts as 'true' pictures of 'reality', the researcher opens him or herself up to understanding the culturally rich methods through which interviewers and interviewees generate "plausible accounts of the world" (Silverman, 2000, p. 823). Therefore, I read the depictions and transcriptions of conversations as texts that can be unpacked, untangled but never truly deciphered. The assumption here is that my reading is just one reading. I hold to the perception that the birth of the reader begins with the death of the author (Barthes 2002). Thus, the true place of writing is reading; the reader is inscribed through the reading process just as the reader inscribes that which is read. In addition, these employee-generated brand portraits are framed as representations of reality, a construction I cannot test or control for, "but only allude to through the use of alternative and competing signs" (Christensen and Askegaard 2001, p.300). Thus I allow the texts to speak for themselves, thereby presenting a complex, paradoxical picture of the service brand as it is perceived from within an organisational setting.

Søderberg (2006) writes about narrative interviewing and narrative analysis in relation to organisational sense-making. Narrative analysis provides a specific naratological method "for uncovering elements of integration, differentiation and fragmentation discourses [...] in the interviews given and the company texts produced" (Søderberg 2006, p. 398). Denzin (2001) emphasises the active nature of narrative in identity construction, and Haigh and Crowther (2005) see narratives as inherently interdisciplinary and useful when the focus is not on trying to find an alternative to

³ Please refer to footnote 1 on p. 7 for an explanation of what I have adopted this approach.

realistic assumptions, but is instead focused on the ways people construct meaning about their experiences. In addition, Haigh and Crowther (2005) adopt the view that the narrative form is the main way individuals come to experience themselves. Thus, I decided to use a narrative approach since the emphasis of my research is on the creation of meaning through the narrative constructions of a service brand. According to Alvarez and Urla (2002) theorists argue that stories are performed to allow participants to bring order to what might otherwise be chaos, allow participants to perform stories that are consistent with their expectations and values, and provide an emic or insider's point of view of what is perceived as important to the narrator in a particular organisational context: "narratives are not simply replicas of the past or present organisation, but rather constituent of it" (Alvarez and Urla 2002, p. 41).

However, in the end the text must be allowed to tell its own story which can then be compared with the theoretical abstractions which have informed the study. Furthermore, according to Gummesson (2005), using a hermeneutic approach is a way to keep in touch with the realism of the context being explored:

If you start inductively with the raw real world data and move on the way up to becoming more general, you will have to dive down again to connect with the descriptive level. There is an ever-present risk that pre-defined categories may not be adequate because they are not properly grounded in the real world and thus are not a valid representation of the studied phenomena (Gummesson 2005, p. 319).

Gummesson (2005) points to the need for balance between the abstract and substantive levels in order to create in the end a better theoretical outcome. Within a marketing framework, Anderson's (2005) study about 'Coloplast', a B2B brand community, is situated between inductive and deductive. This placing allows theory to be part of the researcher's analytic framework, allowing the researcher to see how existing theory applies to a specific context, while still giving freedom to the data to tell its own story. My research is placed somewhere in between these two oppositional

points, between allowing the data to tell its story without any theoretical preconceptions, and exploring the existing theory around service branding and associated concepts within a specific industry context.

3.6 Methods Employed

According to Crotty's (1998) model, the methodological approach emerges as a set of methods which are employed to actuate the research, and these methods are informed by the researcher's epistemological and theoretical perspectives, and, more directly, by the methodological approach (or approaches) taken. I now discuss the method employed in the course of my research into the employee experience of a particular service brand. In this section, I discuss the context of the study, single embedded case study analysis, data generation, and data analysis.

3.6.1 Context

I selected a single embedded case analysis approach in order to provide a 'thick description' (Geertz 1973; Hudson and Ozane 1988), of one organisational context, a large Australasian service organisation. The company I selected is a company which is well known, employs several thousand employees across and has a strong brand culture. The selection process consisted of an initial scoping exercise of various Australasian-based service organisations (e.g. telecommunications, financial services, insurance providers and others). The final selection came down to having the ability to access participants (the chosen organisation was willing to provide researcher access to participants), the type of service offering (the chosen organisation's business model created opportunities for staff to interact with each other and with the end consumers as well as other stakeholders in a number of ways, i.e. face to face, telephone, internet, thereby creating a rich organisational environment within which to explore brand perceptions), and the strength of the brand culture (the chosen organisation has a very strong brand culture and depends on a high degree of employee 'buy-in' to deliver on

its brand promises). For the purpose of maintaining the anonymity of both the organisation involved and also participants interviewed, the company brand name and details relating to that company which might identify it have to be omitted from this thesis and any papers arising out of this research. It was upon this basis that the organisation allowed the participant interviews to take place. A detailed diary of how I approached the organisation and what happened in the initial stages of my contact with the managerial and administrative staff there is provided in **Appendix B**.

3.6.2 A Single Embedded Case Analysis

A rationale for using a case study approach is that it has been used extensively in a number of fields, so it has a rich tradition in both positivist as well as interpretive contexts. According to Walsham (1995), the ethnographic research tradition in anthropology is a valuable starting point for a consideration of the philosophical basis of interpretive case studies, since it has been widely drawn on by organisational researchers concerned with interpreting the patterns of symbolic action that create and maintain a sense of organisation. Within marketing, the case study method is used to explore branding issues; for example Whelan and Wohlfeil (2006) use a participatory case study method to explore customer-brand relationships in relation to a German university; and King and Grace (2005) used the case study method to explore the role of employees in the delivery of the brand promise. Denzin and Lincoln (2000) point to the case as providing the researcher with a complex historical and contextual entity. My aim is not to generalise so much as to uncover, explore and interpret. Therefore, the suggestion that a case study approach may be more useful and interesting than either factual findings or the high level generalisations of theory (Flyvbjerg 2004), is also used to support a case study approach when exploring the employee brand experience.

One rationale for using a case study approach is that it is an effective way of linking theory and real life experiences. The output from case study research may be

concepts, a conceptual framework, propositions or mid-range theory (Eisenhardt 1989). According to Gummesson (2007b), a rationale for using case analysis is that cases provide the researcher with examples which can relate theory to everyday experiences. He argues that the case study allows for:

[T]he study of complexity, context, ambiguity and chaos. It allows a holistic, systemic approach with an unlimited number of variables and links. It allows an inductive approach without considering extant theory, but can also be deductive or a combination of the two. It offers freedom in the choice of data generation and analytical techniques with little regulation. It is innovative, entrepreneurial and non-bureaucratic. It endorses the urgency of access to reality and has validity and relevance in focus (p. 230).

Therefore, case study research provides real world data and can be inductive (the case provides data for theory generation) or deductive (the case is used to try existing theory).

The single case study method is considered an effective methodology where the researcher wants to explore contextual conditions (King and Grace 2005; Yin 1994). King and Grace's (2005) justification for using a single case study is useful to consider: "the case study methodology allows the brand, which in its very nature is different from one organisation to the next, to be explored in-depth, and 'in the round'" (King and Grace 2005, p. 283), thereby providing detail that might otherwise be overlooked if another method was used.

I chose to conduct an embedded case analysis approach to provide a rich understanding of one organisational context. Embedded case analysis refers to a single case which has subunits (Eisenhardt 1989). An example of an embedded case analysis would be a large organisation whose employees are able to be grouped together into subunits based on their functions within the organisation. Furthermore, the embedded case method was selected because the research question lends itself to a 'thick description' (Geertz 1973), of human phenomena within a community

(organisational) setting. A 'thick description' in this context implies the researcher is going to provide an emic perspective, which in turn requires description of the participants', or social actors', interpretations of their worlds as well as other social and cultural information (Davis 1995). This type of research question lends itself, therefore, to a rich, narrative exploration of human phenomena, within a community (or organisational) setting. Overall, the case analysis approach allows the researcher, to interact in a prolonged, immersed way with the context and its participants, and is therefore in keeping with an interactionist framing of the researcher's role. I have included Gummesson's (2007b) checklist (refer to **Appendix C**) to provide a framework for ensuring the quality assurance of case study research. I used this checklist to guide how I have presented the methods and findings aspects of this thesis.

3.6.3 Data Generation

Evidence for case studies may come from six sources: documents, archival records, interviews, direct observation, participant observation, and physical artifacts (Yin 1994). However with respect to interpretive case studies it can be argued that interviews are the primary data source since it is through this method that "the researcher can best access the interpretations that participants have regarding the actions and events which have or are taking place, and the views and aspirations of themselves and other participants" (Walsham 1995, p. 77). Furthermore, Potter and Hepburn (2005) establish the important place of interviews in qualitative research in the disciplines of psychology and sociology, and Alvarez and Urla (2002) assert that interviews are critical events for the creation of narratives. In turn, case studies often consist of a substantial element of narrative (Flyvbjerg 2004). Thus I chose to use interview data as the primary data source.

The interview genre is in part at least a conversational exchange (Fairclough 1993). Using Fairclough's conversational framing of the interview, text generated from focus group and individual interviews is framed as a long, building conversation which

is added to at each interpretation and reading. This type of framing allows the researcher to explore the text in a rich and multi-layered way, with consideration of the text as narrative, but keeping in mind the linguistic and intertextual issues that make up textual analysis. My aim was to create a 'service brand discourse'.

In keeping with the view that the researcher becomes a participant in the research process, I adopted Schwandt's (1997) view of the interview as a form of discourse, the meaning of which is jointly constructed by the interviewer and participant. Traditional interviewing attempts to keep the researcher/interviewer neutral and objective, and interview types are typically framed as a level of interviewer control over the respondents (e.g. Nunan, 1986). More recently, a new perspective of interviewing is that it is a form of negotiated text (Fontana and Frey, 2000). I have selected this new way of framing the interview process, thereby reflecting the way my methodological approach is sensitised to the relationship between researcher and participant. This approach is in keeping with Denzin and Lincoln's (2000) call for a subversion of methodological individualism.

Participant Selection

Participant selection within the case analysis method was conducted through purposive sampling. The former "consists of detecting cases within extreme situations as for certain characteristics or case [...] in order to maximize variation" (Gobo 2004, p. 418). Thus, purposive sampling allows me, with the help of administrative and managerial staff, to select specific groups of people within the organisation with the view of representing a number of different groups and views within the population. My aim was to interview employees across the organisation, but restricted to a particular region, for pragmatic reasons, who were representative of the various business units that existed within the organisation. As well as business unit representation, other variables that were considered when a short list was drawn up included length of tenure, gender and ethnic background. Initial communication with potential participants

was conducted by company personnel rather than by myself as the researcher. This approach was taken to ensure a higher degree of participation than what may have resulted if I had requested participation. At the same time each employee was given the option of not taking part; thus the selection process was not coercive from a company perspective. For ethical reasons it was important that employees felt free to take part or not take part in the study. Please refer to **Appendix D-I** for copies of company and participant information and consent letters which were provided prior to the initiation of interviews.

Focus Groups or Individual Interviews

The focus group method is defined by Cavana et al. (2001) as an information collection method which uses group interaction around a topic provided by the researcher. Interaction between group members provides insight into the similarities and differences between group members, and will also shed light on the culture of the organisation as it is presented through group narratives. On the other hand, Stokes and Bergen (2006) argue for the case of individual interviews:

Individual depth interviews would appear to be more appropriate for research situations where there is a specific, well-defined issue to investigate which calls for a detailed understanding of consumer perspectives, whereas focus groups are perhaps more applicable to wide-ranging exploratory research. Individual depth interviews demonstrated a superior ability to get at the important underlying issues that can shape effective marketing strategy. As many marketing-related research designs require this level of inquiry, this study, therefore, concludes that the individual depth interview method merits serious consideration as a potentially superior alternative technique to the more popular focus groups (Stokes and Bergen 2006, p. 35).

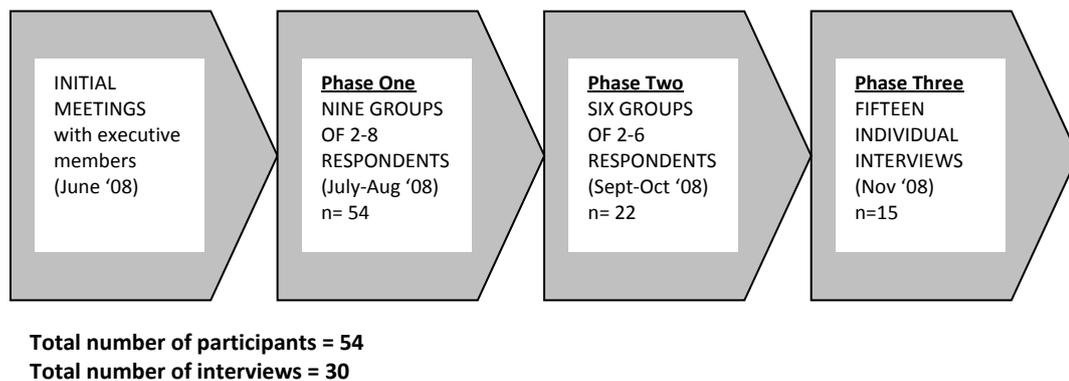
However, they also concede that focus groups have various advantages such as the creation of synergy, snowballing (chain of ideas), stimulation (the group process

creates responses), security (participants may be more likely to speak in a group), spontaneity, specialisation, structure, speed and scrutiny (Stokes and Bergen 2006, p. 27). Also, groups highlight differences between consumers (and I would add, similarities). Given both focus groups and individual interviews can offer the researcher with advantages which should not be ignored, I decided to employ both methods (focus groups and individual interviews) in three phases. This approach creates a phenomenological effect not unlike that deployed by Fournier (1998) who explored the consumer-brand relationship through lengthy, multi-phased, individual interviews.

The Interview Process

Interviews were conducted over the course of five months (July-November, 2008), and the interview process was divided into three phases (**Figure 3.1**).

Figure 3.1: Three Phase Interview Process



The data generation process was designed in this way in order to: (1) explore the employee-brand relationship in depth (beyond just a single one hour group interview); (2) build trust and a sense of knowing with participants who took part in each phase; and (3) increase the trustworthiness of the findings by employing both group and

individual interviews. For Phases One and Two, interviews were held on site at some of the various business centers that made up the organisation's physical structure. This strategy ensured that the interview process was as convenient as possible for participants. Then for Phase Three I invited participants to step out of their familiar environment and interviewed them at the University of Auckland, Business School. The rationale behind changing the location was to provide an opportunity for participants to reflect on themselves, the organisation and the brand from a different physical, and therefore potentially a different psychological, perspective. Interviews in each of the three phases were audio-taped and transcribed. Sørderberg (2006) similarly used a large body of narrative interviews, as I have, and also had 54 participants. I actually recruited 55 participants but one participant asked to be withdrawn from the first stage of the focus group interviews. In addition, two participants who attended the first phase of focus group interviews did not attend the second stage, but agreed to take part in Phase Three. A record of participant attendance across all three phases is provided in **Appendix J**.

Phase One

For the purpose of conducting the first phase of interviews, groups were organised around similarity of roles. Thus, focus groups were classified as frontline, support, or mixed (i.e. both frontline and support). Groups were classified as such based on the dominant category (e.g. one focus group consisted predominantly of frontline staff, with only participant having a mixed role, so in that case the group was classified as frontline). Roles were distinguished in this way to explore possible role-based differences whereby role was defined in terms of proximity to the frontline. Specific details of each group are (with participants' names omitted) provided in **Appendix K**. Much of what the Phase One interviews consisted of was exploratory detail. The aim was to get to know the participants, and also to create a conversation around topics

from which narratives pertaining to branding could emerge. After this initial phase, participants who wished to carry on were later contacted for a subsequent focus group.

Phase Two

Groups were made up of employees who had different kinds of roles; i.e. the original groups were mixed up in order to further explore some of the issues that were raised in Phase One. There was an overlap between the material covered in Phase One and Phase Two in order to maintain a reflexive approach before extending the conversation further. After this second phase of group interviews, participants who wished to carry on were later contacted for a subsequent individual interview.

Phase Three

In this third phase I explored, in a deeper way, but without the group dynamic, the issues that had emerged in these first two phases. Participants were asked to reflect on aspects of the focus groups, provide an illustration that best represented how they saw themselves, the brand and the organisation, and then speak about the illustration in more detail.

Broadly Scoped Questions

The interviews, at all three stages, were semi-structured, meaning that I took to each interview a list of talking points, but I did not insist on maintaining a preordained script; instead, when necessary, I created opportunities for the participants to co-create the direction interviews took. By keeping questions “broadly scoped” they become “starting points for research and are themselves subject within the research process to transmogrification and redefinition”, thereby guarding against “the conceptual predispositions of the researcher” (Alexander 2009, p.556). I found that I needed to guide the conversational flow of the focus groups (and the first more than the second in some cases) more than I had to guide the flow of the individual interview. This trend could have been the result of the individual interviews being more intimate and participants feeling they had more freedom away from the group. It could have also

been an effect of having multiple phases. Also, the larger focus groups required more group management in order to allow turn taking and to encourage less forthcoming speakers. Interview protocols for all three phases are provided in **Appendix L**. Out of courtesy to the interviewees, the duration of the semi-structured interviews was kept to 60 minutes in most cases, although some interviews lasted as long as 90 minutes where circumstances and conditions allowed. Likewise, the formality or informality of data gathering meetings altered over time. By the very nature of qualitative research and as a result of the increased contact and rapport with interviewees or research informants, formal interviews began to merge into less formal meetings or even conversations as the research progressed (Alexander 2009).

A Multi-Modal Approach

In the first four interviews of Phase One I also asked participants to perform sentence completion exercises. My rationale for including a written output was based upon various other studies. For example, Freling and Forbes (2005) in their examination of brand personality through methodological triangulation, used sentence completion exercises as one of their data collection methods. In addition Salzer (1998) used story writing to expose recurrent themes/dominant cultural narratives in the stories participants composed about people living in a public housing project. Salzer's aim was to explore interactions between society, community, and person. It is asserted here that using focus groups as well as individual interviews, and written as well as verbal outputs, along with secondary textual sources, will increase the trustworthiness of the data that is collected. A similar approach was used by Anderson (2005) who employed a semi-structured set of interview protocols to generate data, plus an unstructured interview guide for personal interviews followed by telephone interviews and additional data collection (including other texts).

However, I did not continue asking participants for written outputs because I found that in most cases they did not add anything new or insightful to what was spoken, but

instead the sentence completion exercises simply extended the interview process, which was problematic for some of the participants who were particularly busy.

In Phase Three I continued to employ a multi-modal approach to data generation by including in the interview phase a drawing exercise. My rationale for including a drawing component is based upon the use of multi-modality elsewhere. First, from a marketing perspective, according to Belk (1998):

Human behaviour is inherently multimodal and human experience is inherently multisensory [...]. Instead of relying on numbers, Saint Exupery's narrator fills his charming and insightful fable with drawings. These drawings are of the Little Prince, the sheep he desires to have, and the people and sights he encounters in visiting seven other asteroids (p. 308-309).

Belk (1998) is referring to the work of another (Saint Exupery's narrator) who combines drawings and text. He then also applies this example to our job as qualitative researchers, arguing that in the quest to present a rich, thick description of the contexts we study "Multisensory information can potentially help us to achieve these ends better" (Belk 1998 p. 310).

Another example of a multi-modal approach is work by Tian and Belk (2005). They detailed the extended self and possessions in the workplace through the employment of photo-elicitation and interviews to explore the boundary between the self at home and self at work. Along a similar vein, CEO portraits are presented as sites for the visual construction of corporate identity by Guthey and Jackson (2005). Moreover, the treatment of visual representations as texts has a rich tradition within advertising research; namely, Scott's (1994) casting of advertising images as visual rhetoric; McQuarrie and Mick's (1999) examination of stylistic elements in advertising; and Schroeder's (2005) assertion that branding is a powerful representational system that produces knowledge through discursive practice.

In addition, the use of drawing has a rich tradition within the social sciences. For example Kearney and Hyle (2004) outline the use of participant produced drawings within an educational context. They conclude that participant-produced drawings provide a pathway toward feelings and emotions, lead to a more focused representation of the participants' experiences, invite additional verbal interpretation, encourage participation, and may help to ameliorate against researcher bias by providing a richer picture of a participant's experience.

Thus, I invited participants to draw the self, the organisation and the brand. I gave them the freedom to draw these three elements in whatever way they wanted in the hope that these drawings would either confirm or enrich participant perceptions. In some cases participants also included other actors (e.g. other employees, customers) in their illustrations. My approach was aimed at exploring the view that the narrated brand provides marketing theorists and management with a complex, rich, competing and ultimately constituting polyphonic view of the brand which resists easy categorisation or systems of control.

3.6.4 Narrative Analysis

I turn now to narrative analysis, the method. Narrative analysis can help us to understand the interpretive processes involved in the interview context insofar as story is an embedded and fragmented process in which gaps are filled in by the teller and audience (Alvarez and Urla 2002, p. 40). Through narrative analysis, therefore, we hear voices that can be recorded and interpreted. I chose to transcribe most of the interviews myself. In the event where some interviews were transcribed by others (i.e. some of the focus group interviews) I found the results disappointing and ended up re-transcribing the interviews in question. My strategy was to transcribe one phase of interviews before conducting the second phase or third in order to employ the principle of hermeneutics. I used each phase of interviews as input into designing the structure of the subsequent interview. I also reminded participants, generally, of what the main

topics of discussion in the previous phase were. Lastly, for the focus groups, I asked two students to listen to the interviews and simultaneously read my transcriptions to check words that were difficult to hear, thereby increasing the trustworthiness of my representation of each interview event.

In my analysis of the texts, I conducted multiple readings, using nVivo, Mind Manager and Excel as analytical tools as well as conducting manual readings which were unaided by technology. I reason that it is important to look at the texts from various perspectives in order to tease out the themes and narrative threads, which constitute the socially constructed narratives, both as parts and also as wholes. In my analysis I focused in this thesis on those narratives which survived across all three phases. I am mindful of the incompleteness of my interpretation of the participants' narratives but am also conscious of the view that:

[N]arrative is the mode of thought that best captures the experiential aspects of human intention, action, and consequences, and the narrative process is so pervasive that people spontaneously create stories [...] as story builders, people do not record the world but rather create it, mixing in cultural and individual expectations (Escalas 2004, p. 171).

I am also aware of the creative role I played as reader of the narratives I had co-created with the participants. What the reader of this thesis is ultimately presented with is, therefore, various narratives which may be further interpreted and read.

3.6.5 Ensuring the Trustworthiness of the Findings

In line with the idea that this researcher's reading of consumer stories of a brand is potentially just one reading (interpretation), I therefore employed a co-creational method to code and analyse texts. Thus participants were asked, in the same way Schau and Gilly (2003) invited participants to co-create their texts and analyses, to reflect on their own narratives, both as groups and individuals, and on the researcher's readings of their narratives (called 'member checks' by Lincoln and Guba, 1985). This

method also represents my adoption of Gummesson's (2007a) interactive research methodology. Lee and Broderick (2007) describe Gummesson's (2007a) approach as focusing on the interaction between the researcher and all aspects of the research (i.e. subject, data and audience), and they report that for him, interaction is a unifying concept and includes case study research (recognising complexity, context and ambiguity), and narrative research (making reality come alive), among other methods. This approach reflects the role of the qualitative researcher, which is to facilitate the co-creation of the researcher event, data and findings, and to take up a location and be part of the context, rather than remaining aloof from it.

As has been detailed in the previous section (refer to section 3.6.4: Narrative Analysis), I used a constant comparison method (Spiggle, 1994) in line with an interactive/hermeneutic theoretical perspective. In addition, I asked participants to reflect on previous interviews, and in the final interview stage I elicited conversations by reading comments from previous interviews. Also, I maintained a file of research notes and reflections to provide an audit trail and ultimately my own story. I also employed a reflective writing style in my first attempts to 'write up' my findings. To ensure the credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability of my findings I employed a number of analytical tools to 'read' the data, as stated in the previous section, invited feedback from participants, asked a fellow doctoral student to ('blind') code some of the focus group interviews, and regularly submitted my findings along with the raw data to my supervisor for further checking and discussion. In addition, in the next chapter (Chapter Four: Findings), I have allowed the participants' words to 'speak for themselves' in order to evidence of my reading of their visual and verbal texts.

Overall, I have studied one site but from many perspectives (participant perspectives) and my aim as a researcher has been to report these perspectives in as trustworthy a fashion as possible. As a consequence, different readings struggle with each other on the site of the text, which supports the view that when considering 'truth'

everything is contested and knowledge is contingent. Everything is mediated either by what the participants choose to tell and I am mediating from my perspective. Thus I provide an approximate view of the 'realities' of others.

3.6.6 Verification of Research

Over the course of this research I have systematically exposed my ideas to marketing and management academics in both Australasia and Europe (refer to **Appendix M** for a list of events and publications). This process has been an invaluable way of receiving vital feedback at each stage of the research and provides external verification of my work.

3.6.7 Transcript Sanitisation

In order to maintain the anonymity of the participants and also the service organisation at the heart of this study, transcripts were edited for any mention of names, personal or work-related details that may identify participants and details of specific business activities that may identify the specific industry or location. It is my view that divorcing the context from the material details of the company does not affect the integrity of the investigation. The study is designed to be the rich study of one context. However, the findings are not context dependent and therefore, the findings may provide insight into other large service organisation contexts. A complete set of edited transcripts is provided in **Appendix N**.

3.7 Summary

This discussion outlines a qualitative study, the purpose of which was to explore the ways employee narratives construct the brand. The context for this study, an Australasian service organisation, provides the basis for an embedded case study approach. My world view in this thesis is that of a social constructionist. Within this epistemological framing I have employed an interpretive and hermeneutic theoretical perspective, which, in turn, I have translated into a discourse analysis methodological

approach which utilises narrative analysis as both a methodology and a method. The use of a three phase interview design which employs both focus and individual interviews provides a reflexive interview process. In addition, my use of a multi-modal approach to data collection combined with the analysis of both verbal and visual narratives is designed to unveil the rich, competing views of participants' brand experiences.

Chapter Four: Findings

4.1 Overview

This research grew out of a call to investigate new frontiers within marketing to and discover the way marketing is being re-visioned, re-defined and extended across traditional discipline boundary lines. In particular, the aim of this research was to explore the brand experience within a newly contested theoretical landscape, from an internal (employee) perspective, and using a narrative approach. I also adopted the perspective that the brand is a socially constructed, textual phenomenon, which is co-created or 'read'. This reading is framed, therefore, as the brand-experience. This research increases our understanding of the brand from the point of view of the employee. What emerges from the data are the storied, lived experiences of the participants who took part in this research. As an interpretive researcher, the reading I will present to you in this chapter is one possible reading of the data, and should be considered as such. However, this reading is trustworthy in that it was subject to transcript accuracy checks, 'member checks' and confirmatory coding. This chapter is divided into two main parts. The first part presents the focus group findings. The second part presents the individual interview findings.

4.2 Focus Groups

In this reading of the focus group findings, there are three main actors and then a cast of 'others'. The main three are the 'self', the 'organisation' and the 'brand'. The cast of 'others' consists of other employees, external stakeholders (e.g. customers, clients, community), other organisations and other brands. For the purpose of my analysis I have treated management as enactors of the organisation, and therefore narratives about management are included under narratives about organisation. My aim in writing this chapter is to provide evidence for a mutable, poly-vocal, contested

world from which brand narratives may emerge. I reveal the ‘organisation’, ‘self’, ‘brand’ and ‘other actors’ as “mutual imbrications” (Harding 2007) of each other rather than distinct, self-contained entities. The various ways these actors are narrated into relationships with each other formed an initial basis for coding the data. Refer to **Table 4.1** for a summary of this coding system.

For the purpose of maintaining the anonymity of the organisation at the centre of this study, the company’s actual brand name has been replaced with the letters ‘BN’ (‘brand name’) and any mention of BN’s general manager is replaced with ‘GM’. In addition, references to the type of service the organisation provides and other identifying details have also been edited out of the transcripts and I have obscured the gender of each of the participants by using ‘her/his’ or ‘s/he’ when necessary.

Table 4.1: Codes

CODE	EXPLANATION
S-Oth	Self and Other
O-Oth	Organisation and Other
B-Oth	Brand and Other
O-S	Organisation and Self
B-S	Brand and Self
B-O	Brand and Organisation
O-S-Oth	Organisation, Self and Other
B-S-Oth	Brand, Self and Other
B-O-Oth	Brand, Organisation and Other
B-S-O	Brand, Self and Organisation
B-S-O-Oth	Brand, Self, Organisation and Other

4.2.1 Self and Other

I first explore the **self** as it is represented in conjunction with **internal actors** (other employees). When considering the self in this way, three narrative threads become apparent. First, working as an individual and the expectation of being part of the larger organisation is held in tension: e.g. “[...] *that’s a sort of paradox isn’t it, on one hand you work quite individually but on the other hand you are in teams*” (1-9, ll.458-459). Another narrative thread which emerges is the dissemination of either certain personal qualities or knowledge from staff member to staff member. For example, the process of sharing certain qualities is characterised as something rubbing off, one to another: “[...] *showing ourselves, showing that we are and showing that to other staff members, I think that rubs off*” (2-4, ll.71-72). Furthermore, the passing from one version of the self to another and then passing acquired knowledge back down to others, thereby suggesting a hierarchy, is reflected in the following excerpt:

[...] starting with who you were to where you are now [...] so to be engaged you have to learn all the steps on the way up to get there. So when you get there you can actually start funnelling you [knowledge?] back down” (2-1, ll.608-613).

The first excerpt suggests the self needs to be revealed, that it exists: “*showing that we are*”. The second excerpt suggests that the self is transformed: “*who you were then [...] where you are now*”. Lastly, the perception that the self is part of a special group of people is reflected in the following statement: “[...] *we’ve attracted better quality people because of who we are*” (2-6, l.944). An ambiguous use of past and present tense is apparent here, as is the use of circular reasoning; both features suggest the existence of a self-perpetuating system.

As well as considering the self in relation to other internal actors, I also found representations of the **self** in relation to **internal** and **external actors**. First, a few

participants (mainly front line staff) viewed themselves as external customers of other organisations: e.g. “[...] when you go out into the outside world we expect the same level of service [that customers receive at BN]” (1-3, ll.200-201); or set a service standard for themselves based on how they expected to be treated as customers: “I tend to treat my clients the way I would expect to be treated myself if I were a client” (2-2, ll.98-99). In addition, some participants expressed their position from an external perspective as well as an internal perspective: e.g. “Well I’m a customer [...] as well [...] I have a bit more inside knowledge, but I’m still a customer” (1-7, ll.1071-1072).

Furthermore, the perception of the inside and outside being linked emerges. A number of participants commented on the connection between the internal employees’ experience and the external customers’ experience: e.g.

But dealing with external customers sometimes could be very difficult, especially if you can’t meet what they demanded or what they want but if you could help them in some way and you feel that’s fulfilling because at the end of the day if the customers are happy then we’re happy” (1-3, ll.82-85).

One participant noted that different roles meant different perceptions: “[...] that’s one thing about being removed from the front end, is that, as an example, we get given a motto that was supposed to be put at the bottom of our emails which is completely meaningless to us” (1-9, ll.234-236). I also found evidence that belief and alignment were linked: “It’s hard to sell something (Another participant: That you don’t believe in) [...] [that] you’re not aligned with, yeah it’s hard to sell that” (2-6, ll.131-135); of a perceived gap in alignment: “I personally don’t like the pressure of sales so the job that I’ve got, I’m happy supporting those who have got that pressure” (2-3, ll.998-999); and the expectation that customers should also be aligned: “[...] we live and die by having customers and not all of them are easy to deal with [...]. The customer is still the customer, but not to the extent that we would have rude and arrogant customers on our

books" (1-5, ll.542-552). Lastly, the perception that employees are on display when outside is suggested in the following text unit: "*we do watch what we do*" (2-5, l.511).

When the **self** is considered along with **internal actors** and **other organisations**, the narrative of alignment again emerges:

"[...] if you don't agree with at least the principles of what's happening you couldn't work for them in the long run you know, it would go against your own personal beliefs. Say we had a mission of let's rip off the customers as much as possible, most of us probably couldn't believe in that [agreement]. An organisation that was like that would be hard to deal with" (2-5, ll.117-121).

Instead of referring to the organisation, the narrator refers to a hypothetical organisation.

When considering the self and other actors, the following narratives emerge: the self as an extension or mirroring of the external customer's experience, working in teams versus working as an individual, interactions between internal actor (which suggest the sharing of values and the existence of a hierarchy), being special, internal-external flow, alignment, and being on display.

4.2.2 Organisation and Other

When considering the **organisation** in relation to **internal actors**, a common narrative which emerges is that of knowing or knowledge. This narrative can be further broken down into several narrative threads. First, some participants perceived familiarity, or knowing between organisational actors as leading to trust, while some thought it led to better communication. Furthermore, knowing and feeling part of the organisation were also linked. Perceiving that the organisation is special was also linked to knowing; i.e. being known: "*[Compared to this organisation] the other [organisations] [...] seem to be a bit bigger and they are quite distant in their relationships*" (1-5, ll.309-311). Knowing was also expressed as a decision to either

rely upon organisational systems and protocols or go to individuals who had knowledge: *“No longer are we the font of all knowledge [...]; I think that’s the important thing. I think we need to be aware that we’re very much focused [on certain areas], but call upon assistance when we need it”* (1-3, ll.365-367). This excerpt points to a gap in the organisational systems which are potentially being subverted by individual knowing and familiarity. Furthermore, knowing was expressed as a product of recruitment policies which attempt to create a self-perpetuating, consistent environment: *“[...] if there is a promotion going on it is nine times out of ten that it is filled by somebody who is internal, so it is not like you are always getting new people in outside of the [organisation]”* (1-5, ll.478-480). However, this self-perpetuating system creates difficulties for new people who are recruited in from ‘outside’: *“It’s also really hard for the new people to kind of break into the circle and for them to be accepted or seen as helpful, whatever, because it’s all about experience and history”* (1-7, ll.201-203). These narrative threads also hint, therefore, at a lack of knowledge, or knowledge gaps between individual employees. As well as existing between individual employees, knowledge gaps may also occur between departments, which can lead to communication breakdown between departments, and dislocation: *“Everyone’s got a perception of what happens [in the organisation between departments] but unless you’ve been in that environment and seen it, you have no clue”* (1-7, ll.473-474). In one particular focus group, geographical separateness, a lack of face to face contact and no organisation-wide social events were provided as reasons for interdepartmental breakdown

As well as knowing, the concept of hierarchy was also evident when considering the organisation in conjunction with other internal actors. The organisation was largely characterised as having a small feeling while still being a large organisation, of being open: *“[...] this still feels like a small organisation even though it is not”* (1-5, ll.401-402). It is also clear that for many participants a hierarchy existed: *“They are always*

trying to aim to get people up the ladder step by step" (1-5, ll.480-481). Other comments emphasised the flat structure of the organisation, however: "[...] *everyone's on a level playing*" (1-8, ll.631-632). Linked to this view of the organisation is the perception expressed by a significant number of participants that the organisation has a close, friendly culture: e.g. "[...] *there's a real family atmosphere*" (1-5, l.1393). However, at least one participant did not agree with the view that the organisation's culture was like a family: "*And there is a blame culture here. (Interviewer: What do you mean by that?) It's not good to speak out*" (1-9, ll.732-736). The predominant voice, however, was that both the organisational hierarchy and culture were attractive due to a perceived openness and sense of belonging and this culture lead to a high number of staff staying beyond the expected average number of years. It also lead to staff returning.

There was also a perception that the organisation's 'special', family-like culture created an attractive environment for some to come back to or stay within: "[...] *people who work for the [BN] is the company try to you know look after their staff and get to know their staff*" (1-6, ll.550-551). However, not knowing what was outside was also deemed a weakness by at least one participant: "[...] *that's a great strength and a great weakness for the organisation. Some people have been here thirty years and they're walking around, do they know what's going on outside?*" (1-7, ll.618-620). Thus the narrative threads of hierarchy and knowing are intertwined.

Another narrative which emerges when considering the organisation in conjunction with other internal actors is that of shared values. First, there were two extremes which are evidenced in the text units; namely that everyone in the organisation experiences the same values: "*I believe as a whole they are values that everybody holds*" (1-8, l.528); or that there are no shared values: "*I don't know that there's a common value, I think that's probably, a problem*" (1-9, l.185). In relation to the perception of whether or not shared values existed, there was also discussion about how shared values had

come to be shared. Common views were that values are shared through recruitment, organisational processes, communication, and the hierarchy: e.g. “[...] so it’s making sure that there’s not a difference between management and staff” (1-3, ll.418-419). One participant explained that values are also shared from department to department as people cross-fertilise their values. This concept of cross-fertilisation links back to the idea that something rubs off from one person to the next (refer to section 1.2). In addition, values are also instilled into staff: “[...] they kind of become your second nature” (1-6, ll.387-388). Another view was that values are inherent in people as well as part of the organisational systems. Values are also shared through informal as well as formal methods. In addition, values are shared through the organisation’s historical presence, and by being part of the organisational standards and core values.

Connected to the perception that there are certain shared values within the organisation is the concept of alignment, which again surfaces in discussion about the organisation. Alignment was expressed as employees recognising something of their selves in the organisation: “[...] people want to go to work for companies that they recognise some of their personality in that company culture” (1-6, ll.453-54). The importance of alignment was also discussed:

It’s like a well-oiled machine and you’ve got to get all the cogs moving and if you don’t it’s just it just doesn’t work, it doesn’t work as well as it should, and you have to have it all up and running” (2-1, ll.539-542).

Some participants asserted that alignment occurred through recruitment, i.e. recruiting to fit the culture: “[...] management will recruit people that fit the model so you have a self perpetuating model inside the organisation [...] so you’ve got a sort of a financial and a management pressure to conform to this model as well” (1-7, ll.591-595). As well as recruitment, the suggestion that the alignment process is a two way process was made. There was also discussion about what happened if people were not

aligned: e.g. *“I don’t think somebody would stay with the organisation if they didn’t trust it or like working here”* (1-7, ll.611-612).

There was also discussion about the differences that existed between departments; thus not only were there potential alignment issues between people and the organisation but also there were perceived culture and therefore alignment differences between departments. Ironically, departments were deemed to have their own visions and values (despite the shared value system). Moreover, sometimes these differences between departments revealed inconsistencies between departments: *“[...] if you go into a branch people laugh, and, and laugh, have a good time, you go into our area on the [...] floor and you’ll hear a pin drop”* (1-8, ll.813-814). The tension to fit into a mono-culture where one size fits all was expressed by some participants: *“I can understand that you want to come up with a mission statement that encapsulates the whole [organisation], but unfortunately, everybody at the [organisation] is not the same”* (1-9, ll.507-510). Yet there was also the view that the values shared by employees were shared across the whole organisation regardless of role: *“I think that the values remain the same throughout the organisation”* (2-1, l.217). Another view was that the organisation allows for some diversity.

Also there was a sense for some participants that profit driven aspects of the organisational culture did not fit with the overall vision they perceived the organisation had, and through which they saw their own role and personal values reflected: e.g.

[...] if a person is under pressure to achieve a target, if they don’t achieve a target they’re going to be managed to achieve that or managed out [...]they keep saying oh no, no we’re not here to be, we don’t want to you know, integrity is number one, but at the end of the day [...] (2-4, ll.380-387).

This view also reflects a lack of alignment between the organisation and its employees.

Lastly, engagement is another narrative thread which emerges:

[Being] aligned with your values [...] is a big factor in being an engaged employee, buying into the process of what you do, the way you do things [...] being part of a team, is a real key factor, being proud to work for [BN] (2-1, ll.592-595).

Many of those participants who commented on engagement linked it with being aligned, teamwork and pride, and also having a common goal and being more than just what a job description suggests.

When the **organisation** is explored in relation to not only **internal actors** but also **management** (read here as the enactors of organisational processes and policies), the reader gains insight into the role of management in relation to organisation structure and also how values are shared.

First, the sharing of values was considered by a number of participants across a number of groups as being a top-down process: e.g. *"[...] it has to come from the top down because you can't instill values in people if you are not demonstrating them. So there has to be demonstrated different ways all the way up from the top"* (1-4, ll.382-384). More specifically some participants perceived values as being shared through the GM (either past or present). There was some discussion that the culture may change with someone coming in from outside to lead the organisation: *"those top jobs are now, whereas we all worked our way up, people have come in from all over the place, so they don't know the staff within"* (2-4, ll.695-697). This excerpt extends the view that knowing is important. Also extended in this section is the narrative that the organisation is structured in an open way, a flat hierarchy.

When considering the role of management, and in particular the GM, it becomes clear that they help to enact this type of organisational structure by trusting employees and treating them as equals: *"[...] whether you're the [role] at the branch or whether you're the chief manager or whatever, I think [the GM] manages to make, at a level, everyone part of the organisation"* (2-6, ll.1005-1008). Furthermore, values are also shared through managerial processes: *"[...] by having value cards and giving welcome*

induction courses that talk about the [organisation's] values, by having it flow through with breakthrough service training courses by having other training courses" (1-7, ll.376-378). The role of management in the establishment of organisational culture is also apparent: *"[...] the manager still has quite a lot of say in the direction of the [organisation], how friendly they are or not"* (1-9, ll.851-853). Management also become agents in the blurring of work and private or home life: *"[At a staff member's funeral] the [manager] spoke and all the qualities you know that you're talking about was what he expressed about [the staff member] and you could see this was sort of [a BN] thing"* (2-3, ll.350-355). Thus management actions may blur the perception of inside-outside the organisation.

When considering the organisation in relation to not only internal actors but also management, the reader gains insight into the role of management in enacting the organisational culture and hierarchy.

When considering the **organisation in relation to both internal and external actors** a new raft of narrative threads emerges. First, the tension between sales and service become apparent. One view of sales was that it is secondary to service. Another view was that while the organisation viewed targets as important, relationships with clients were viewed by some participants as being more important: *"[...] they [...] focus sometimes too much on a lot of things that are obviously for the business and to drive the market and everything [rather than client relationships]"* (2-2, ll.280-287). Other views included the perception that sales are somehow synonymous with service: *"[...] everyone [is] talking about sales, sales, sales, but the end of the sales is providing good customer service"* (1-3, ll.313-314); that good customer service will inevitably lead to sales; and that the organisation is not just sales oriented: *"[...] the people are real people, not like they only want your money or sell you something but they genuinely care about you"* (1-4, ll.577-578). The implication of this excerpt is that BN is genuine, rather than fake, caring rather than solely profit-oriented.

Another narrative which emerges in this section is that of the internal-eternal interface. This interface is expressed in terms of knowing: *"It's just about, when they ring up, they're not going through a story of who they are; it's about ringing up somebody who knows them"* (1-5, ll.1266-1267). It is also expressed in terms of the link between loyalty and satisfaction and the link between staff happiness and effective service delivery: *"[...] it starts the staff first, happy staff will give great service, unhappy staff won't"* (1-5, ll.370-371). Furthermore, the sharing of organisational values extends across the organisational boundary: *"[y]ou would want to expect employees in the [organisation] to have those attributes and if they don't have those how can they instill those qualities into people who are customers"* (2-1, ll.125-127). These narrative threads lend support for Heskett et al.'s (1994) model of the organisational flow from inside to outside the organisation, i.e. the service-profit chain. There is also evidence to the contrary of Heskett et al.'s (1994) model, namely as a denial of the link between internal and external loyalty: i.e. *"(Interviewer: Do you think the internal loyalty maps to the external loyalty?) [...]. In my experience I would say I disagree, yeah just internally I wouldn't rate loyalty that highly"* (1-2, ll.331-336). Furthermore, the effect of difficult economic times was expressed in terms of an internal-external relationship: *"You're finding it hard to sell; we're finding it hard to [recover]"* (2-4, ll.232-233). These excerpts explore the organisational boundary between internal and external actors. Furthermore, the blurring between work and home is also evidenced: *"[The organisation] was considered a marriage bureau"* (2-1, l.334). Thus work and private worlds become conflated or at least connected.

The main narrative which emerges when considering how the **organisation** is constructed in light of **other organisations** is that BN is special: e.g. *"[I]t's an organisation that doesn't rush into anything, takes a very methodical approach to most areas and that has worked well [...]. Other [organisations] will bull at a gate straight into the same sand and they'll lose their clients that way"* (1-8, ll.651-655). However,

another thread emerges, namely the perception that the organisation's culture, or parts of the culture at least, may be generic as opposed to distinctive and special:

[For example] pleasantness is actually the service culture, but being pleasant is actually just a shared value as a human being and prefer that people treat you with respect but that might slip out again. It becomes a generic one you have as you come into the organisation but it does fall into the service category (1-6, ll.283-286).

The **organisation** is also constructed as an imbrication of not only **internal actors** but also **other organisations**. The predominant narrative associated with this combination of actors is also that the organisation is caring, and therefore special: *"[...] they care, the [organisation is] not just [like other organisations of this type], and [...] they care enough about you as a person [...they] make sure that everything gels"* (2-1, ll.358-360). In addition, at least one comment was regarding recruitment from outside: *"[...] they're bringing qualities into the [organisation] which others can pick up on, so I think you'll find that there is a benefit in this cross-flow of people who have worked for other organisations"* (2-1, ll.159-162). This comment seems paradoxical in light of earlier excerpts which emphasise the need to create a self-perpetuating, and special, organisation and system.

Overall, when considering the organisation in relation to internal actors, narratives such as knowing (and knowledge), hierarchy, the shared value system, alignment (including a lack of alignment linked to diversity), and lastly engagement emerge. When considering the organisation in relation to not only internal actors but also management, the reader gains insight into the role of management in enacting the organisational culture and hierarchy. The main narrative threads which emerge when considering the organisation in conjunction with both internal and external actors pertain to the tension between sales and service, the link between internal and external actors' experiences, and lastly, blurring organisational lines. Thus, when considering

the organisation and other organisations, the main narrative is that the organisation is special, set apart; but this narrative is also tensioned against the opposite idea; i.e. that the organisation is generic, and similar to other organisations which provide the same services.

4.2.3 Brand and Other

The brand is now considered in light of other actors. First, the **brand** was on occasion expressed in relation to **internal actors**. A few narrative threads emerge when considering this combination. First, the concept of the BN person emerges: “[...] *they display the sort of person that should be working at [BN]*” (1-2, ll.396-397). Thus, somehow the employee is branded, and the assumption here is that there is also an alignment of values. The perception that people constitute the brand also surfaces: “[...] *brand is people*” (1-8, l.1036). Furthermore, internal actors are presented as creators. The brand is also presented as possessing people, and employees are described as being defenders of the brand: “*they’re very protective of that brand*” (1-8, ll.1011-1012). The brand is also distinguished from people: “[...] *people are human and they do make mistakes and that doesn’t necessarily reflect on what [BN] stands for*” (2-6, ll.370-371). Lastly, it was perceived that the brand is also enacted by the frontline staff.

The main narratives associated with **brand and external stakeholders** focus the reader’s attention on external expressions of the brand. First, the brand is constructed as an external marketing communication, which indirectly relates to the external target market: “[...] *if you look at the [advertisements], it is all about always going that extra mile [...] just moving on from there it has a really open door policy*” (1-4, ll.634-636). The brand is also associated with the company’s strap line and other external expressions, with the customer, and with customer feedback: “[*The*] *processes actually support the brand and that’s reflected in the feedback from external customers*” (1-6, ll.683-684). The brand is also associated with history and also the wider community

and sponsorship. Some participants associated the brand with products or products with the brand: “[...] *the product is very much the brand*” (1-7, l.996). One participant described the brand as being something outside the organisation: “[*The brand is*] *just out there and you look at it and you know that trust*” (2-1, ll.755-756). Thus, looking, knowing and trusting are linked in this narrative thread. In addition, being known is linked to brand strength: “[...] *but that’s where you draw on your strength, your name [...] it is a strong [brand name], and a name that’s a household name*” (1-3, ll.49-50). Lastly, one participant commented on the solidity of the brand: “[*It’s a good solid brand that means something, because it’s everywhere*” (1-8, l.1056). Thus brand meaning and brand presence are linked.

The main narrative which constructs the relationship between **the brand and other brands** is that of the brand being special, a leader, distinctive from the rest. First, the brand was considered special compared to competitor brands, but not only was BN considered to be special compared to locally competing brands, it was also compared favorably to overseas brands: “[...] *it’s not like the ones going to work in the US happening obviously the staff don’t know what’s happening*” (2-3, ll.459-461). In addition, it was considered special even when it had to do something difficult: “[...] *when BN closed a branch you felt safe because you’d hear that the branch was closing for some reason*” (1-8, ll.1083-1084). This perception of the brand being special was also exemplified when the brand’s personality was considered: “[BN] *would be more like a, stylish [... up market suburb]*” (1-2, ll.603-604).

When the **brand** is narrated in conjunction with both **internal and external actors**, the main narrative threads which emerge are mainly in relation to how the brand is constituted by these other actors, the role the brand plays or the other actors play in relation to each other, and perspectives of the brand such as inside and outside.

First, the brand was constituted by some participants, notably frontline employees, as scripting, or scripting is viewed as a form of brand communication. In both cases,

scripting is an integral part of the internal and external actors' interactions: "[...] *first off it is like 'Welcome to [BN]'*, or you always do the branding whether you do it at the beginning, you should do it at the end of the call because you have got a certain way you have to do the call throughout, speaking to the customer" (1-4, ll.509-512).

Another view of the brand was that it is an entity which has empathy. Another perspective was that the brand is constituted by people, both internal and external actors: "[...] *that's really what the brand is at the end of the day, people whether it's just clients or staff*" (1-8, ll.1128-1129); or the brand and people are constructed as separate entities: "[...] *there are some people who potentially could let the brand down*" (1-7, ll.1117-1118). This view suggests that the brand and people are separate.

Other narratives construct the brand in terms of its role in relation to internal and external actors. For example, one view was that the brand is linked to engagement: "*Engagement of the people and the customer and everybody, and all that we all engaged together, internally or externally*" (1-8, ll.892-893). Another perspective was that the brand, represented by the external marketing communications, is not as important when it comes to attracting customers, but instead it is the internal actors who play the major role: "[...] *it's not because of, the ads get people to ring up but it's the people that actually bring people in to [BN]*" (1-5, ll.994-995). Another view was that the employees defend the brand: "[...] *they're very protective of that brand [...] and therefore they then, they're communicating that outwardly to their communications with the customers*" (1-8, ll.1013-1015). Related to this protective role was the view that the brand can be damaged:

if [...] things should happen that that brand is damaged, that would be a disaster, not only for the [organisation], but disaster for the people who work in it and a disaster for the customer, so that brand name has to be protected at all costs (2-1, ll.735-738).

The brand's worth becomes a reflection of its support for the internal and external actors: "[...] it's really important that it does have integrity and it does provide support for people because at the end of the day if you haven't got those two things the brand would become worthless" (2-4, ll.439-441). Lastly, brand perspective also emerges when considering the brand in relation to internal and external actors in that the brand has both internal and external versions and for some participants, both these versions are the same: (*Interviewer: You've been talking about the brand I guess from the external customer point of view. As an employee, is it the same?) For me it's more or less the same*" (2-3, ll.641-644), while for others these versions were not synonymous.

When the **brand** is considered in relation to **other brands**, along with **other actors (both internal and or external)** the main narrative which emerges is that the **brand is special**. This view was commonly expressed as a comparison of the brand's advertisements compared to other brands' advertisements. The narrative of being special was also expressed in terms of the brand (and organisation) being more caring than other brands by not making staff redundant, unlike other companies. A notable story told by one of the participants who extended the **brand-other brands** imbrication to include **brand-other brands-other organizations**, compared BN with a hotel. This narrative presents to the reader the inevitable problem of offering a superior service:

[...] that's why the customers they have higher expectation from us so they just like to complain even though they are not that high level customers, like you walk into a 3 star hotel you wouldn't make that much complaint, than walking through a 5 star hotel (1-8, ll.258-261).

This narrative, though short, is complex in that not only does the narrator use another organisation type to explain the special nature of BN, but this narrative also highlights the tension that can come from being so special and superior to other similar service providers.

The reader, therefore, by considering the brand in conjunction with internal actors, gains some insight into how employees construct the brand in relation to themselves: i.e. employees branded, brand constituted by people, brand defended by its people, brand separated from people. This view of the brand broadens the scope of the brand's interactions with both internal and external actors both in terms of brand communication and brand-based relationships, and also in terms of how the brand is constructed and defended. The customer and wider community's relationship with the brand is emphasised when the brand-other (external actors) relationship is considered. Also, the dominant narrative was that BN, when compared to other brands, is superior.

4.2.4 Organisation and Self

An understanding of how the narratives construct the **organisation** in relation to the **self** is an important step in understanding how employees construct the brand because the brand is, in the extant literature, often associated with, mapped onto, or distinguished from the organisational culture. Furthermore, employees bring their own personal value systems to the organisation for which they work and therefore understanding how this is constructed by the participants is, I would argue, an important step towards understanding how participants construct themselves in relation to the brand and also the organisation in relation to the brand. The connection between the organisational culture and the brand is documented by (Balmer 2001; Hatch and Schultz 2001), and in turn, the concept of alignment between personal and organisational values is also established in the extant literature (de Chernatony and Segal-Horn 2003; Harris and de Chernatony 2001).

This first part of the analysis deals with the degree of alignment and also orientation. Some participants agreed that the company's values were aligned with theirs: e.g. *"But I feel it's aligned with mine so I would like to work for a company whose values are aligned with mine"* (1-2, 469-470); or alternatively that their personal values were aligned with those of the company: e.g. *"[...] most of us have them in our own*

personal value system which is how we integrate into the [organisation] so well" (1-8, ll.749-750). These examples suggest an absolute fit between personal and organisational values and vice versa, but for some participants there was only a degree of fit: e.g. *"I think mine, mine are quite similar"* (2-2, l.451). While most participants expressed either complete or partial alignment, at least one participant did not see any evidence of there being a culture to which s/he could be aligned: *"[The organisation's training service] doesn't mean anything to me"* (1-9, l.332). What did become clear was that the organisational culture was constructed by most participants as a mirror of their own value systems.

There was evidence, however, that there was for some participants, a gap between perceived personal and organisational value systems: *"I've got to put on a different face and try to present that professionalism that the [organisation] expects from me and which I expect from the people I work from because that's the culture"* (2-1, ll.259-261). The two faces represent two ways of 'being'. One participant explained what s/he would do when there was a clash: *"[...] if there's a difference or any conflicts I will always just tell myself that this is the guideline and this is the boundary that the [organisation's] set and you know and I just have to act professionally, you know like, I don't take it personally"* (2-2, ll.263-265). The statement *"it's not worth it"* has a negative connotation and suggests that the organisation is the stronger of the two. One or two participants viewed their own personal values as having priority: *"I don't care probably what the [organisation's] values are, it's my personal values"* (1-9, ll.271-272). This kind of resistance, perhaps lack of recognition of self in the organisational culture, was rare, however.

A number of participants commented on the importance of being aligned, specifically to BN's organisational culture. A few participants made a comment about being aligned, but in a generalised way: *"[...] you cannot work for an organisation that you don't believe in it [...] or you don't share its same values"* (2-3, ll.222-223). Other

narratives suggested that it was not enough for the employee to just bring in her/his personal values but that the organisation also had to give back in some way, or for the organisation to also be aligned to the employee's personal value system (Vallaster and de Chernatony 2006). Another view was that there existed a respectful tension between personal values and organisational boundaries: *"I do sort of think that the organisational boundaries sort of come into it quite a lot with internal people because I think you still have to sort of respect [the boundaries even though] you may not agree"* (2-2, ll.204-206). Still another view was that the employee was more than just the institutionally decided job role: *"I really want [...] to be [a] friend to my customer as well"* (2-2, ll.59-60). These narrative threads suggest that the self-organisation construction is a negotiation of value systems. There may be alignment, but there may not be alignment. The relationship may be tense or comfortable. Lastly, there is also evidence of a relationship existing between the organisation and the self: *"[...] if you don't bring your brain to work it is bad, but if you don't bring your heart to work it's the worst"* (2-1, ll.644-645); and *"I love this organisation and do feel like a girlfriend dating relationship sometimes"* (1-4, ll.737-738).

Also included in this section is the construction of **self** in relation to **organisation** (including management). I read management as an extension of organisation in that management enacts organisational policies. When considering this combination of actors, the main narrative is again that of knowing, i.e. being known: *"[...] there's people on level four, the [role] manager that's I've never deal[t] with I've never spoken to but they actually know my name. I don't know how they hell they do but they actually know me by name"* (1-5, ll.1286-1289); and not being known:

[The mission statement is] just words and they're meaningless to me; they don't mean that [head of marketing] is going to come round to my desk and say hey [my name], you know I heard that you did some[thing]? We're in a different universe altogether, we may be both employees of the [organisation] but we're never going to meet" (1-9, ll.504-507);

and the idea of false knowledge:

I actually have my personal experience that on the survey for [a] particular department or the management, I just put what I thought and then unfortunately he didn't get it; he thought that we [didn't] understand the question, the [survey] question [...]; he still put the blame to the staff, he [thought] that we [didn't] understand the question; that's why we're ranking him so low (2-2, ll.522-528).

Thus, the survey response was misrecognised by the manager as a lack of knowledge on the part of the employee rather than an honest response to the survey. In addition to knowing, the concept of believing in the system also emerges: “[...] *there's a methodology behind [the decisions management make] and if it's [...] proven wrong, it'll get changed and if it's right well then they were right all along*” (2-1, ll.435-436).

Here the system seems to be synonymous with management in that the system makes choices. Thus, there is a blurring between organisation and enactors (management). Linked to the concepts of knowledge and belief is the role of management, which also becomes apparent when considering management (as organisation) and self. One view was that the manager was a model:

If my leader can't [...] do his job or [...] give me enough respect or, or I don't see any integrity, then how am I going to you know perform my job if I have a leader like that, so it's both ways, and again I look up at the [organisation] as a whole as well, you know for me to perform my job as well” (2-2, ll.728-732).

Thus the employee's relationship with management as organisational representatives, is highlighted. Another view was that the experience of the employee depended on the management and this could be ad hoc; i.e. not necessarily consistent with any particular cultural environment or set of policies. Another view was that the relationship

between the manager and employee was paramount: “[...] if I had a poor relationship with the person I reported to that would be the deal breaker” (2-6, ll.137-138).

The narratives which explore the organisation-self relationship centre around the concept of alignment (i.e. degree and orientation, importance of being aligned, and the method of becoming aligned). As well as alignment, narratives of resistance also emerge. By considering management alongside organisation and self, the concept of alignment is given a new layer of complexity.

4.2.5 Brand and Self

How the **brand** is constructed in relation to the **self** is the focus of this section. The narratives which emerge from this imbrication, centre around the relationship between the self and brand, the constitution of and sameness of brand and self, and separateness of brand and self.

First, the brand is constructed as a relationship between the brand and the self. The relationships spanned a number of possibilities and intensities. For example, one participant simply described her/his relationship with the brand as being a working one: *“I like working at [BN] because it’s flexible with time”* (1-9, l.625); another described the relationship as a friendship. For another participant the relationship was that of a parent-child, with the brand taking on the role of the parent: *“My relationship with [BN] is a parent-child and I’m the child”* (1-2, ll.655). The brand was also described as reliable: *“it’s always been there for me”* (1-2, l.747), a provider: *“I’ve inherited from the brand”* (1-2, l.765), and a place to live: *“It’s my second house”* (1-1, l.613). Another participant stated that s/he elevated the brand: *“I have got [BN] a little bit on a pedestal because I’ve been here [for a long time]”* (2-6, ll.652-653), and still another suggested that her/his life was constituted by the brand. Linked to the perception of the brand and self being in a relationship, is the view that the brand is an entity capable of being in a relationship (Fournier 1998). However, not all participants thought the brand was a ‘being’: e.g. *“I don’t see the brand as an entity”* (1-2, l.705). Overall, however, the

relationship metaphor emerges reasonably convincingly when considering the brand and self together. In some cases, when asked about their relationship with the brand some participants referred to the organisation.

How the brand and self constitute each other or are constituted separately is another narrative thread which emerges when considering the brand and self as mutual imbrications. One view was that the self and brand are somehow fused, the one constituting the other. For example, one participant presented her/himself as a vivification of the brand: *"I live and breathe it"* (2-6, l.642). Another participant went as far as saying that the brand somehow subsumed who s/he was: *"I am [BN], not [my name]"* (2-3, l.989). There was also the view that there is an inside the brand space and an outside the brand space:

I think having been outside of the brand [...] you have got to look at the ideas that people have; they might not be branded as has always been, but it is sometimes good to have external ideas because it helps things change and that can be a whole different thing" (1-4, ll.826-831).

This kind of inside-outside view was less to do with the customer-employee distinction and more to do with bringing other ideas, "external opinions", into the brand environment. In this last excerpt, bringing new ideas in is seen as progressive and positive.

Alignment was also a narrative thread which emerged when considering the self and brand. On one hand the brand was considered to be closely aligned: *"I suppose I've been thinking of [BN] as someone who is very similar [...] and the relationship is very supportive; we've both got the same goals"* (1-2, ll.756-758). On the other hand the brand was considered as having no values by at least one participant: *"(Interviewer: So do you [...] see a set of values that are associated with the brand that help you in your jobs, in particular?) No"* (1-9, l.945-949). For others, the brand did not feature that highly in their consciousness: e.g. *"I don't think too much about [my relationship*

with] the brand; I don't think that deep" (2-6, l.589). This comment suggests that thinking about the brand, for this participant, was a surface level activity.

This section reveals examples of some of the relationship types that participants suggested they had with the brand and explores further, the way the brand and self are constructed in relation to each other. Whether or not participants were conscious of the brand also emerged as a narrative thread.

4.2.6 Brand and Organisation

When considering the **brand** when constructed along with the **organisation**, a dominant narrative which emerges is again alignment.

One view was that both the brand and the organisation had identical values: e.g. *"[...] they're one in the same"* (1-2, l.463). If not the same, then a number of participants thought they were at least similar. A few participants expressed the view that the brand may not have any of the values attributed to the organisation:

"(Interviewer: Would you agree [that the brand has some values]?) I kind of hesitate to some degree" (1-6, ll.595-598). However, the prevalent view was that brand and organisation are aligned in some way.

Connected to alignment is how brand and organisation are constituted. For example, a participant asserted that the brand and organisation were separate but connected: *"So there's a face to the brand and all these things and how that's made up is what goes on behind"* (1-6, ll.582-583); while another view was that the organisation and brand are synonymous: *"That's what [the organisation] is all about, is the brand; what is this brand, it's the integrity, provide the best customer service, so the [organisation] is the brand"* (1-3, ll.808-810). I also noted that when I asked about the brand, often participants would talk about the organisation, thereby confirming that the two seemed to be linked or even synonymous in the minds of some of the group members. Another view was that the brand and organisation are linked but with one actor in a subordinated role: e.g. *"[...] what the [organisation] does [is] just live up to the*

standards of the brand" (1-3, ll.989-991). The other view which emerged was that the brand and organisation are separate in a negative way: e.g. "[...] *the organisation is trying to maintain the reputation that the brand has and sometimes it doesn't always get it.*" (2-5, ll.591-592).

Furthermore, management is included here as a manifestation of the organisation. For one participant the management represented the brand: "[...] *whatever [the manager] acts would be representing the brand itself; the manager itself is quite important*" (1-4, 158). The sameness of the manager and the brand is signified through the use of an identical pronoun to reference both actors, i.e. "*itself*". More specifically, the GM's values were deemed the same as the brand: "[*The GM is [BN]*" (2-6, l.987). Thus the GM does not merely share the same values but s/he constitutes the brand. There was also nervousness about having a change in leadership as the new leader was perceived to not necessarily be a BN person.

Overall, the main narratives which emerge when considering brand and organisation centre around the dual views of alignment and whether or not the brand constitutes the organisation and vice versa. The role of management, particularly the GM, in constituting the brand was also apparent.

4.2.7 Organisation, Self and Other

When considering the **organisation** along with **self** and **internal actors** the narrative of alignment again emerges. However, comments were less about whether or not personal and organisational values were aligned, and more about the importance of being aligned: e.g. "[...] *you've got to be aligned, if you're preaching the gospel so to speak. If our values are disconnected, then that's going to be really hard to represent your organisation*" (2-6, ll.111-113). This statement introduces the reader to religious imagery, which emerges elsewhere but in relation to the brand. In addition to commenting on the importance of being aligned other narratives about how alignment comes about emerge when considering the self and other employees

alongside the organisation. For example, recruitment was commonly mentioned: “[...] *we try and recruit the people who fit. I mean I have recruited a lot and I have made the odd mistake [...], so you know how important recruitment in the first instance is, it’s everything*” (2-6, ll.249-253). There is also the suggestion of organisational control:

[...] we are the company and I know what the company expects of me and I know if I fell along with what they expect me they will report me so I try and remember this is what they want; you’re normally rewarded [if you do this]” (2-4, ll.88-92).

The perception of how alignment is effected is linked to the narrative threads which detail how values are shared. The organisation is characterised in the following excerpts as the one who instigates a shared culture, through employees imbibing it: “*In a strict sense it sometimes gets imbibed into us*” (1-1, l.481); through recognition and rewards “[...] *there’s recognition regional managers to you know they recognise you for what you are because there’s leader boards, you can actually see it, it’s there in front of you, black and white, everyone else gets to see it too*” (1-8, ll.711-714); and through imparting the the vision “*The actual vision or the vision we, because they have a vision [...] it’s ingrained from the day you start*” (2-2, ll.343-344). The use of the word “actual” suggests that there may be another vision that is not the actual one.

One participant in the second phase of interviews made the comment that being engaged was linked to loyalty, commitment and being a team player: “*For me an engaged staff is about the loyalty [...]. Your heart has to be here [...]. Some people will think that [...] you know that means whatever my manager say I just say ‘Yes’, and I’m a good team player; a good team player is not like this*” (2-1, ll.635-641).

Quiescence is not considered in this excerpt to be ideal. Other definitions of engagement which emerge when considering these three actors include having a shared understanding, doing one’s best, being helpful, and expecting others to help too.

There was also a narrative thread which emphasised gaps in the alignment process, between individuals: e.g.

[...] it's never a hundred percent total fit all the time because we're working with people, and we're all different and whatever, but generally speaking, yeah you want to work in a place that you feel there is that alignment" (2-6, ll.115-118);

and between departments: *"I wouldn't know (which values are shared) to be honest, apart from when I go into a branch myself"* (1-9, l.463). The issue of sales is also introduced: (in response to being asked about alignment with personal values) a participant said, *"[...] you know we are here to make a profit too so you know there's kind of two sides of it"* (2-5, ll.128-129). Selling was often viewed by participants as an activity which creates a gap between their own personal set of values and those of the organisation.

When considering organisation, self and internal actors, the concept of hierarchy emerges: *"[...] we're pretty much the bottom so everyone we're talking to is just giving us information"* (1-1, l.240). However, within this hierarchical system there is for some participants a sense of being helped: *"[...] they will actually push you for promotions with a view to helping you up. They are not trying to keep you in the same position. They are always trying to aim to push you up"* (1-5, 168). The importance of knowing was also highlighted: e.g. *"[...] you have to kind of know other people and get to know them, how do they work [...] and make them understand a little of your part of the business"* (1-6, ll.211-214). Furthermore, a lack of knowing was also reported: *"From year to year we don't know what kind of projects are coming up and so that's why it's always changing"* (1-7, ll.133-134), thereby suggesting that organisational systems at least in that department were perceived as ad hoc.

The issue of what constitutes the organisation also emerges. As in the excerpt above, one view was that the internal actors are the organisation: *"[...] who are we as*

the person, we are the company" (2-4, ll.267-268). Another view was that the organisation is a large supportive network supporting the brand: *"Behind you is a huge solid network moving constantly; they don't change but they're constantly changing"* (1-8, ll.1217-1219). The binary of change-no change is held in tension in this excerpt. Connected to the idea of what constitutes organisation is the perception of organisational boundaries. One view was that the organisation's boundaries were there to guide employees: *"[...] like a guideline to as well to us, everyday you know as part of the guideline for us to perform well [...] respecting organisation boundaries, this is very important"* (2-2, ll.155-157). Another view was that these boundaries (guidelines) were merely the start: *"We try and screen [each situation] so we are doing our job and having empathy"* (2-4, l.335). The way internal actors worked, i.e. as individuals or in teams, also features when considering organisation, self and internal actors. One back office view was that there was no team: *"[...] we're just a bunch of individuals"* (1-9, l.253). Another view was that both occurred: *"[...] we work for the same organisation, everyone's got their own individual targets to meet but we've got these values in place so we all know we have to work as a team"* (2-3, ll.897-899). At the other extreme, the idea that the organisation is just one big team was also put forward: *"we're not just a [business unit] here and a [business unit] there [...]; it's the whole family"* (2-1, ll.520-521). Moreover, I found as a reader that some comments relating to how internal actors worked inside the organisation related to a front office versus back office distinction: e.g. *"I think our front facing is good but I think our back office is a bit lacking"* (2-5, l.574). This dislocation between front and back becomes an important issue when considering views of the brand.

Lastly narratives about change also became apparent in this section. One participant commented that the organisation had changed:

Now we're a much bigger [organisation], it is less personal [...] and certainly you don't have the same background [...] our services were more simplistic

then. Now we're a more full, wide ranging series of services, in all sorts of products that we didn't offer in those days, so it is quite different now. But the idea is to try and keep that personal approach" (1-3, ll.364-369).

This comment suggests that personal and organisational values may not still be quite as aligned as in past years. In this excerpt there is a sense that change is not necessarily good. However, the opposite view was also expressed: "*We should always be open to new ideas, new ways of doing things which may be more efficient*" (1-6, ll.113-114). Another issue relating to a lack of alignment was that of surveys, one of the main ways the organisation monitored teams and perceptions of management performance and so on. First, surveys were perceived by a few participants as not necessarily being reflective of the organisation and heavily influenced by management: "*We just always get the same [survey], every year, except we get better marks now, now that we've had things explained to us*" (1-9, ll.977-979); as being characterised by miscommunication: "*[... My manager] thought that we [didn't] understand the [survey] question, so I decided to move on because this guy just [didn't] get it; he still put the blame [on] the staff*" (2-2, ll.354-356); as being difficult to perform when there's a lack of knowledge:

[A new manager] jumped in and then made all these sweeping changes and then handed us a piece of paper and said okay, do a survey on me now, and it was very very interesting because at the same time you wanted to have a bit of respect for her [...] but not knowing her, it was very hard. She didn't get to know, she didn't take the time to get to know us as well (2-2, ll.606-610).

Managers were also viewed in a more positive light, i.e. as role models and as relationship facilitators.

Now I consider not only **internal actors** but also **external actors** in conjunction with the **organisation and self**.

In the previous sections alignment has been a common narrative. In this section the concept of alignment is further extended. Alignment was also attributed to inward and outward expressions:

[...] the customer walks in, the first person they see is, that's who they see, [and if they are] sloppy, 'Will they be sloppy with my money, will they be sloppy with my information' [...] so if we act and present ourselves professionally then [...] they say 'Oh, there's a company that cares and they'll look after me' (2-1, ll.286-290).

This view of the inward and outward values being aligned also mirrors Heskett et al.'s (1994) view of the flow between employee and customer interaction. This model is also echoed in the following excerpt: "*[...] if everything gelled well in your workplace that was a big part of how you were going to be seen and second how you were going to treat others*" (2-1, ll.329-331). Similarly, engagement was also attributed to both inside and outside actors. These excerpts extend the organisation's effect into the realm of the external actor.

In addition, narratives about sales also emerge when considering internal and external actors in conjunction with the organisation and self. One way of negotiating the issue of sales was to believe in what is being sold:

We believe in the product ourselves, that what we are doing and telling customers is right, and it is not us being pushy salespeople or just trying to do something for our money; it is something we believe in ourselves to deliver to our customers (1-4, ll.608-611).

This comment could also be read as an extension of the idea of the organisation being special, i.e. other organisations have pushy sales people but not BN. Furthermore, the concept of believing is also used in conjunction with believing in staff: "*I have to have a lot of belief in them that they're going to, deliver on my expectations [...] and then the*

customer have faith that my staff are going to deliver on the promises” (1-8, ll.328-331).

Thus, believing in staff engenders customers to have faith in the same.

When considering management as the enactors of the organisation, narratives about the disjoint between management and employees emerge. This disjoint is expressed as those in head office not knowing about core activities: “[...] *if you would go in [to head office], some of them don’t even know the products, the things that we even sell” (1-8, ll.814-816); as hypocrisy: “[...] my clients survey me. They get rung up and asked questions about my service so and that’s every month so that’s and then whereas the manager’s one is once a year” (2-2, ll.688-690); and as a lack of alignment: “It’s make the business actually saying you know, don’t deliver too much too quickly because the [retail outlets] can’t cope, you know, and yet, and yet they’re still pushing us” (2-5, ll.679-681).*

Some participants reported feeling a tension between providing customer service and representing the organisation: *“We’re sort of like in the middle, represent the customer, at the same time represent the [organisation]” (2-2, ll.210-211).* In addition, a number of participants reported tension between making sales and relating to customers: *“I couldn’t put a price tag on a person’s face” (2-1, l.396).* Other participants felt a similar kind of tension regarding having to sell to customers: *“I’ve got the customers here and approvals here and trying to make them meet can be quite challenging” (1-1, ll.202-203).* This statement also suggests a lack of alignment between personal and organisational values. A passive approach to selling is evident in the following statement: *“I’m not actively selling but I’m happy to talk to people about it if they seem like they’re interested” (1-7, ll.962-963).* The tension around sales was viewed by some as a value gap: *“Some people [management] really like my style but there are some they think I’m too much, I’m too personal, I’m just getting too involved in the customers’ personal lives” (2-1, ll.379-381);* or value conflict whereby relationships with clients were privileged over and above meeting targets. Another view was that

engagement was used by the organisation (management) to manage the issue of selling: *“I suppose they want to move you you know the belief that if you engage with customer and all these people just come you know your business”* (2-2, ll.392-394). The words *“They want you to believe”* suggest the participant did not necessarily believe this but was aware of this as a tactic. The relationship with the customer was also perceived as going outside traditional role boundaries: *“[...] you know like you have a [role] hat and then a counselor hat sort of thing at the same time and a friendly hat”* (2-2, ll.191-192). In this excerpt the participant presents her/him self as being something more than the organisation requires.

One of the main narratives which emerges when considering not only **organisation, self** and **internal actors** but also **other organisations** is that the organisation is special. For example the organisation was deemed distinctive due to its employees having belief in the organisation: *“We believe in our [organisation]. I think there’s a mutual respect; the [organisation] respects the people and the people respect the [organisation]”* (1-3, ll.901-902); because it rewarded hard work:

I have worked in [another organisation] before and even though I was at a moderate level, you never really felt that important, your contribution wasn’t that important. I think [at BN] [...] your contribution is important and it is all just part of the whole organisation” (1-5, ll.208-212);

and because the organisation had high standards: *“[...] as an organisation we set incredibly high standards”* (1-7, l.1123). In the last excerpt the narrator not only represents her/himself as part of a group of employees (“we”) but there is no separateness between organisation and internal actors with the internal actors becoming the organisation. The opposite was also evident: *“Most organisations [are] like our; something comes in the front, it’s processed, it goes out”* (2-1, 5ll.553-554). However, the predominant narrative was that the organisation was set apart from others. When regarding the **organisation, self** and **other organisations** two main

ideas emerge. First, BN is different (criticism) from other organisations in terms of its management style: *“I’ve never worked anywhere where there’s been so many managers”* (1-9, ll.672-673), and BN is special (in a positive way): *“[Compared to other organisations in my home country, BN] gave me the chance, and I will never forget that”* (2-1, l.179).

When considering the organisation, self and internal actors the reader gains insight into issues such as alignment, engagement, what constitutes the organisation, dislocation and change. When considering the organisation, self, internal and/or external acts, a more complex view of the organisation is constructed from the view of the employee’s interactions with the external actors. Narratives about sales versus service, and being more than just the generic role the employee played are evidenced in this section. When considering the organisation, self and external actors the main narratives which emerge create a more individualistic view of the participants’ relationships with their customers. When considering the organisation and other organisations, the narrative of the organisation being special emerges.

4.2.8 Brand, Self and Other

Now I turn to considering the brand in conjunction with the self and other actors. When considering the **brand** as a mutual imbrication of **self** and **internal actors** what emerges is a range of perceptions about the role of employees and the brand. In two different groups the term ‘belief’ is used in relation to the brand. Belief was viewed by one participant as a way to the brand:

[...] if you don’t believe in it and don’t see it in examples that you deal with on a day to day [...] then you are not a customer service person, you might be doing administrative work; so that is how we are being brought to the brand through our experience and believing in it (1-4, ll.582-585).

Another participant suggested that her/his belief in the brand was affected by people:

“[an incident that happened], it’s gutting to me because I was so, well I still am

passionate about [BN], but it has changed that" (2-6, ll.288-289). Another view was that the brand experience is a group experience: *"It's not as an individual that you look towards this brand; it's as a team"* (1-3, ll.637-638). What constitutes the brand was also a narrative thread that emerged. One view was that people constitute the brand: e.g. *"[...] we're the brand as well"* (2-4, l.115); and another view was that the brand is associated with people: *"It's people, number one"* (1-8, ll.877). I am reading the word *"people"* here to mean other internal actors. That the brand is somehow larger than the people and the people are part of the brand was another view: e.g. *"It's kind of a big circle you know and [we are] part of that"* (2-3, ll.1073-1074); as was the perception that the brand was somehow higher up: *"[...] you have to kind of come across portray yourself as part of the brand, you can't be derogatory kind of thing, you've got to be up there"* (2-5, ll.525-527). The brand was also perceived as being separate from people, but somehow dependent to a degree: *"[...] the brand is here already and we are the one[s] who maintain it, to retain it, to keep up the brand"* (1-4, ll.589-590). Other views were that the brand has meaning: *"[...] if you actually have a good look through everything we've got and what [BN] actually stands for, it is to be genuine it is to be, it's a good solid brand that actually means something"* (1-8, ll.244-246). Lastly, the brand was also perceived as not being that important: *"[...] it's not so relevant to me, the brand, but I do know what it represents when I step outside the building, but internally, it's not a biggy for me"* (1-6, ll.611-613). Thus, the brand for this participant was associated with an external brand rather than her/his internal experience as an employee.

This construction of the **brand** as a relationship between the **self** and **internal** and/or **external actors** emphasises the external world of the brand.

A number of narrative threads suggest that the brand was an authenticating force for participants when they were outside the organisation. Some participants reported how proud they were to represent the brand when in a public arena: e.g. *"And if you*

are at a bar-b-que somewhere and somebody says what do you do and you say you work for [BN] I mean everybody knows [BN] so it's a sense of pride" (2-5, ll.311-313).

The question of where the pride comes from is raised. For one participant, belief leads to pride: *"Personally I felt proud to work with for BN because the brand as I see I believe" (1-8, l.1137).* In other cases, the external recognition the brand enjoyed lead to a feeling of pride: *"I know [BN] is well regarded and most people feel good about it and then I just think about me" (2-6, ll.591-592).* For some, representing the brand outside the organisational boundaries was facilitated by the wearing of a uniform: *"To me I put the uniform on, I know I'm going to work as it's a known identity; I feel proud to work for the [BN]" (1-8, ll.1223-1224).* For others, wearing the brand was less visible but still apparent due to the reactions of others: *"[At a function] whether we were dressed different or whether we had an invisible [BN] on us [...], we were picked out. So people love to work for [BN]" (2-4, ll.132-138).* This excerpt extends the view that the brand is special. The brand in these cases authenticates the participants.

As well as the brand authenticating employees, one participant suggested that s/he authenticated the brand:

[...] you are there you're pushing you're promoting the brand and reinforcing it but you're also it's about you as well because you've got this brand that you're standing behind [...] you've got to believe in what you're dealing with and I think you'll find if you actually have a good look through everything we've got and what [BN] actually stands for it is to be, genuine [...] it's a good solid brand that actually means something (1-8, ll.233-246).

This excerpt ties together the narratives of authentication and believing. A key phrase in this excerpt is *"good solid brand that actually means something"*. This phrase implies that there are brands elsewhere which are not solid and do not mean anything. This excerpt therefore also suggests that BN is a special brand. Other participants were mindful that they portrayed the brand as was the case of the participant who sometimes forgot to take her/his branded shirt off outside work: *"If I walk round*

[wearing a branded shirt], you know I never take it off. When I'm outside I'm like, 'Oh I've got my thing on, take it off just in case', you know" (2-5, ll.517-518).

In another case a participant found that even when s/he was living her/his life away from the organisational boundaries people would still speak to the participant in her/his capacity as a BN employee: *"I often have people approach me, a lot of my son's mates, even their families, oh you work for the [organisation], oh I've got this problem; if I can help you I will"* (1-8, ll.866-867). The participant's experience challenges the traditional view of work starting and stopping within the confines of the traditionally boundaries of the organisation. In all these cases, the recognition of the brand by those outside the organisation had an effect on the lives of those representing the brand or being represented by the brand.

The narrative of what constitutes the brand and what the brand constitutes is also relevant and evidenced here. One view was that the participant felt that from a client's perspective s/he constituted the brand: *"For me personally I am the brand, that's what it comes down to so in my job, they buy me"* (1-8, ll.1153-1154). For others, they represent the brand: *"(Interviewer: Someone mentioned before that you are the face of the brand). Yeah because that's what the customer sees, they see me"* (2-3, ll.1007-1010). This responsibility, to represent the brand, was top of mind for some participants: e.g.

You know it gets very important that you know when I present myself, always thinking of [BN], it's the brand that I'm representing, so have to be very careful the way I talk to them you know and how I present myself and so it's quite interesting and it's quite challenging too because you got different types of [customers] in my profile (1-8, 37ll.180-184).

This excerpt presents a more fragmented view of the brand-self interface in that the customer mirrors multiple views of the self-brand interface. One participant described the way the brand authenticates employees in the context of buying: *"If you take away*

the brand, the clients buying in they're buying you [...] they're basically buying us, and then [BN] is behind us as a sort of halo above us" (1-8, ll.336-340). The image of a halo represents the brand as a god-like phenomenon.

Others saw the brand as representing them: *"[...] as soon as [the BN] name comes up. It's like, yeah that's me"* (2-6, ll.562-563). Many of the above quotes represent positive reactions towards the brand. One participant made the point that negative comments about BN affected her/him: *"[...] bagging [BN] is bagging you"* (2-6, l.672). Another saw the brand as a relationship partner: *"[...] it is that employer employee relationship to a large extent, [but also] I love [BN], I am very proud to work for [BN]"* (1-4, ll.693-697). In line with the relationship metaphor evoked in the previous excerpt, the following quote supports the service-profit chain view of the organisation (Heskett et al. 1994).

I think the relationship I have with the brand is that they provide me with an income, they provide me with a great place to work, I love my job, [...]. And the [relationship] they have with me I like to think of it as good as well. I like to think I do a good job, and I provide a good service for my customers which means I'm providing a good service for [BN] (1-2, ll.668-669;ll.675-677).

This quote suggests, however, that there is a two-way relationship, rather than a linear flow from inside to outside. There is an arrow pointing back from customer to employee.

Finally, some participants viewed the brand only from an external perspective. For example, in one case the respondent's experience as a customer informed her/his view: *"My only experience [as a customer at BN] in a [retail outlet] when I opened my first account, was not good"* (1-9, ll.864-865). Another participant viewed the brand through a customer's experience:

I was listening to the radio and the DJ had gone into the [BN]; they're not [a BN] customer, [but] they'd gone into [a BN retail outlet] [...] and they were talking about this you know unsolicited because they'd walked into this brand and [the staff were] saying 'Hi, welcome to the [BN], what can we help you with today?' [...] and I was quite chuffed, that unsolicited, this DJ was talking about this fabulous service (1-7, ll.905-911).

How the participants perceived the brand through the eyes of those external to it became in some cases a way to perceive the meaning of the brand: *"Perhaps being inside it's a bit hard to [...] but I just kind of feel that's what the brand means to us, what other people outside perceive the brand to be"* (1-2, ll.496-497). The brand comes, therefore, a reflection or mirror of an external view.

One participant viewed the brand from both internal and external perspectives:

I think it's probably the same for me but with maybe slightly different balance because you know I see the guts, I know how many firewalls we've got, how paranoid we are, security, all those things because I see it (1-7, ll.784-786).

The internal brand is represented metaphorically as the inner part of a body, which represent the security devices the company used to protect its products and processes. Perceiving the brand as both an employee and a customer was also evident.

The issue of what is actually being sold is also raised. For some participants the brand represents the product but for others it is the brand that is being sold: *"[...] when you sit with the client itself, it's all about selling [BN], it's not the product it's the [BN] and the value from [BN] itself"* (1-8, ll.121-122). Thus for this participant the brand seems to displace or overshadow the products being sold.

There was also a sense that the brand did not always reflect the employee's reality: e.g. *"[...] the [BN] is a kind of a brand up here, but when you actually deal with people you're dealing down here somewhere aren't you"* (1-9, ll.854-855), so there's sometimes a dislocation. There was also evidence that participants in some

departments were not always conscious of the brand, or were more conscious of the brand when dealing with clients: “[...] *when I talk to external customer[s] I’m more aware of the brand because I represent the [organisation]*” (1-6, ll.781-782). However, another perspective was that the brand was a reality for all employees, not just those dealing with customers, and whether the employee is conscious of the brand’s effect or not:

I think all of my, everything we do, all the job, independent of what we [are] doing [...] we [are] front line [...] we [are] not front line, brand kind of affect your job; you may not be conscious of that [...] we have [the strapline], and you want to be [the strapline] all the time when you do your job” (1-6, ll.813-816).

The brand is represented here as having a reality that is separate from the perceptions of others. Another view was provided in relation to engagement: “*So we’re bringing it back to engaging not just with the customer; it can work in reverse [...]. And that to me means the whole the brand*” (2-1, ll.705-714). The brand also becomes a facilitator of relationships: “[...] *you can go beyond being professional and form those really close bonds [...]. And I think that that is probably something that we’re aloud to do via the brand*” (1-8, ll.367-373). The brand as relationship facilitator is a feature also suggested by Brodie et al. (2006).

When considering the **brand, self, internal and/or external actors** and **other brands**, one of the main narratives which re-emerges is that the brand is special:

I’m glad I don’t work for [a competing brand] because I felt like a number just walking in [...]. We treat them as a person, an individual, not ‘Oh it’s another number’; it’s another customer to serve, oh what am I going to tag onto this person” (1-8, ll.1003-1006).

Two aspects of this narrative are ironic. First, it is ironic that the participant accessed her/his perceptions about BN by remembering being a customer at another brand’s

retail outlet. Thus, the brand is associated here with an external view. Second, it is ironic because the participant criticised the other brand's use of tag lines, a common selling technique, and yet BN uses the very same method on its front line. It is as if these ordinary business practices, which are associated with making sales and therefore profit, is somehow excused or better handled in BN. Then there was the story about an incident which occurred and which traumatised the staff in a particular branch. The participant recounting that incident made the following comment:

[After an incident that affected my team] my whole weekend was about looking after my people [...] helping them through one of the toughest periods that they would ever experience, and so now, I'm not saying that I wouldn't have acted the exact same way had I worked for another organisation, but maybe I wouldn't have" (2-6, ll.620-626).

Again, in order to express her/his perceptions about the brand the participant projects her/his experience into another situation. Another participant speculated that if s/he went to another brand s/he didn't know if s/he could change brands as a customer. Again, the participant perceives her/himself as a customer in relation to the brand. In relation to being out in public, again the brand is perceived as superior. One participant mentioned that s/he would be embarrassed to say s/he worked for another well known brand which at that time did not have a good reputation: *"I'm quite pleased to say I work for [BN] but I wouldn't be pleased to say I work for [another well known brand] so, at parties I'm quite pleased"* (1-7, ll.858-859). However, the opposite view was also evidenced; i.e. that BN was not necessarily special:

If you suddenly had to work for [a competing brand] [...] would you be sitting down like this talking about how good [the competing brand] was, as opposed to the other [brands], putting the same sorts of things out because you're being loyal to your employee, not the brand? (1-7, ll.1079-82).

In this case the employee (the organisation?) and the brand are separated and the phenomenon of loyalty is generalised.

Overall, by focusing on the brand, self and internal and/or external actors, the complexity of the brand experience starts to become apparent. Inside and outside views of the brand, authentication of and being authenticated by the brand, construction of and construction by the brand, consciousness and connectedness of the brand, and brand roles are narrative threads which are all apparent in this section. Considering the brand alongside other brands, provides more evidence for the employee perception that the brand is special.

4.2.9 Brand, Organisation and Other

When considering the **brand, organisation and internal and/or external actors**, what constitutes the brand is again evidenced: *“It’s people that matter [...]; people make the brand”* (1-5, ll.976-980). The perception that people make the brand puts internal actors in a powerful position. This excerpt also suggests that there is alignment between brand and organisation, through people. Another participant suggested that employees contributed to the brand: *“[...] we all contribute to the brand through our values and the [organisation’s] values”* (1-4, ll.501-502). This quote suggests that the contribution is made directly through personal values and also indirectly through the organisation’s values. Still another perspective was that people in the organisation were the brand, i.e. synonymous with, rather than makers of, the brand. When considering management, the top-down view of value sharing is again evidenced: *“Values are shared top-down, from the GM; management are schooled about the brand”* (1-4, ll.376-377).

One narrative thread is that the brand is associated with location: *“I know the [organisation’s] brand is very strong in [this region] because that’s the home base for the [organisation]”* (1-3, ll.555-556). Thus brand strength was attributed in this case with regional alignment. However, another participant pointed out that the organisation

was no longer nationally owned but had gone off shore. That historical association was still evident nonetheless. Another view of brand strength was that the organisation provided strength to the brand: “[...] *that name [BN] is held in good regard around the country because of the strength of the [organisation]*” (2-1, ll.730-732). Furthermore, one participant suggested more specifically how the organisation supports the brand: “*So your processes actually support the brand and that’s reflected in the feedback from external customers*” (1-6, ll.681-682). A more negative view of the relationship between the organisation and brand was also expressed: “[...] *the organisation is trying to maintain the reputation that the brand has and sometimes it doesn’t always get it*” (2-5, ll.586-587). This excerpt suggests that the organisation’s role is in part to maintain the brand’s reputation.

Another perspective was to view the brand as it was expressed in the external marketing communications designed for external actors. A notable comment was that one of the central characters used in the external advertising campaign was not the organisation: “[*The advertising personality*] *is fun, [s/he’s] not the [organisation]; s/he’s a customer*” (1-7, ll.802-803). And yet elsewhere, the advertising personality was associated or equated with the brand: “*It is like having [the advertising personality] as the external brand that you see on the adverts for the customer, and the managers are like the internal people that can make the difference to us*” (1-4, ll.881-884). Furthermore, in this excerpt an external-internal view is suggested.

Whether or not people are constituted in their lives beyond organisational boundaries and influences by the brand is evidenced in the following statement:

There’s actually a question in a survey that they have to clients and they ask our clients you know could you imagine a world without the [BN].
 (Interviewer: What do you think of that question?) [...] I thought it was a bit strange, bizarre [...] but then again, you get [...] a small amount of clients who actually say, you know, ‘Couldn’t have done that without you’,

and it's more about, it's more about us as individuals rather than the organisation as a whole (2-2, ll.406- 416).

What is notable here is that the effect of the organisation is downplayed and the individuals are presented as the vital link between brand and external consumers. In contrast, another view was that the brand is associated with teamwork: “[...] *the whole corporate brand and being part of the team*” (1-4, l.707). This tension between being an individual and being in a team is a common narrative. Some participants attributed management with the role of having a lot of influence over whether people believed in the brand or not. For example, one participant described how after a change of management, *“For a time period we lost a lot of staff because of people’s result of not believing in the brand”* (1-4, ll.794-795). Management also has some good effect: e.g. *“[The GM] and the senior management team are happy for us to put in a good forty hour week [...] they want you to go home and be happy at home”* (1-5, ll.345-348). These narrative threads link into a more substantial narrative about the role of management.

When considering the **brand, organisation, internal and/or external actors** and **other brands** and/or **organisations**, the narrative of being special is further extended. For one participant, the people who work for BN are again paramount:

[BN is different because] of different things but [...] the one that is strong for me is that people who [work] for [BN] [...], you have to have the right people working for you and you have to connect with them as well and you have to make sure, you have can have technology, [...] but you can offer good service, good profit [...] but if you don’t have people, people to promote, people to, not just sell it because it sounds like [...], but the things comes after that and looking after the customer, making sure they have excellent customer service (2-3, ll.774-781)

Here the distinction between selling and customer care. Another view was that BN was not susceptible to some of the issues faced by other similar organisations. There was

discussion about other organisations making their employees redundant, but BN was going to be different (2-6, ll.399-407)⁴ BN was also perceived as special in the way it was described as more than just a regular organisation of its kind: “(*Interviewer: [...] what are the values of the [organisation’s] brand?*) *I think our technology and innovation puts us streets ahead of the others. We become the [organisation] of choice rather than just another [organisation] people choose*” (1-6, ll.557-562). It was also deemed special because of its history and community presence and because it was perceived as being more competitive than other brands. Having an open hierarchy was another reason provided for BN’s distinction: “[...] *the fact that [the previous GM] personally went when he left and said goodbye to each person [...] I mean I worked for [another organisation overseas] for twenty years; I’d never met the [GM]*” (1-5, ll.890-893). The perception that BN was special was also put down to being an emotional reaction:

[...] it is an emotional thing when you get in, in some organisations you’re in you do your two years you’re out, and you move around [...]; that’s more than just a normal it job, so there’s something more than just these things that keeps me here (1-7, ll.1144-1149).

Thus being special is linked to staff retention. Another perspective was that the external advertising reflected the special (fun) culture of BN:

Yeah, I actually feel [...] the brand also has got a fun, there’s some, difficult to say, but the whole [advertising personality] advertisements we see as well, it’s not [...] like [a competing brand campaign which is] about the other [brands] and ‘we will conquer them’, and, with [BN] it’s more about ourselves and our selling (1-7, ll.744-748).

⁴ The study was conducted at a time when local and global economies were sliding into a severe recession.

This statement seems ironic in light of the angst that has at times been displayed about selling and the way selling is elevated, denied or transformed through the concept of engagement. Overall, the reasons that were given to explain why BN was deemed special, create a rich and competing view of this issue. Lastly, BN was deemed special from a customer service perspective:

[...] if I was a customer, I would trust something that the employees themselves trust so, I mean, I've worked at previous [organisations] and I had a friend who at one time told me that he wouldn't [be a customer] at any of the [organisations] he'd worked with before" (1-7, ll.685-688).

Thus having trust in the brand and organisation (as an external customer as well as an employee) engenders trust in customers.

Overall, by focusing on the brand, self and internal and/or external actors, the complexity of the brand experience starts to become apparent. Inside and outside views of the brand, authentication of and being authenticated by the brand, construction of and construction by the brand, consciousness and connectedness of the brand, and brand roles are narrative threads which are all apparent in this section. When considering the brand, self and other brands and/or organisations, and also internal and/or external actors, the narrative of being special can be considered from various perspectives and different contexts (e.g. from an historical view, as an employee, through customer service).

4.2.10 Brand, Self and Organisation

This section exemplifies the construction of the **brand** along with **self** and **organisation**. Alignment emerges as a dominant narrative thread. For instance, some participants reported that their personal values and the brand's values were aligned: "[...] they mirror each other if you look at my personal values versus the [organisation] brand" (1-4, ll.473-474). In other cases, however, the question of alignment was seen as a more complex one:

I suppose I don't think they do [...] it's hard to look at [BN] as having, its working out what values they are. And [...] because it's sort of an unknown because [BN] is all of us, I suppose my values are more important than [BN's] because [...] I stand for [BN] so it's my values that stand up for that and not the [organisation's]. The [organisation's] values, I mean I don't know how you could interpret that, so I find that's difficult. (2-4, ll.151-156).

This statement privileges the self over the organisation and brand and sides with the brand over the organization, while at the same time denuding the brand of any values of its own. The self authenticates the brand.

Other participants perceived that the organisation and brand were one and the same. Another view was that the brand was not visible because of the role the person played in the organisation: *"I just can't see [the] brand; I'm a [support role]"* (1-2, l.719). This view was corroborated by other statements. There was also evidence that the brand acted as a facilitator; e.g. the brand was perceived as providing permission for gaps to exist between personal and organisation values: *"I'm not necessarily going to achieve all the standards that are set that are expected of me but at least I know I can you know go home and sleep at night"* (2-2, ll.851-853). Furthermore, the brand is represented in this excerpt in singular and plural forms. The brand was also presented as a relationship facilitator in the case of a relationship breakdown. The participant in question described the way one of the other managers used the system to rectify the situation: *"So I think we have a system in place you get it fixed as soon as it's broken I think"* (2-3, ll.828-829). In this narrative thread it is not clear whether the manager represents the brand or the organisation and whether the brand is represented by the manager or the system. It is as though the two become blurred. Furthermore, another participant represented the brand as a dictatorial force:

I perceived the change in management to be the lack of brand and through my fault I stopped believing in the brand for a time period. Strangely

enough the brand has dictated to my management the way the culture of [BN] is and it sorted itself out (1-4, ll.791-794).

Brand and management are therefore separated rather than merged in this narrative thread and brand is represented as the stronger actor in that the brand “dictated” the BN culture to the management.

Some participants perceived a definite gap between the organisation and brand and self while others saw them as being intertwined: “(*Interviewer: Do you see the organisation and the brand as the same thing or separate?*) *Because I’ve always said we’re the brand as well. So [...]. (Interviewer: So do you see the three things as being [...]) Intertwined*” (2-4, ll.113-120). In another case, there was some confusion about separation and integration, or sameness: “[*We’re*] *separate. Before, I was sort of part of it. Yeah we were right together, the whole three of us together [...] I’m not quite sure which way you look at it*” (2-4, ll.742-744). The phrase “*the whole three of us*” is suggestive of being both the same as, or joined, and different from, or separate. For some participants the brand was less important inside the organisation: e.g. “[...] *the brand’s sort of important but it becomes less important because you’re in here and it’s working*” (1-5, ll.908-909). This comment alludes to internal and external brand perspectives.

Narratives threads which also emerged from the metaphors some participants employed in order to better explain their views of the brand in relation to themselves and the organisation. A number of participants placed the self in the middle and the brand was the external, outer ring or external facing, while the organisation was depicted as the internal workings:

I’m in the middle [of a ball], that’s me doing, coming in with my things and thoughts and passions and trust, and I guess the brand is the outer coating [...] you know all the basically the values and everything are sort of rolling around in it (2-2, ll.761-764).

Another participant used the metaphor of a picture, whereby s/he was one piece in the puzzle, to depict the brand: e.g. *“The organisation would be all the pieces of the puzzle, and the overall picture [...] of you know what we’re ending up displaying, would be the brand”* (2-5, ll.412-413). A few participants describe the brand as a vehicle, or something they could ride. One in particular presents a paradoxical view of the organisation, brand and self:

[...] it’s like driving a car [...] it’s like a perfect combo, it’s like, not an old taxi it’s not, you know your vehicle when you drive it it’s something that suits you (Interviewer: So you’re obviously the driver and what’s the car?) [...] it could be the brand that’s right and the machine the system is the machine [...] (Interviewer: Where is the organisation in all that?) That would be the probably the attributes that are driving the whole process (2-3, ll.938-952).

There is an interplay between a more integrated view (one car) and a more fragmented view (each has her/his own car). The brand, organisation and self were also described as a sports team: *“I guess we’re the organisation, and we’re showing the brand off”* (2-5, ll.372-373). Lastly, one participant suggested that the brand was a cup, the organisation a sofa, and s/he described how s/he and the others in the group were sitting together on the sofa. In this view the brand seems to symbolise the social network which exists between the employees while the organisation provides a supportive structure for the same. It should be said that these metaphors in some cases were collectively created by more than one member of the focus group in question. In other cases, the metaphor was created by an individual group member.

In summary, when considering the brand, organisation and self, a complex array of views pertaining to how these three actors relate to, align with, and/or combine with or subsume each other become apparent. The brand is represented in various positions and roles as are the organisation and self.

4.2.11 Brand, Organisation, Self and Other

In this final section, I consider mutual imbrications of all the various actors who have been the focus of this first part of the Findings chapter. This section relinquishes some of the more complex views of the brand as it relates to or is related to the organisation, self and other actors. The narrative threads which emerge largely present differing perspectives of the brand in relation to these other actors. I start by considering the **brand, organisation, self and internal actors**. These brand narratives help to define the brand as it is viewed from an employee's perspective of the self and other internal actors.

First, the brand was seen as a facilitator:

I know that [BN is] number one in customer services and [is a] technology leader [so] we get business, new business in particular; you can ring up somebody and you get referrals, you can ring somebody up and they want to see you, so we've got a good story to tell" (1-5, 1024-1028).

The participant seems to suggest that the story is a way that the brand values facilitate business. Another view seemed to privilege the role of the employee vivifying the values of the organisation/brand:

[...] we are probably the organisation. So our values are, it's not what their, it's intangible, we have got [BN], what is it? It's actually us, so we are the values of that, so then the [organisation] may put out its visions and goals, but you know their visions and goals [...] but it's us that do that so we are the organisation's, we are the values (2-4, ll.80-85).

This excerpt reveals the difficulty participants sometimes had when searching for an explanation of how the three actors, brand, organisation and self, related to one another. For another participant, the brand was associated with structure: "*[The brand is associated with structure and by structure I mean] it's a vision or a statement that we have to follow, the goal; the [organisation's] goal*" (2-2, ll.816-817). The organisation's

goal is only part of the structure, and part of the structure, the vision, may also belong to the brand. The brand was also downplayed as only a selling device: *“I work for an [organisation], I work for [BN]; brand is just something that they use to sell that [organisation]”* (1-3, ll.825-828). In this excerpt the organisation and brand are different, but others perceived the brand and organisation as synonymous:

[...] when the customer comes in they see me or [another customer representative] [...]; it's who they see that's who they perceive the brand is, so our professionalism has to come through in how we think act feel or present ourselves, wear their uniform, and so that we are the [organisation], we are the brand, even though it's just behind us (1-8, ll.344-349).

Here, the participant perceives employees as both the same as the brand (from a customer perspective) and as separate from the brand (from an employee perspective). The self (employee) is presented as authenticator in the following excerpt: *“If the brand just gets you in here looking at the place and feeling good about it, but it's not, you're in here and you don't live it then it doesn't matter, the brand means nothing actually”* (1-5, ll.904-906). This next excerpt is paradoxical in that the brand is constructed out of a sense of nothing; the customer (external actor) is implied when the concept of selling is used: *“Without us there is nothing and without the brand, well you're not going to sell much, there's nothing there; we are the three of us”* (2-4, ll.124-126). The final statement, which declares that all three actors (organisation, brand and self) *“are the three of us”*, suggests that they are both separate and also together.

A key excerpt which reflects a dislocated view of the brand was expressed by one of the participants:

[...] we're never exposed to [other departments] unless we go into a [retail outlet] and we're on this side of the counter, not on that side of the counter, so you never really get an idea of how they feel, and then they're never

going to get an idea of how we feel [...] so how can the brand, it's difficult to think of the brand encompassing us all; we're just a company" (1-9, ll.907-912).

For this participant, knowing and being known become central narrative threads in her/his version of the brand. Other participants commented that the brand was not visible from certain perspectives: "*(Interviewer: I'm just trying to figure out how you see the brand because you kept talking about the organisation). Being inside the organisation, perhaps we can't make that distinction* (1-7, ll.1007-1013). This narrative thread of visibility is linked to evidence the brand was perceived differently from different perspectives: e.g.

I can go for ages and ages without thinking about the brand. I upgrade systems so users can use them properly and they can do their job. Effectively, so it's purely, when I think about that I don't think about [BN] and some of the work I do has a lot more visibility externally. Like [lists products] that sort of stuff has a lot more visibility with [the BN] brand, so for me it comes down to what work I'm doing as to how much I'm thinking about the brand (1-6, ll.694-700).

Another participant changed her/his perspective after a major incident at work:

I think my perspective as a leader and as a manager has changed and that, of course I want [BN] to do well in terms of the shareholders, but my real reasons for being now is more so than ever is to live and breath that brand and for my people to and that is about caring and service and being in the community (2-6, ll.1455-1458).

In this narrative, the participant associates the brand with relationship values and less with meeting bottom-line targets, which I read here as belonging more to the organisation's main goal set. The values which characterise the brand for this participant are "caring", "service" and "community". The perception of family was the main association one long-serving participant made to the brand: "*It's the family aspect*

[that makes the BN culture special] and a lot of the staff did intermarry and I'm one of those staff members and we formed a lot of long term friendships" (1-3, ll.618-619).

The brand for this participant, had constituted her/his entire life. For other participants, the brand was a culture as well as an idea or an image: *"It's almost like it's an image, it's a culture, it's a concept, you know, it's not the specific products we're selling but it's like when people do get a product, they're buying into the image"* (2-5, ll.448-450). The brand is presented here as having constituted this participant's life and the lives of other employees. For another participant, a change in perspective became a change in a negative direction. Her/his view of BN became tarnished between the first and second focus group meeting because of an incident with a person who was being treated badly by others in her/his team. The participant reporting this to the group tried to negotiate the meaning of the incident by allocating it as a department issue rather than an organisational issue, but the participant admitted that it had affected her/his relationship with the brand: *"I definitely think there's a gap there between what [...] I sell as [BN] brand and culture to what has actually happened to this candidate"* (2-6, ll.291-293). The BN culture, while delivered by management as a uniform culture is, in this narrative challenged from the perspective of the employee's experience. Another view of the brand was that it was constituted through acts of communication, such as scripts. The brand was also associated in one or two cases, with being monitored.

The construction of brand in relation to management, whereby management is an enactment, a vivification of the organisation, is also varied. The brand is depicted as a structure:

[The GM] stimulates the brand and makes it, you know, comes up with, you know, what they want us to do and say and be, and [...] performance-wise, I think you're, I think we're responsible really for our own decisions; the brand is just there to I guess, as a structure; we choose to either like it or not or use it or not (2-2, ll.738-742).

The brand here seems to be synonymous with the organisation, and it seems inert, in need of stimulation, and able to be discounted. The internal actors, self included, are predominant. For other participants the managers become the brand, rather than just stimulate it: *“It is pretty much that [office] manager is our brand”* (1-4, ll.835). On the other hand, rather than the manager being the brand, or representing the brand in some way, another view was that the manager somehow prevails over the brand. For example, one participant stated that s/he did not think about the brand much but instead:

I want to work for a good boss, and it’s literally as simple as that. So, but I also want to know that, when I go out that people feel good about [BN] [...]. But when I think about me, all I want to be is happy Monday to Friday” (2-6, ll.577-580).

Thus the brand seems to exist in this excerpt as an external phenomenon.

Finally, the narrative that BN is special is further extended when all four actors are considered together. For instance, one participant told the group about her/his experience working at another organisation of the same type: *“I came from another [organisation] and they tried to make this work but it just doesn’t work for them; it works really, really well here”* (1-5, ll.273-275). For another, the brand somehow assuaged the issue of working in the type of industry this brand represents: *“[...] we’re kind of the pick of the bunch, so I kind of cringe and say I work for [in this industry], but I’m quite happy to say I work for [BN]”* (1-7, ll.860-862). Thus, BN is elevated as being superior enough to excuse the type of industry to which it belongs. This final excerpt expresses, very succinctly, what it was that this participant saw as making BN different: *“The brand and the culture and the people are what makes us different”* (1-3, ll.594). Being different, unique, special is represented here in a succinct yet holistic way.

Overall, this section presents the most complex view of the various actors which have featured in this overview of the focus group findings. These narratives position

the self in various combinations with the organisation, brand and other actors, thereby creating a complex view of organisational and branded identity which suggests that the brand is predominantly constructed in discordant ways in relation to the other actors and vice versa.

4.3 Summary

In this first part of the findings I have provided evidence for various mutual imbrications of organisation, self, brand, and other (actors). By teasing out the various combinations of actors I also brought to light the main narrative threads which in turn become the main narratives that occur across the individual interviews. The main narratives which have informed this discussion thus far are listed in **Table 4.2**.

Table 4.2: Summary of Focus Group Narratives

Narratives	S-Oth	O-Oth	B-Oth	O-S	B-S	B-O	O-S-Oth	B-O-Oth	B-S-Oth	B-S-O	B-S-O-Oth
Individual vs team	x	x					x	x	x	x	
Shared values	x	x					x	x			
External view (self)	x										
Internal view (self)	x										
Internal-external flow	x	x					x	x	x		
Alignment	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Sales	x	x					x	x	x		
Belief	x			x			x		x	x	
Knowing		x	x	x			x	x			x
Belonging		x					x	x			
Special	x	x	x				x	x	x		x
Hierarchy		x						x			x
Engagement		x	x				x	x			
Management		x		x	x		x	x	x		x
Org. boundaries		x					x	x	x		
BN person			x						x		x
External view (brand)			x					x	x		x
Brand strength			x		x						
Relationships			x	x							
Constituted by			x			x	x	x	x	x	x
Brand role			x						x	x	x
Brand value			x		x						
Int.-ext. view (brand)					x			x		x	
Int. view (brand)					x						
Org. role							x				
Front line vs back office							x	x			x
Change							x	x			

I chose to present the findings in this way in order to focus the reader's attention on the main actors and how their interactions are implicit in the formation of the narratives which are expressed not only in the focus group interviews but also by individuals in the third and final phase. I have focused only on those narratives which have a voice across all three phases, as one of my aims has been to show the ways employees construct a service brand, in this case, BN, as complex, contestable, and poly-vocal. The table also shows that the narratives which are carried through to the next section have enough critical mass to be considered as being socially constructed as well as being diversely expressed. I will show in the next section how this complexity is sustained even when the focus is on individuals rather than across group discussions. I also decided to use this method to present my findings, in order to move away from simply providing themes. Instead I wanted to show how narrative analysis provides different views of the text to be presented, but still in a methodical and trustworthy way.

4.4 Individual Interviews

This section outlines the main findings which emerged from the fifteen individual interviews that made up the last phase of the research. The individual interviews were based around the following interview protocols: *Reflection* on aspects of the group interviews (either what others had said or what the interviewee had said); *Discussion* on the degree to which the brand has facilitated the interviewee in her/his position at BN; *Invitation* to illustrate and then discuss the relationship between their 'selves', the organisation and the brand. To ensure anonymity participants are referred to as 'P' plus an identifying number, i.e. P2, P6, P8, P10, P12, P16, P26, P27, P31, P35, P36, P38, P42, P50 and P51.

The findings are divided into two categories: 1. Collective Narratives and 2. Individual Perceptions. In the first part, themes that were discussed by the majority of participants are outlined. In the second part, individual perceptions of self, organisation

and brand are explored both as illustrations and interpretations. One aim of this section is to bring together the main narratives which emerged from across all three phases. Another aim of this section is to compare and contrast the verbal and visual narratives which were generated at this final stage of data generation. Overall, participants generated similar narratives, so there is congruence, but there is also dissonance between participants' narratives. What emerges, however, is the conflict as well as the agreement which occurred within participant interview streams, and between their verbal and visual narratives. These results, therefore, display the sort of complexity others (e.g. Humphreys and Brown 2002; Hopkinson 2003) have also found in studies about organisations.

4.4.1 Collective Narratives

Special

The superiority or specialness of BN compared to competing brands was a common narrative that travelled across all three phases. For most of the interviewees in the third phase, the brand was superior in the way it valued its staff. For example, P6 pointed out that BN was not at that stage getting rid of any staff, despite the recession, unlike some of its competitors. Even one of the most skeptical participants, P51, spoke about BN being a better employer overall, despite the general industry getting tougher and more profit driven. However, P51 also said it had been more caring in the past and the atmosphere was changing. Furthermore, several of the participants commented either on their own longevity within the company and desire to stay long term, or on the tendency for others to not leave or come back after leaving. P42, however, noted that some people had not liked the organisational culture: "*There are people that have been to other companies that they really like and come in and they don't like it. It works both ways*" (3-5, ll.725-726). However, based on the narratives generated in this phase, these people seem to be the exception rather than the rule. Most comments are about people who end up coming back to BN.

As well as being a caring organisation, other comments about BN's superiority included innovation and superior service. Moreover, P26 stated that BN went beyond just being a financial institution: "*The bare minimum service—any [financial services provider] can do that*" (3-8, ll.68-69). According to P31, having higher service standards was a reason for BN's superiority and this was linked to providing better customer service than other brands. Differences were not only noted between organisations but also between people within the organisation, notably outsiders who had come to work at BN: "*[P]eople from other [organisations] are less inclined initially to help clients out, or help other people out. It's more me myself and I [...] But as they get in the culture, they become more of a helper*" (3-8, ll.248-249). This participant's comments suggest that the culture at BN is stronger than individual variances in service attitude or cultural persuasion. Overall, what is surprising about this narrative is that even the more cynical interviewees (e.g. P51), spoke about BN as having something special or being better than other organisations. 'Special', was a narrative that was strong in each of the three phases.

The Brand Culture

Connected to the previous narrative, 'Special', is the brand culture, which is made up of certain values. In fact, having a superior brand is really an extension of how the brand culture is depicted. Thus, descriptions of values perceived to be attributed to the brand overlapped with comments about the brand being superior or somehow special.

Having a customer service orientation was identified by several interviewees as being an important aspect of the brand culture at BN (e.g. P27, P35, P42, P26, P36). In addition, being progressive (linked to technology) was identified as being an important value (e.g. P36, P16, P8, P42). Loyalty, integrity, honesty and security were also identified. P10 described the brand as being associated with "*old fashioned manners*" (3-6, l.479). P8 associated the brand with a Western culture (as opposed to her/his own culture) and viewed values as a map: "*You have to actually use the right*

map in the right area" (3-12, l.158). Having a community presence was also identified, as was family (e.g. P51, P38). P42 perceived the then current advertising campaign as being reflective of family values. Caring for staff was also noted. The brand was also recognised by some participants as being both a local and national brand, and by others as ultimately an Australasian brand (but more frequently the former).

However, gaps were also identified. P51 identified a change in the culture. P8's story about a colleague having to change her/his name in order to evoke respect, P6's narrative about bullying occurring within a specific team and tension around sales, highlighted the presence of value gaps. In addition, P38 expressed the view that gaps occurred when the customer's view was not considered sufficiently enough. By far the largest gap identified by various participants in this final stage was the tension around sales. In addition, some participants' comments suggested that BN's values were merely generic and not somehow special to BN (e.g. P31, P8, P2 and P38).

In summary, participants had a positive view of the BN culture. The overriding finding was that the organisation cared about and fostered growth in its employees; some participants went so far as to say the organisation was like a family. For some, the brand and organisational values were synonymous, while for others there was some difference. The brand was clearly associated with community and innovation. Threats to and opportunities for the BN's special culture were seen as coming from both the global economic environment, and also the increasingly multi-cultural (and multi-generational) environment within the organisation.

Alignment

Alignment⁵ of personal and brand values also emerged as a collective narrative. A number of interviewees in Phase Three said they would not work for BN if their

⁵ Alignment originates from the C17 French word *aligner*, from *à ligne* or 'into line', and the literal meaning in English is to place or arrange in a straight line or in correct relative positions (Oxford Concise English Dictionary). According to the same source, it can also mean to ally oneself to something, to come together in alliance.

personal values were not aligned to the organisation and/or brand values.

Furthermore, some commented that people who were not aligned would either leave the organisation, or would be moved into other roles within the company: *“I guess it’s just common philosophies, like honesty, integrity and loyalty. I think it’s, if you don’t share those personality traits, then I guess you’re not really going to be an employee for very long”* (3-9, l.440). That people could be moved into other roles suggests that different value sets may inhabit different roles or departments within the organisation. In addition, P31 commented that a lack of personal buy-in could lead to a feeling of isolation (when reflecting on the excerpt about the brand not being all-encompassing).

The question here is whose values are whose. P2 said that it was a mix of brand and personal values that were reflected in how s/he treated clients: *“I think we will see the brand; you sort of have in the back of your mind what the role is and what it entails, so I think it’s just combining the two”* (3-11, ll.23-24). P50, who perceived that s/he had matured as a person with the brand, felt her/his values were the same as those of the brand (and the organisation), and the brand values had become hers/his along the way. Some participants, like P26, projected a value or values onto the brand, which they saw in themselves: *“[T]he brand is about helping people [...] I like helping people”* (3-8, ll.177-210). S/he linked this quality (being helpful) to the special nature of BN in her/his comment about people from other organisations not being as helpful. For P38, the organisation’s values *“have to reach mine”* (3-9, l.513).

Alignment, while still an important narrative in the third phase, is not as prominent as it was in the first two phases because other similar, or linked, narratives such as ‘Engagement’, gaps in alignment (‘Sales’) and personal alignment (‘The BN Person’) become more prominent. It may also be that while alignment is not referred to overtly; however, it becomes a powerful meta-narrative which underpins these other narratives.

Sales

Where there is alignment there is also potential for misalignment (or value gaps). One of the most notable value gap narratives related to the issue of sales, or reaching certain profit related targets. The story so far is that BN is a special organisation (or is it), which has a culture made up of certain values which create a unique culture and brand. Alignment of personal values with brand and/or organisational values (depends upon whether brand and organisation are aligned as well, and how brand and organisation are depicted (i.e. as one or separate or intertwined). Now the harsh reality of sales interrupts this narrative of uniqueness and caring. However, the various participants negotiated the issue of selling is the focus of this section.

For some (e.g. P51) making a profit is the bottom line of any organisation, particularly a service provider such as BN. Not only is it the bottom line, but it is central to their existence, particularly from a shareholder perspective. P51's comments were perhaps the most absolute of the fifteen interviewees; however, s/he was not alone in her/his sentiments, as others were also of this opinion: e.g. (P38)

Primarily, though, the organisation is a business and need to make a profit. I'm quite glad it's not actually my job to determine what kind of level of service has to suffer if you want to make a profit (3-9, ll.521-523).

One participant saw her/his job as more than just performing as a financial services representative. However, on the other hand s/he also admitted that in the end the bottom line was the dollar. Others, such as P50, had turned away from focusing on sales:

[S]ince being involved in [an incident...] I've taken more of a, the growth of the business is important but that will happen if those people [the people in her/his team] are satisfied and, and feel more aligned to the brand [than] I do, and it's about it being more part of their lives, and that part's just gone

[out] the window in terms of that's our sole focus for being [here] from nine to five (3-2, ll.143-149).

Her/his view was that if you focus on people rather than sales, the sales will take care of themselves. A similar view was that if you had a customer orientation, the sales would come: "*Personally, when I was [role], you would do what the customer wanted and then you would do the sales*" (3-3, ll.609-610).

The reasoning in both comments is that sales will come anyway as long as people come first.

Another way of negotiating the issue of selling was to contextualise it within the broader aim of the company to care for its clients: e.g.

If I didn't like the brand, like the [organisation], then I wouldn't be happy promoting it, selling it. I think [BN] actually cares about their people, about their clients; we're not there just to make them for as much money as we can and then cast them aside. (3-8, ll.119-122).

For P26, there was no separation between being a person who sold a lot of products and being part of a team that looked after the customer. However, for others, there clearly was a difference and this participant's views tended to be the exception rather than the rule.

On the whole, the sales orientation was seen as a negative change and is therefore linked to the next narrative and section titled 'Change'. For some participants, having a sales orientation, rather than a customer focus, was not aligned with the brand culture. For example, P27 was of the view that the brand had nothing to do with money but was instead a "*people thing*" (3-15, l.698). P10's view was that the drive to sell was not in line with what the brand was all about, i.e. people before profit. S/he went as far to say that the push to sell had resulted in a lower quality product:

They'll do [selling] to get their brownie points to get their rewards. And a lot of them never even think that it might fall over. That just doesn't come

into their thinking at all, that just goes somewhere else. But often we get a file and look at it and right from day one it's not the [business activity] that the [BN] brand really wanted (3-6, ll.35-39).

Others thought that the pressure to sell had subsequently put pressure on the brand. A similar view was that the selling orientation had had an impact on values within the organisation: “[T]hey have pushed too much on sales and the frontline and the customers are not quite happy with it, and I think that is where the values have changed” (3-7, ll.420-421). Another view was that the sales orientation was not a good cultural fit (i.e. it was viewed as an American approach) and in fact jarred with the local culture which valued a less proactive, more relational approach: “We’ve started to try and just sell instead of talking” (3-5, l.144). P42’s view was that the sales push was coming from the top, but there was too much emphasis on the sales figures rather than how people had obtained these figures. Similarly, P51’s view was that the organisation should listen to customers rather than try to manipulate them.

Linked to sales orientation and cultural fit was the view that some of the cultural groups that now worked in the organisation (a reflection of the changing demographics of the local culture), were more aligned with a selling approach. I think this part of the selling orientation narrative is linked to not only alignment and cultural fit but also change and a tendency for people to either embrace change and difference or relegate that which is different to the margins. P26’s way of negotiating around those s/he perceived within the organisation as having perhaps too much of a sales orientation was to identify them as people who came from other organisations rather than now belonging to BN.

To summarise, in order to negotiate the issue of selling, some participants either relegated it to the margins, claiming it did not fit the dominant culture they associated with the brand. Others embraced it as an activity the brand condoned; therefore it was part of the brand culture. Others separated the brand from the business of profit

generation, seeing it as an activity which would just happen as long as people were prioritised. Others actually rejected the selling culture by switching roles within the organisation all together.

Change

Narratives about change were numerous in the final phase. This section reports on these narratives from various angles, namely from cultural, leadership/management style, organisational and brand perspectives on change. Change was considered as both a positive and negative phenomenon. Change was also held (sometimes paradoxically) in tension with the historicity and perceived constancy of BN.

First, cultural change was attributed to the changing demographic environment of both customers and employees. The change towards a selling culture was linked by a few interviewees to this cultural change: e.g. *“It’s hard to explain, but they can get off side with the customer because the customer feels like they’re being sold something”* (3-5, ll.471-472). BN was considered by some as a brand with a long history. One of the interviewees who had a long history with the brand and valued its historical presence viewed cultural change as a positive occurrence which was enabling the organisation to reach new market segments:

[...] those people working in the [organisation] and also introduced people from those cultures join the [organisation], and borrow money and do business [...] so the [organisation] has benefited. It has opened its brand from you might say purely a Caucasian outlook into now a world outlook of people from all races (3-14, ll.165-169).

This participant was not worried, as others were, about different cultural influences influencing the existing value system because s/he had faith in the training system the organisation employed.

However, P12 and others were concerned about the change towards a more aggressive selling culture:

[...] this sales culture is really turning out product and I'm not sure that everybody who buys the products these days are buying the right product or the best product. Because in some cases it's a matter of attaining the sales targets by the person who is selling (3-14, ll.200-203).

Two participants in particular (P16 and P10) thought ethics had been compromised with the growing push to meet sales targets, and others (e.g. P51 and P12) were concerned that the brand could be tarnished by what was occurring.

This narrative stream (a changing cultural environment) also threads into the narrative of generational change (or vice versa). Some participants (e.g. P36 and P12) were aware of the effect of Gen Y on the organisation. Paradoxically, P36 noted that Gen Y employees did not seem to display the accepted value system; however, they were just as likely to produce acceptable levels of work compared to those who were outwardly behaving as BN employees. P12, however, linked this generational change with falling levels of loyalty within the company; s/he noted there was more pride in the past while now working at BN was just a job for many of the younger generation. A lack of loyalty was also noted by P42; s/he noted that employees were not as likely as they were in the past to also be customers of the brand.

Whether or not the brand can be easily changed was another narrative thread linked to change. For some, BN is a brand which will not easily be changed (e.g. P12, P2 and P42):

I don't think it would change too much because I don't reckon it can, terribly. [Interviewer: Why is that?] I think because I suppose it's an ingrained, it's such a big thing, I suppose it's so massive [...] the brand itself can't change too much (3-11, ll.309-316).

BN's high profile in the community and sheer strength of force historically were also cited as reasons why it would be difficult to change. However, others thought that the brand already had been changed (but the organisation had not changed). For

example, P10 thought the brand was malleable. P51 was of the view that both brand and organisation had changed; the organisation had put pressure on the brand. While P12 thought the brand could be tarnished (as did P50); P51 used the word 'damaged'.

A number of participants could see that there had been a change from family to corporate image, but paradoxically, some thought that despite the growth and change that had been occurring, the organisation still felt connected: *"It still feels like a small organisation despite the fact that it's grown so big"* (3-8, ll.482-483). P26's comments are linked to the narrative of being known and acknowledged. Similarly, P31 was of the view that the values had not changed despite the brand imagery and logos changing. There was a definite acknowledgement, however, that the organisation was moving towards a more corporatised (as opposed to family) model and this was also linked to a changing management style and also a change in leadership.

Some participants agreed that the management style had changed, but not necessarily in the same way. For example, P42 observed that the management style had become, over time, more collaborative: *"It wasn't as warm and fuzzy stuff that we have now"* (3-5, l.413). On the other hand, P51 noted that the leadership had become more hard-line and profit driven. S/he told a story about when s/he cleaned out her/his house and s/he found some old marketing material. S/he compared the message then with what s/he was experiencing at the time of the interview and s/he noted it was very different, less customer oriented, less caring.

The change in leadership was a narrative which emerged from many of the interviews across all three phases. In Phase Three, the main comments can be divided into two groups. First, one group of participants saw the change in leadership in a positive light: i.e. they either believed in the current management team to make the 'right' decision (one which would not change the status quo), or they saw change as an opportunity to change the status quo. For example P6 thought there was a need for a shake up:

[...] there'll be re-shuffles, and there'll be you know people who may be a little bit I'll say past their use by date [...] I'm just hoping there's a re-vamp, re-jig, re-something, and then it will be fine, but, oh well I think it will be fine, I don't know, it may still carry on (3-4, ll.417-422).

Second, another group of people viewed the change in leadership as a potentially threatening event (e.g. P27, P51).

'Change' is a narrative which overlaps with other narratives such as 'Sales' and 'Management'. This narrative also starts to unravel for the reader how the brand is perceived in light of a changing organisation and environment.

Management

Brand communication and leadership change are narratives which both thread into participant comments about the role of management. One view of management was that they facilitated movement of the brand from the top-down and therefore should themselves have the core values and beliefs (P50, P31). Other participants agreed that communication of values was top-down. Implicit in being top-down is the concept of hierarchy. Top-down implies a certain type of hierarchy whereby there are those on the top and those on the bottom. However, P27 used the term top-down but also said it did not feel like a hierarchy:

The senior management in [BN] are accessible, it is a hierarchy, but it is, the [organisation] it does not feel like that; I can [...] see [the GM] if I really need him to help me on a major [issue] [...]; you couldn't do that anywhere else (3-15, ll.1079-1083).

P27's last comment "you couldn't do that anywhere else" suggests that part of what makes BN special is its open culture. Similarly, P51 described the management structure as flat but also acknowledged a top-down structure. This paradox of hierarchy but no hierarchy is captured best by P6's comment: *"That's the thing, hierarchy is not something I see as [BN]. I know we've got people who are higher up*

and people who are lower down. I've never heard a manager say the word hierarchy" (3-4, ll.553-555). Thus brand communication is considered by most to be top-down, but there is a sense that a flat hierarchy exists. The hierarchy represents the actual structure of the management team and sub teams and so on. Flatness is more the feeling people have about the management structure. Furthermore, this feeling of flatness comes from a sense of being known and knowing others (connectedness):

I think it is a top/bottom kind of thing I think it is driven from the top. [The GM] is a very caring sort of person; it does not matter who you are, what you are, what you are doing, even if you are the lowest person in the [organisation] a cleaner, he would say hello and he would also talk to you as if you are the same similar level and mentality[...] (3-12, ll.246-250).

Others (e.g. P26) also mentioned the importance of being known by those in management. P6 spoke about the importance of having a collaborative management team. Conversely, P38's experience was one of ideas being imposed upon her/him by management:

"[...] we kind of have to deliver on other people's ideas, about the brand, because we've got a marketing department and they tend to do all the marketing and all the planning and all the advertisements, and all that sort of stuff, and when we changed the logo a while ago, it was all kind of marketing, it was kind of enforced on us and we just have to make it happen (3-9, ll.42-47).

However, elsewhere in the interview, P38 was very positive about her/his immediate managers and attributed having a good manager to not feeling dislocated (while reflecting on the excerpt I had shown her/him).

The importance of having a good manager was also emphasised by P27 and P6. In Phase Two, P27 spoke about leaving another organisation because of her/his manager. S/he emphasised the importance of management over all other factors. In

Phase Three, however, her/his view was that it was the brand that kept her/him in her/his position at BN: *“I know the brand’s always there, the brand actually keeps me I suppose feeling good about long term tenure with [BN], [...] so the brand is keeping me here”* (3-15, ll. 678-680). For P27, brand and management at times seem closely connected. Other participants (e.g. P6 and P38) commented that management could affect the way employees felt about the brand. Certainly, P6’s story about an ineffective management situation had, at the time of the interview, led to P6 feeling more distanced from the brand. S/he concluded that individuals could block the BN value system:

[the executive members] do try and instill this and when you meet with them they do make you feel welcome, they do appreciate the honesty, they do seem like they’re very, a lot of integrity and all those things that, you know, the ‘warm fuzzies’ that make [BN], and they do I think try and have that filtered down, but at times I think it’s blocked, but others it filters all the way down to, like in my department absolutely fantastic (3-4, ll. 66-71).

That management plays a role in representing the brand emerged not only from P6’s story but also from the narratives of others in this Third Phase of interviews.

What starts to emerge from this narrative thread is that the way participants perceived the role of management was linked to the way they perceived the organisational structure (whether they perceived it as hierarchical or flat, or both, or imposing or collaborative). Their perceptions of management are also linked to the relationship they perceived management to have with the brand, which is also linked to the ways in which they perceived the brand. In addition to perceptions of hierarchy, the idea of being a BN person and being engaged to the brand are also linked to how management is framed.

The BN Person

Throughout the three phases, a narrative which emerged was that of the BN person. The BN person was described in different ways and this narrative is linked to the narrative of branded identity.

One definition of the BN person was that of long tenure. Long tenure was cited by at least six of the remaining participants as being the main prerequisite or signal that someone was a BN person:

Well, yes for me I have always known people who have been BN people because they've worked there so long. And I've probably met a lot of people even when they've left the [organisation] they've still retained the fact that they were [BN] people (3-14, ll.423-426).

Connected to being a long tenure employee were cases of employees not having worked anywhere but BN - it becomes a family phenomenon: e.g.

We used to have this joke that when I first started in [BN] [organisation], it's like saying, some of the staff were born there, the father was a [manager] and their son was born in the [organisation], went right through; that's what it was like (3-13, ll.187-190).

Thus, in this comment, being a BN person is not only signified by length of employment, but it is also a family phenomenon in the first excerpt and is a phenomenon which extends beyond employment boundaries—the brand, therefore, constitutes the life of the person and her/his family outside the boundary of the organisation.

In addition, the BN person was described as having certain attributes or values. Ironically, these attributes or values were, more often than not, similar to how the interviewees saw themselves. Also, the interviewees, when asked if they considered themselves to be a BN person, on the whole answered yes. In the following excerpt,

the participant (P8) identifies herself/himself as a BN person through the inclusion of the pronoun “we”:

I had somebody at work, I said to her that you do not have the values that some people have; you [are] not [a] [BN] person. And she said to me “Explain to me what [a] [BN] person is?” I said to her well **we** [emphasis added] are very caring, we would not just cut cost and [not] look at just what the impact is, especially on people. The case we were dealing with was on health and safety [...]; the lady was very strict and stuck to the books: “It says this and this you are not entitled to it.” [A BN] person would always look and try and understand before they judge; they do not jump to conclusions (3-12. ll.227-235).

Not adhering strictly to processes is a narrative which emerges not only here, but also in the narrative titled ‘Sales’. Having values that are aligned with the culture of the organisation emerged as a key factor in being a BN person.

Another common interpretation of this term was having the passion and motivation to do more than what was required, which in turn helped to make the BN culture special. The actual qualities listed by people in themselves were not surprising (and could even be described as generic), but what is of interest is the common perception that there is such a person as an BN person, who has something that makes them intrinsically branded as such. Going beyond what the processes say and using discretion, is a narrative which threads through various individual narratives (e.g. P2, P50). Some participants in this Third Phase noted that developing relationships with customers was another way employees could go beyond and therefore be a BN person.

In addition to going beyond what participants perceived the job required, some participants emphasised the importance of alignment in relation to values:

I think [a BN] person has exactly the same values as the [organisation], the same vision. They have a passion for the brand and [... the] end results is

what they are working towards is ultimately the customer; [it] should be not like what we talked about before. That's what should happen (3-5, ll.103-106).

This participant had been speaking about there being a gap between the ideal and what s/he perceived was actually occurring in the organisation. The ideal for this participant was alignment of employee and organisation in the common goal of working for the customer.

Also linked to this narrative is discussion about whether or not the incoming GM was going to be a BN person or not. This discussion also raises the question, 'What is a BN person if someone is perceived as being one (or not) if they are coming into the company from outside?' Ironically all employees ultimately came from the 'outside' and many of these employees were deemed by participants to be BN people. According to one participant, the new GM was not a BN person:

[This will be] the first time that a non-[BN]-er has been employed as managing director, so I guess it's [...] quite a change for us. We've always had the next one coming through from within and then they know the culture, they know what [BN] is about, its history and things like that, so it's going to be different, it's going to be a different perspective. It will be interesting to see the slant that [s/he] puts on things (3-1, ll.216-222).

Other's thought the new GM must somehow possess the qualities of a GM, otherwise s/he would not have been chosen for the position. Both stances: i.e. s/he is not a BN person or s/he must be a BN person construct an ambiguous view.

Another definition of the BN person was that of having something extra, an X-factor, that a *curriculum vitae* might not reflect: e.g.

I have a candidate currently who has all the skills we're looking for but in his meeting he's not an BN person and you can just tell [a] [BN] person whether they're one or not, so I said to the manager can we train someone to be an [BN] person once they're in here do you not think they could do it,

and he said it was too much of a question mark for him, so it could be the fact that we get people in that are [BN] people, or, [BN] makes those people who they are, but for me when look, when I'm interviewing someone, I see them as either being [a] [BN] person or not, whether they would fit our culture and have that sort of extra something (3-4, ll.202-210).

For this participant, s/he described just knowing whether or not a person was a BN person. S/he also offered the view that they could either be BN people when they came or the organisation could change them when they were in the organisation.

Later the same participant used the term "[BN] person" to simply mean, people working for the branded organisation, BN: *"Maybe you can't lump [BN] people into categories because we're one big happy family [sarcasm, laughter]"* (3-4, ll. 737-738). This narrative may cause the reader to wonder whether or not a person just is a BN person or whether s/he can learn it. In other words, can being a BN person be achieved through attending training programs and the like or is being a BN person something intrinsic to the person and unable to be acquired. These questions connect the narrative 'BN Person' to the narrative titled 'Alignment'. Furthermore, connected to this narrative of there being a special kind of person that works for BN are the narratives 'Special' and 'Engagement'.

Engagement

Engagement was a term which the organisation's executive management consciously used in its training and system of surveys. In a meeting with one of the HR managers, the interviewer was informed that the organisation preferred to use engagement over and above satisfaction. Thus I assumed that the term 'engagement' was known by the participants as a term which was embroidered into BN's culture. The term is also gaining interest in academic marketing circles (Bowden 2009; Spratt, Czellar and Spangenberg 2009), and therefore is included here as a narrative of interest, and one which has links to the 'Management', 'Alignment' and the 'BN Person'.

When asked what the difference between job satisfaction and being engaged to your job was, one participant answered:

The big difference is, I guess, yeah it is living and breathing, I say living and breathing the job, but really feeling that this is all that I want to do, this is, I don't always want to [be in the role that I am in], but I always want to work for [BN] (3-4, ll.599-601).

Thus, for this participant, it was loyalty to the brand rather than her/his role which signified engagement. The same participant linked engagement to motivation to perform as an employee: *"And that's how I see engagement, that [...] you feel you are making a difference and that you are valued at work and that in turn makes you want to go to work and do a good job"* (3-4, ll.295-297). P6 also linked engagement to organisational processes such as training programs and also to team dynamics. Another participant (P27) linked engagement to being proactive and being willing to take ownership.

In response to the interviewer asking about engagement, P2 responded in terms of the brand:

I guess it sort of means that the [BN] are not, I suppose they want clients to think that they are not just a [type of organisation]; they are not just doing [business]; that they are there to sort of provide guidance and flexibility when it's needed, and perhaps moving into a personal level rather than it all just being business orientated (3-11, ll.42-46).

This participant's comments connect engagement with going beyond, which in turn is one of the threads of the 'BN Person' narrative. Certainly engagement is linked not only to 'Alignment' but also being a certain type of person within the organisational context (in terms of values and alignment).

Engagement was also perceived as being a phenomenon that management engendered in the employees:

Yep, so that's what I said, like happy, a happy employee you know means a happy work environment and then that's portrayed. I think that's why contact centre, branches, they have their, they're like their own little worlds and they try and you know the branch manager tries to engage them (3-4, ll.352-355).

That management has to try to engage employees, signals the possibility that there is effort on the part of management. Thus this narrative also connects with the discussion about the role of management. One participant noted that management played a vital role in determining whether or not a team was engaged:

It probably depends on I think depends on the team you're working in and who is managing you because I think it comes from the management down so it filters down. You could look at two different teams, one could be really engaged and one may not be fully engaged and that [might] be because of how they're being treated. So treatment is a big thing and at work my opinions count, sometimes they don't; I think that's the big thing (3-5, ll.748-753).

As well as speaking positively about what they thought engagement was, some participants voiced what they thought dislocation or disengagement might be. For one participant (P50), when asked to define the term disconnect, s/he responded with: *"Well, when you talked about job satisfaction and engagement I guess that's it, it lies in there, it lies in there somewhere"* (3-2, ll.815-816). Lying 'in there somewhere' suggests that there is a nebulous space in between satisfaction and engagement, a grey area perhaps, where dislocation may exist. Moreover, there was some discussion about the differences between not only teams but also front of house and back room positions. P42 highlighted this difference as being one of personality type:

Yeah. They know if stuff is genuine or not too. But then on the other scale you've got some extraverts out there too but they're probably the ones who would engage with the brand. They would probably be at the opposite end

of the spectrum. So definitely [it's] how, you have to look at groups of people or the profiles of people and try and attract them differently; maybe to make it better you need to ask how do we make it better, what do we need to do to make it better (3-5, ll.816-822)

S/he suggested that the current training tools may not suit everyone in every role, given the propensity for some roles to attract certain personality types (i.e. frontline tends to attract extroverts, and back room tends to attract and suit introverts).

Engagement was also connected to a higher level, or meta-narrative, that of knowing (which includes being known). P6 made this connection when s/he said:

Yeah it's the respects that someone, someone has taken the time to one remember your name, know who you are, and that makes a huge difference, it makes you feel more valued and it goes back to that engagement where you feel valued, respected and that you are making a difference (3-4, ll.575-578).

Knowing is also therefore linked to value creation.

In summary, engagement was perceived as a phenomenon which was intrinsic to being a BN person, to wanting to go to work, to going beyond the position an employee held. Engagement was also applied to evoking loyalty within external consumers as well as being loyal to the brand (as opposed to the job position). The role of management was, for some, key in engendering engagement. Disengagement was attributed to not only role but also personality differences. Engagement was connected to being known.

Brand Descriptions

This section overviews some of the different ways the brand was described. These descriptions are then explored in more depth in subsequent sections; i.e. in terms of role-based perceptions, brand relationships and branded identity.

An Historical View

Another view of the brand was that it was a national phenomenon. This view in turn relates to the perception that the brand is constituted by its history. The following excerpt ties these narrative threads together:

“[M]aybe this whole brand was [country] based; the changing of our environment over the years, you know we were colonial, farmer, you know everybody looks after each other you know you never locked your house, you never locked your door and it was all very sort of like we all got on very well. Everybody loved each other and were very [mono-racial/cultural], but times have changed, we’ve been dragged as a country into how Europe’s moving and the US and Asia and we’ve opened our borders to immigrants (P3-13, ll.588-595).

The expression “we’ve been dragged as a country into how Europe’s moving” has a negative connotation. The following view stresses the *historical view* of the brand:

I think it’s having lived in town; I walk around and I run and I go past so much historical information, and statues and monuments and I think this is part of our history, our city and [BN] is part of that [...]. Some of our visions and values [are] actually remembering part of that history as well (3-7, ll.206-212)

Thus, for this participant, the organisation’s visions and values are constituted by the history which contextualises the brand name. History was also linked to the long tenure of some participants: e.g.

Yes indeed because of my longevity with the [organisation] I can see where it come from and where we are today. I can still see that strong family bond has existed in the time I’ve been in the [organisation] because managing directors are from that whole period, from the start of the [organisation], and their career and in fact their first and only career in the [organisation]. So that’s been the sort of family part (3-14, ll.26-31)

This participant's comments also link the historical brand, to being a family brand. Linked to being a family brand is the tendency for the management to also be long tenure employees. Thus, the brand is closely linked to the organisation's history and also the history of the people inside the organisation. This view of the brand, i.e. as an historical phenomenon, is connected, therefore, to any change in leadership, which adds to the brand's historical profile.

Connected to this historical view of the brand is the notion that the brand plays a community role (e.g. P12, P2, P16). The brand's external, communal, presence went beyond, therefore, marketing messages and selling the essential services BN offered. Sponsorship, co-branding exercises, and the branding of community buildings were some of the ways the brand was perceived as being visible in the community.

People and the Brand

Another view of the brand was that the brand depended upon people (e.g. P27, P10 and P8). P10's view was that without good employees the brand would not exist: *"Interviewer: So the people create the brand through their behaviour; P10: Yeah. Interviewer: [...] the [organisation] employs people who in turn create the brand; P10: Yeah."* (3-6, ll.516-522).

P8 was of the view that people were the brand and they also made the brand. These two concepts are subtly different and therefore represent a conflicting view being expressed by one person. The perspective that individuals somehow made the brand was a popular one. For P10, the brand was part of her/him but s/he did not say s/he was part of the brand. One participant could not decide whether the brand depended upon people or vice versa:

Yeah, so does that make the brand made up of individuals or is it that the individuals make the brand, I don't. Maybe they go hand in hand. I would say the individuals make the brand, which makes it disappointing that you know individuals make mistakes (3-4, ll.231-234).

Thus, despite having conflicting views, one view, people (here read as internal actors) of the brand, dominates this participant's narrative.

Linked to the perspective that the brand is somehow dependent upon people is the view that people are the same as the brand:

They like to make you believe that people are the brand and they do to a certain extent, but I think there's probably a differentiation between the two. Yeah, [...] people do make a difference and [...] we are getting to the time where a lot of the executives and people like that are getting to retirement stage and those are the people that were the brand (3-1, ll.203-207).

This excerpt shows two views. On one hand 'They' (read as management) engender the belief that people and the brand are synonymous, however, there is a separation. But then the executives are perceived as the brand. P26's vacillation between separateness and being synonymous is not atypical. Another participant suggested that the brand could be separated from the people, and yet at the end of her/his interview s/he stipulated: *"So I think again it's hard to differentiate between brand and individual and [...] I think at the end of the day individuals do make up the brand"* (3-4, ll.799-800). There is a subtle difference between the perception that people 'make' the brand, and 'make up' the brand. Connected to the idea that people constituted the brand in some way was the perspective that because of a change in people at the top of the organisation, the brand may also change. However, there was also the view that the brand was bigger than any kind of management change (P50).

Making or making up the brand are not quite the same and neither is 'being' the brand the same as making or making up the brand. The perception that the employees were the brand was a popular one: e.g.

Yes we are the brand yes I see [BN] totally as a people thing nothing to do with [product] almost. I suppose our [product] is the same at [name of

competing organisations] and so on, so it has little to do with [product], pretty much. A person if they're good to get [product] from [BN], they are good to [be customers] anywhere so I suppose it [...] purely is a people thing, service that the people give and it is the amount of service we give that attracts more business to us (3-15, ll.698-703).

This participant's comments can also be linked into the theme of profit versus service— intrinsic in this view is the perception that the brand values are aligned with service. At least one participant (P8) viewed the brand as a persona; i.e. it had a personality, which mapped onto an advertisement personality. Another participant said the brand was funny and professional

In summary, this section teases out some of the nuanced associations participants made between people and the brand. People were perceived as creators of the brand (people make the brand), constituents of the brand (people make up the brand), synonymous with the brand (people are the brand). In addition, the brand was also perceived as a persona.

Internal-External Brand

Some participants associated the brand with the customer and/or the product. Therefore, for them, the brand was a frontline phenomenon. For example, the brand was described as the *"face of the [organisation]"* (3-1, l.470), as that which is visible (P16), as that which people at the front portray (P12). For some participants, the brand was that which was tangible (and therefore external), such as a uniform, or the website (P38) *"That's the visible things isn't it, the brand, what you see, you see [well known ice cream brand] and you'll get an ice-cream"* (3-3, ll.460-461). Not only did P16 refer to the tangible elements of a brand to explain what brand was for her/him, but s/he chose the brand of a well known commodity s/he associated with her/his childhood.

As well as being perceived externally, the brand was also perceived by some participants as being an internal process. For example, P2 depicted the brand as an internal system of scaffolds: *"I suppose the brand sort of sets the processes for the*

guidelines and structure for which all the internals go by" (3-11, ll. 517-518). P10 and P31 also depicted the brand as a process.

There were a few participants who (consciously) saw the brand both internally and externally. For example P50 said that employees needed to see the brand as more than just a surface feature to avoid having just a surface level understanding. S/he was critical of what s/he had experienced in the focus groups with regard to perceptions of the brand as mainly an external (and tangible) phenomenon. P6 also viewed the brand internally and externally. One participant (P36) resisted the idea that the brand was a process, instead emphasising that it was through relationships the brand was communicated, not emails and such like.

Thus, the brand was perceived as either an external or an internal phenomenon, and in some cases as both expressions. One participant emphasised the importance of relationships in communicating the brand.

A Multi-Faceted View

The main message from this section is that the brand is multi-faceted. This statement means that participants viewed the brand in different ways and certainly this observation is already becoming apparent. What stands out, however, is not that there are differences between participant views (this is to be expected), but that differences and ambiguities are evident *within* individual narratives. Ultimately, the brand seems to be what the participants wanted to make it. As one participant put it, *"the brand is quite like a piece of paper"* (3-7, ll.105-106). The same participant saw that s/he himself had three different views of the brand:

I never realised because I've [never] had to say it aloud to a person that I had separated the brand quite nicely into separate compartments [...] so I was quite distinct in sales, products and services side of the organisation. I preferred the historical ancient side. And then we have the visions and values that are sort of my guiding force within the [organization] for what I

do. It's just somehow gelling them all together in some ways (3-7, ll.489-494).

The brand as paper metaphor captures the way people bring their own meaning to the brand; it can be whatever a person wants it to be. At one point, this participant said that there was no imagery that went with the brand (3-7, l. 272), which contradicts a common view that the brand is reflected in its visible image.

This multi-faceted view is now explored more intensively in the next section. It is explored from a role-based view to explore whether or not the different roles employees played affected the ways in which they perceived the brand.

Role and Brand Perceptions

This section is divided into three main sections: frontline versus back office; customer versus employee; and long versus short tenure.

Participants themselves commented on perceived role-based brand perception differences. I also noticed differences as the reader of this data. I found ambiguity, complexity and resistance to any attempt to reduce the data into a neat pattern when it came to analysing the role-based brand perceptions of various participants. I think what was key for the participants, was how they perceived themselves within the role or roles they were in or had performed in the past (some participants had worked in a number of roles, both frontline and back office).

Front Line versus Back Office

It was notable that *front line versus back office* perceptions of the brand emerged from the data. Several participants said that people at the front were the face of the organisation (P2, P35, P12, P38). When viewed in relation to comments that the brand was a person, or a personified phenomenon, then this view also places the employee as the face of the brand. The brand is the face of the organisation and the employees at the frontline become the face of the brand: "*Well really I suppose if you're in the front line, if you're in the branch as a [role...] or account manager you are really on the coal-*

face, right up there, seeing all the clients; really we are the face of the [organisation]" (3-11, ll.121-123). Thus role differences can be viewed in terms of visibility. The brand becomes visible to the customer through the frontline employee. The employee in this case embodies the brand (de Chernatony 2002). However, the brand also becomes visible to the employee when s/he is at the frontline. This idea was voiced by some of the participants: e.g.

It is more visible, it is kind of in your face stuff because it is a bit like [popular fast food brand]; can I upsize your order, it is the constant, it is a scripted even though you try to go away from it now, approach to customers to involve them into some service or product and so there are things that pop up onto their screens that say you should ask the customer about this? (3-7, ll.330-334).

The comparison with the popular fast food brand mirrors an earlier parallel with a well known ice-cream brand - both are well known brands and both are linked to a food commodity, a tangible item. This comparison occurred in each case when the participants in question tried to explain their perception of the brand. In addition, in this latter comparison with the popular fast food brand, the comparison could be read as being negative (somehow devaluing the role of the frontline employees now that a sales orientation has been implemented). Another participant (P2) confirmed that it was easier to see what the brand was when an employee was at the frontline. These assertions that the brand is easier to 'see' at the frontline, present a view of the brand that is associated with the external features of the brand and/or the products sold by the organisation. Another participant (P42) used the term 'coal-face' and explained that the brand was more notable at the coal-face because people there were always exposed to the brand.

In addition to being more visible, the brand was also described as being easier to relate to if an employee was on the front line (as opposed to the back office). For example, P27 made the following comment: "[T]he rubber hits the road with us,

because we actually deal with the customer" (3-15, ll.647-648). In addition, P27 commented that s/he knew the brand was there even if s/he was not thinking about it all the time:

I know the brand's always there [...] but I don't come to work each week and think about the brand. I feel, I suppose, I do subconsciously because if I see the ads on TV, for argument's sake, if one or two of them are looking a bit tired, I feel a little bit, you know, so I suppose I do a bit because I want them to be good and fresh all the time so I am consciously aware of the advertising, does it look good and that sort of stuff. So I suppose I am [...]I love the way our branches look and that is the brand isn't and so I am aware of it probably sub-consciously, but consciously I come to do my job and look after my business unit (3-15, ll.677-688).

P27 associated the brand with the external aspects of the brand such as advertisements and branches. S/he was an example of a frontline employee who, in the second focus group, presented a more dislocated view of the brand compared to some of the other people in her/his group. However, in this third phase s/he was less dislocated and more reflective of her/his relationship with the brand while still admitting that s/he was not always conscious of the brand, as s/he perceived it. When asked to reflect on participants who did not feel encompassed by the brand, P27's view revealed a connection between understanding and relating to the brand:

I think when you really boil it down there are those that have some direct relationship with customers or one step removed like this person how many steps is [s/he] removed from any real [...] who don't real[ly] understand what we do. Is it integral to the brand? I think it is integral to understanding [BN] really; I think this person here [referring to comments by a back office participant who felt the brand did not encompass everyone] could potentially work for any [organisation], best be in the back office somewhere doing the engine stuff and it would not matter if it was [a

range of well known brands], whatever, they probably would not have a better or worse feeling about their employer (3-15, ll.762-769).

P27 also made the point that it is a financial consideration whether or not the company spends more time and money trying to get the people in the workforce who don't feel like they are connected to feel more connected: *"[H]ow much time do you spend bringing them into the front line surface, whatever area w[h]ere people are connected when they are not part of that"* (3-15, ll.779-781). Thus for this participant, being engaged and encompassed by the brand was more important for those at the frontline - those in the back office were for this participant, less a unique part of the culture and more a generic role which could be transferred into other organisations. P42, on the other hand, thought there were ways to create more engagement in the back office.

Others who viewed the brand as an external phenomenon were not exclusively frontline workers (e.g. P12, P10). Also, some frontline workers viewed the brand as being more than just an external phenomenon (e.g. P50, P2). In addition, P42 and P38, both in the back office, associated the brand with products and brand image. It appears that role perceptions did sometimes intersect with the external/internal view differences. However, sometimes they did not; it could be expected that front line staff saw the brand as an external phenomenon while support workers saw it as process, but this was not always the case. Thus a complex view emerged. However, whether or not there is a pattern of responses compared to perceived distance from the front line, from the customer, and from the product (three potential variables), this patterning could be verified in further study involving content analysis. This kind of study was not part of the scope of the current research.

In response to the interviewer asking why people on the front line seemed, in the focus groups, to be more aware of the brand values, P2 responded with the following view:

I think the reason for that is you are more exposed to people I suppose and to [...] (Interviewer: To the external customer?) Yes, and the internal to some extent because you have a mixture of both, because if you're more in a separate role that's not so exposed to external clients, you are only internal, and you will have a different perspective, you won't have the best of both. (3-11; ll.405-413).

Her/his comments suggested that being on the front line was preferable over being further beyond the front line ("best of both"). Thus, being on the front line was sometimes privileged by some of the participants. On the other hand, sometimes support positions were privileged (e.g. P10, P12). P31 made the following point:

[I]t's one term, someone's used it but I never really like it; they call it the back office and I thought it almost sounds a bit derogatory like the back end or rear end. For me, what we do is just as important, or some people refer to the support areas including IT as the engine or the work horse of the [organisation], because we do everything else that the front line does not do (3-7, ll.176-181).

This participant's comments resist the idea that those in support roles are not as valuable as those in front line roles.

What is clear is that participants could see that certain aspects of the various roles that could be had at [BN] were what made the brand relevant or not, or perceived in different ways. For example, P31 suggested that relevance and interest were important factors in deciphering what employees maintained a conscious connection with (e.g. the brand).

[T]he [organisation's] common imagery and logos are not as relevant to us for what we are doing and I think that is the other thing too, if it's of no interest to you and you do not need to use it why bother because you have these other things that are actually what you're required to do your job (3-7, ll.301-305).

It seems that P31 was speaking about the marketing version of the brand.

At the time of the interview P36 was working in what I had categorised as a support role. However, s/he did not display the same dislocation others showed in her/his focus group. The issue of dislocation was discussed in her/his individual interview. When asked to explain why the brand was in the forefront of her/his mind in the course of her/his work, P36's response was:

Well mine was very much attached to the brand because when we're doing running policy and making changes and things like that the brand's at the forefront, you have to think about what you're going to do and what impact that [is] going to have on the brand (3-1, ll.40-43).

P36 also commented on the others in the group during the individual interview, commenting that s/he recollected some of the others did not think about the brand that much (particularly P31). Thus, they had similar depictions but different relationships with or proximities to the brand. P6 (in Phase Three) commented that P27 (in the P2 group interview) was detached from the brand. This participant made the point that for her/him the brand and job were much more fused (although not completely). At least one participant (P16) found it almost impossible to relate to or discuss the brand in any depth in the verbal part of the interview.

As well as being linked to the role an employee was in, brand perceptions were also associated with certain roles attracting certain personality types:

They [employees in IT] wouldn't be thinking about the brand because it's not something they would be thinking about. A lot of them as well you would find if you try and do that warm fuzzy [...] type stuff they'll look twice at you. I have talked about this before, but that could be the problem, part of the disconnect because of the type of people that they are. Not everybody, but a large number of them are techo, geeky types (P42, ll.803-808).

P42 her/himself was working in this kind of department and yet seemed to distance her/himself from being classified in the way s/he classified some of her/his fellow workers. However, P42, like some of the other participants (e.g. P31, P36), had worked in a number of roles in the organisation and had spent time at the front line before taking on a back office position.

It could be that a particular version of the brand (e.g. sales orientation or marketing version versus process or historical) is closer to certain roles. P31 made this point when s/he said:

I make quite a distinct impression of what the brand is for me because when we're in the branches we have particular sales targets and focuses and then you have products and services that is your real aim and goal, you do not do that very often in the support areas and your focus become a bit more on how you work together to actually support your internal customers and so the [BN] brand is such [...]. We end up going back to our, probably our service levels and standards and training and then the values from the [organisation] [...]. Whereas sometimes in the past if I was in front line I would think as the products and services as one part but then I think well where does the history of the [organisation] fit in because that's still part of the branding [...] (3-7, ll.181-196).

This participant, therefore, reflected on her/his different roles and the different perspectives s/he had of the brand in those different roles.

P31's comments suggested that there were, for her/him at least, different brands depending on role perspective. However, another participant suggested that different employees were inevitably looking at the same brand (however, note s/he says brands not brand):

But it's certainly a lot harder to [do what I do] than it is to sell but we all look at the same brands. Our jobs are a lot harder because often at the start people have promised the earth and often it's not what the brand is about; they've just promised it for their own benefit to a sale, to get the good

rewards or points. But they have been totally on themselves, not the brand as a whole; is this good [business activity for the BN], is it good [selling]?; They don't even think about it falling over (3-6, ll.21-27).

A theme running through P10's interview is that there is sometimes a gap between what the front line staff are doing. This quote is complex, in that at first the word brands suggests products and then the word brand suggests an entity that doesn't want a certain type of business activity. Another view of the brand which seemed to be connected to role was that of P38. S/he spoke about her/his experience as a creator of the brand image. This participant's attitude towards the brand was linked to a lack of buy-in:

We are but we do what we're told, we don't have any input into the design. So that's an interesting angle isn't it because if you have input to a design you've got more of a buy-in to it. Whereas, we don't have to like it or whatever but we have to deliver on what they want, what their vision is and sometimes that's not very well communicated (3-9, ll.51-55).

Branding for P38 was about altering the tangible face of the brand: e.g.

[...] but yeah we were involved in some of the re-branding. We had to go through all of our systems and find out where the old branding was and change it to the new branding, sort of stuff (3-9, ll.66-69).

Therefore, for her/him, branding was something that was manipulated and created across a spectrum of systems, systems that the end user was not necessarily conscious of. P38's own tangible representation of the brand was also important (in keeping with her/his view that the brand is tangible):

[W]hen I first joined the technology side I was actually from a branch and so I was part of front line for [a number of] years before I came into [another] dept. But when I did come in we were still wearing uniforms [...] and we actually were still asked to wear the [BN] uniform, and gradually

that subsided. And I think that probably [a number of] years ago the uniform went and I think that people who joined since then haven't got the same kind of linking with that brand that you did when you did have the uniform (3-9, ll.94-101).

Thus for this participant, visibly linking with the brand through wearing a uniform linked her/his to the brand in a way that the participant did not perceive happening without a uniform. Others also spoke about the linking and authenticating benefits of wearing a uniform.

Overall, different perspectives of the brand emerge when viewed in relation to different employee roles within the organisation. This relationship between roles and brand perspectives (and perceptions) is complex and therefore not easily categorised—thus further research specifically into this feature of the current study is suggested.

Other Roles

As well as employment role differences, some of the participants commented on their relationship with the brand as customer and employee. I use the term 'role' here to include adopting a customer or employee perspective and also long and short tenured employees.

Several participants thought of the brand from a customer perspective (e.g. P12). Some participants thought of themselves as both a customer and employee (e.g. P36, P35 and P42). The following statement is an example of a participant thinking from both a customer and employee perspective:

I kind of think of, more these days because I was so heavily entrenched in the branch network previously, so, but nowadays I look at it from two perspectives because I was always at the branch, so I'd do my business while I was there and things like that. Now I see it as a [organisation] as well, where I do my [business] and the place where I work, so from a, my [organisation] kind of perspective (3-1, ll.62-68).

Thus whereas before s/he saw little distinction (i.e. when s/he was on the front line), at the time of the interview s/he perceived difference (i.e. s/he can step back). The dual role that staff members play is illustrated in P10's comments.

When I am an external customer and I don't get what I think I do, I get quite cross and I will probably scout out a branch where I'll get service and we have all got those ID cards and if they see that they'll sort of, but you shouldn't have to, but also my account will come up with a warning 'staff member' so they should know (3-6, ll.238-241).

P35's initial reaction to her/his relationship with the brand was to reflect on her/his role as an external consumer as well as an employee. Furthermore, P42 saw the customer/employee roles as being blurred: *"I'm a customer and a staff member as well. It's hard to differentiate between the two"* 3-5, ll.316-317).

Similarly, P35 also saw a continuousness between the two perspectives. P35 thought s/he had similar views of the brand despite her/his short tenure status at the organisation, and yet also acknowledged that it was different for those who had been in the organisation for a long time. According to this participant, tenure also made a difference:

I guess yes for me a little different because obviously I have been there for just over a year, but also people have been there for ages, my partner for example has been there [a number of] years, and they see differently but also when we have [a] conversation and talk about that, it's kind of basic things they're saying as well [indicates they share the basic values][...] But yes obviously people who have been there for quite a long period of time it's different (3-10, ll.33-41).

P36 and P12 also noticed differences in how brand values were presented (P35, Gen Y) or not presented (P12, front line staff) in the younger staff. The following comment by P50 revealed what s/he perceived as a potential difference between herself and the people s/he managed:

[...] I think that was for me a bit of an awakening in terms of is that how my people see the brand, and [...] what is brand to my people and what is it when we are on brand and off brand, you know, does, is it [the advertising], is it more than that, so, and that's a process that I'm going to take my staff through in terms of what you know what are your values, what are the [organisation's] values, do they align [...] and I think that was probably a process that I was taken through (3-2, ll.319-325).

A key point in P50's narrative is that s/he was probably taken through a process of alignment (which affected how s/he saw the brand), but s/he perceived that perhaps the people coming up through the organisation were not going through that process (and perhaps this gap was resulting in a different view of the brand). Thus, tenure is again a sign of brand view difference.

Overall, participants commented upon various role differences. These roles included front line versus back office, customer versus employee and long tenured employees versus short tenured employees.

Brand Relationships

Brand relationships were also evidenced by the data. Having a relationship with the brand suggests the brand is more than simply marketing information or process, but is perceived, or at least can be perceived, as an entity. The relationships that were depicted were in part dependent on how participants perceived the brand (e.g. as an historical presence, as something that is physical, as all encompassing, as a phenomenon which could be changed). What is important to see here is that the brand was perceived in multiple ways and this multiplicity of views has implications for how the brand is communicated to and received by employees.

Degrees of Intimacy

Narratives about relationships are classified in this section in terms of intimacy. Relationships with the brand were perceived by some participants as being very intimate whereas others resisted intimacy.

A number of participants saw themselves as being part of a family (e.g. P38, P12). One participant saw the brand as not being part of her/his family but instead being good for her/him family (P10). P50 saw her/his relationship with the brand as being like a marriage: *“I think that in any relationship you have, you do have that honeymoon period and then you have the really getting to know each other and really understanding each other and then living together”* (3-2, ll.423-427). On the other hand P51 used the metaphor of marriage and divorce to describe her/his relationship with the brand: *“I’d be different to the normal [BN] person [...] I mean I do [...] love it, but, I think // [...] I divorce myself away from it, whereas a lot of staff can’t”* (3-14, ll. 619-621//625-627). Another view was that the brand took on a parental role. P8 described her relationship with the brand as a child-parent relationship:

[W]hen we were talking about the brand I felt that the brand is like my parents and I am the child, because I was [a BN] person, I have never been, worked or paid anywhere else; everything is about [BN], although different managers who were my mentors, they were always consistent (3-12, ll.379-383).

Her/his depiction of the brand-organisation as her/his parents blurred the brand-organisation distinction. However, s/he admitted that one day s/he might leave the brand-organisation (just as children eventually leave their parents).

Another view of the brand was that the relationship could be tarnished and intimacy could be lost. For example, P6 felt let down by the brand because of the actions of people within the organisation. Her/his narrative suggested the employee-brand relationship could change. Thus, P6 showed resistance to intimacy. Similarly,

P26 also resisted becoming too intimate with the brand, preferring instead to remain detached:

[...] because you never know what is going to happen, [it] could be like breaking up with a partner or something where you have that emotional disability afterwards. [Interviewer: Is there a fear of getting too close and getting hurt?] Yeah, I think so, so I think I want to keep that separation (3-8, ll.512-516).

Unlike P26, P6 had allowed her/himself to get hurt through being close to the brand.

In addition, some participants saw their role as being a defender of the brand (i.e. P10, P12, P8). In turn the brand played the role of benefactor or facilitator.

Thus, brand relationships that are categorised as having certain levels of intimacy were certainly present in the participant's narratives. Degrees of intimacy and resistance emerged in different forms such as part of my family/not part of my family, marriage/divorce, child-parent/child grows up, close partnership, defender of the brand/benefactor of the brand. This finding supports that perception, and theoretical proposition, that brands can be entities which form relationships or partnerships with people (Fournier 1998).

Believing in BN

There was evidence that at the organisation, a belief system existed, which helped shape the brand and organisational culture.

Evidence that the brand was for some participants a belief system was suggested by P50:

[...] obviously it starts from induction [...] and there's a lot, you know this is what we are and what we believe in, and the mantra if you like is there, but it's not until you experience certain aspects of that [...] and that's about people delivering on what the [organisation] expects and I know and I understand that, so you know you can have, obviously it comes down to

your manager, so if your manager has those core values and beliefs they're going to live them and you're going to aspire obviously (3-2, ll.274-281).

This excerpt suggests that a belief system exists which is also linked to the role of management, who are instrumental in inducting employees into the belief system, and also, therefore, to the process of alignment.

Other evidence that the brand was viewed by some participants as a belief system came from assertions such as 'we practice what we preach':

The brand, I don't know it's just something we're trying to portray not only externally but internally so we've got the brand out there that says [BN] is a great place to work, great culture, great customer service [...] but also trying to be that behind the scenes as well, we're not just putting up a façade; we're actually trying to walk the walk, if that makes sense. That we want to be practicing what we preach, that we are great customer service because we do give great customer service because our workers are happy and they want to give great customer service (3-4, ll.774-781).

This participant's comments also support the view that there is an internal-external link; i.e. employee happiness leads to great customer service. Furthermore, belief in this excerpt is linked to being genuine. At least two participants maintained that believing in BN was an important part of their job satisfaction: e.g. *"You have to have some connections and I think if I didn't believe in the brand I wouldn't be working for [BN]"* (3-10, ll.292-293). Being connected (knowing) was, for this participant, an important antecedent to believing in the brand. Believing in the brand seems to be similar to being aligned to the brand since in the focus groups being aligned was deemed an important prerequisite to being able to work in the organisation. In addition, the same participant explained that it was also the nature of those connections (being accepted for who s/he was) which was key:

Be yourself, exactly. And we are invited for dinner like everybody else. We [are] treated as everybody else and that's why I really believe in it; it's important for me (3-10, ll.307-309).

The brand experience occurred, in this comment, outside the organisation. For P31, belief, buy in and brand fit were linked:

If I did not have the sense of belief in the brand and its vision and values because that's really where it's coming breaking down again to[...] and its service standards then I could not really share that with the rest of the team; I would be in the wrong role. Because I would not believe in what I was trying to do and for me that is how I relay the brand; is probably through the vision, values and service standards. (3-7, ll.270-276)

This participant perceived belief as a way s/he communicated the brand. Another suggestion was that the brand was superior to personal beliefs:

I've seen people from a management level that don't necessarily buy into it, initially, but they will never communicate that to their teams; it's always, they won't put their own personal beliefs before the brand essentially (3-1, ll.309-312).

Elsewhere, P35 also spoke about there being an unwritten rule. This unwritten rule comment is similar to other comments by other participants that there is an X-factor about BN people (P6), that there is something about working for BN which is more to do with an unknown 'warm fuzzy' feeling or 'something extra'. These comments, when read in context with these other statements, add to the narrative that the brand is something which employees can believe in. The question is, does the brand constitute the belief system or does the belief system constitute the brand?

P35's suggestion that it was through the experience of being accepted that s/he started believing in the brand is one explanation for how believing in the brand may come about. Another suggestion was made by P36:

They like to make you believe that people are the brand and they do to a certain extent (3-1, ll.204-205).

Her/his comment suggested that management had somehow engendered belief.

Another participant, P50, signalled that alignment and belief were connected. For example, this connection emerged when P50 talked about people who were not aligned:

[T]hose people [who are not aligned] presumably don't progress as quickly or as well, because it's, I think that that's, okay I don't, if I sit around my management table and I would every single one of the managers that sit around that table are very much of the same brand values and believe in [BN](3-2, ll.291-294).

Another view was that those who do not believe do not survive in the organisation (P36, P35). P50 perceived disbelief as a lack of knowledge.

A more resistant view of believing in the brand was offered by two of the participants. One participant perceived the existence of a belief system but resisted getting too close:

One [person] at the [organisation] is called the preacher or something like that, of the [organisation], because [s/he's] held in such high esteem [...]. [S/he's] always proclaiming about how good it is. Evangelist, that's the word. (Interviewer: Evangelist?) Yes. (Interviewer: So it's taking on a slightly religious kind of tone.) Yes, because he believes in it so much, which is quite incredible. And maybe after I've spent as many years in it I may feel the same way. (Interviewer: Is there a danger in being [doesn't let interviewer finish]). Cults always have an innate ability to be scary (3-8, ll.485-503).

Another participant, P51, likened the organisation to a large and slightly controversial church that had been in the headlines during the time of the interview process. This participant distanced her/himself from being a believer but noted that for some

customers and employees, the brand was equivalent to God and therefore could be in for a shock if the changes s/he was observing lead away from customer service and towards a profit driven culture. This participant was of the view that the company had deliberately engendered a belief in its employees:

And they love it, breath it, live it, reward them for it, it won't matter, it will continue to grow, because people will just continue to support it, you know market it to their friends [...] it's like giving people a shareholding in the company (3-13, ll.288-291).

P51's comments point to a kind of emotional shareholding which I would suggest is linked to engagement. Another participant, P35, overtly linked belief and engagement.

Oh yes, they believe in the process, so they're not negative about it. They're not okay I need to tell you about this, not that I agree with it but here it is. (Interviewer: So are they engaged?) Yeah, yeah absolutely. I think our management are very much so engaged in that and, and even if they don't necessarily believe in it to start with they'll be shown the way and at the end of the day they'll come on board for sure. It's very rare that you'll have a manager that doesn't believe in it I guess. (Interviewer: What happens if they don't believe in it? What happens, how do they get them to believe in it?) Yeah, I guess they don't survive in the role so long (3-1, ll.288-301).

Thus, belief and engagement are fused, as is the perception that those who are able to become engaged will not last in their jobs.

Finally, as well as participants believing in BN, one participant perceived that the brand/organisation believed in her/him and trusted in her/him and this for her/him was central to creating value:

(Interviewer: [...] how does the brand I guess give you [...] value and allow you to create value in other people. What is it?) How does it, it's given it [...] to me through [...] other people, have obviously from when I joined the [organisation] from what other people have brought up through me in

terms of this is what [BN] represents, this is what we do, this is how it is done, this is our way, and then it's, it's that knowledge of, the brand will always be there or the [organisation] will always be there, believing in your trusting in you, and letting you deliver on what you see as right (3-2 ll. 239-248).

For this participant the brand and organisation seem synonymous in this excerpt and the brand is perceived as a relationship partner in that it is able to reciprocate trust and belief in employees.

Belief, therefore, seems to be a product of employee-brand value alignment and this alignment in turn leads to engagement and longevity in the job. However, some participants expressed a negative or resistant view of believing in the brand, preferring instead to maintain some distance, and in one case offering prophetic advice for a changing organisation and brand culture in which profit was clearly emerging as the main cultural driver.

Brand as Facilitator

For some of the participants, the brand also played the role of facilitator. Being a facilitator is a type of relationship. Furthermore, being a facilitator is linked to the creation of value.

The brand was deemed a standard setter by some. For example P2 said it gave her/him parameters via the job description while P35 commented that s/he knew what was expected. However, other participants viewed the brand as facilitating them to go beyond organisational processes: e.g. “[...] *the brand gives me freedom*” (3-2, ll.91).

Another perception was that the brand facilitated relationships, as the following excerpt illustrates:

(Interviewer: The brand has facilitated a lot of your relationships?). [...] Yeah, I mean, yeah for sure, business and personal. Yeah, lots of good friends that I've made within [BN], who some are here still and plenty have moved on as well. And lots of business relationships that help you when

you're dealing with different people as well, just breaks the ice you know, you can be a bit more forthcoming when you're asking for things and getting favours and things like that for sure (3-1, ll.148-156).

According to this participant, the brand facilitated relationships both within the organisation and outside, both business and personal. In another case (P12) the brand had extensively facilitated her/his family life. At least two participants (P10 and P8) viewed the brand as being good for their families. Another view was that the brand did not so much facilitate relationships but guided them.

The brand was also attributed by some participants as having facilitated their growth as people within the organisation: e.g. *"It allows me to grow, to learn more, to do more things, to do things I am interested in. [...] They are all about growing people"* (3-8, ll.349-352). However, this growth was not only growth as an employee; in a few cases the brand was attributed as facilitating growth more generally: e.g. *"[I]t's taken me through different steps in my life, from childhood to adulthood to motherhood [...] it's something about the brand that, you know we want to nurture people"* (3-2, ll. 637-640). Paradoxically, the participant identified her/himself as being both the recipient of the brand's nurturing but also as part of the brand as nurturer.

A raft of comments centered around the brand being an encouragement (P10), a motivator (P12), creating a situation whereby the work was not just a job (P27, P50, P26), which facilitated employees to stay in the organisation by encouraging loyalty (P27, P26). The brand was also attributed with being the facilitator of a common vision and the creator of a good team environment.

Overall the brand was perceived as a facilitator not only within the context of the employee experience within perceived organisational boundaries, but also in some cases as part of the employees' personal lives outside their field of work. Furthermore, the brand was perceived in a variety of facilitation roles; i.e. facilitator of standards and guidelines, relationships and professional and personal growth.

The Branded Identity

A common narrative which emerged in Phase Three was that the brand somehow represented, identified, authenticated and validated employees both within the organisational boundaries and also beyond. Most of the narrative threads that feed into this narrative were however set outside the organisation.

Some participants saw their identity as being represented by the brand to other employees of BN, but not so much a part of their identity outside the organisation. One participant defined her/himself as not being like others in the organisation: e.g. *"I don't live and breathe it like some people; some people live and breathe the brand. I mean they take their sleeping bag to work"* (3-5, ll.625-627). Another participant (P35) said that s/he represented the brand mainly inside the organisation. P51 asserted that the brand authenticated her/him and that s/he represented the brand to her/his clients. P6 perceived that s/he represented the brand both inside and outside the organisation: *"The brand, I don't know it's just something we're trying to portray not only externally but internally"* (3-4, ll.774-775) For others, the portrayal of the brand was something which occurred mainly in relation to customers.

However, some participants felt that they did not stop representing or being authenticated by the brand outside the work context. For example P50 commented that the brand was part of her/his extended self:

(Interviewer: In terms of the brand [...] what do you think of when you think of [BN]?) I do [...] consider it part of my family, part of my ext[ended], myself, so, and obviously [now] that you've brought that up, that, that's, it's an extension of me, it's part, I don't consider, and I talk to people often that talk about going to their job and going to work and they've separated quite distinctly, and I possibly don't, it is part of me, it's part of my family (3-2, ll. 249-257).

When asked to comment on the brand, the participant seemed to merge the brand and both organisational and personal life together. Similarly, P8 stated that the brand was

part of her/his life history. Others perceived that they represented the brand to others beyond the employee-customer interface; e.g. *“all of a sudden the brand becomes mine and that’s how people see it”* (3-6, l.293). P12 stated that s/he was a BN person outside her/his role. Also P36 perceived that s/he wore an invisible badge, while another participant (P38) would sometimes wear BN branded socks or use branded golf balls when taking part in her/his life outside. For one participant s/he expressed her/his role inside the organisation as being hidden behind the brand, the face of the organisation, but when in public s/he perceived that s/he was recognised as the face of the brand.

For at least two participants they identified with the brand to the extent that they would take things to heart if the brand was reflected badly. Lastly, P50 stated that s/he lived and breathed the brand.

When considering the branded identity, there were a range of views about whether or not the brand is part of the identity, when participants considered their lives both inside and outside the organisational boundaries. Responses ranged from the brand only being a small part of the employee identity, to the brand being an extension of the self outside the organisation as well as inside. This narrative is also linked to the various constructions of the brand, organisation and self which is discussed in more detail in Section 4.3.3: Vignettes.

Knowing

Knowing may be framed as having different levels: the management view, the customer contact view, the product development view, and the branded identity view. Knowing is connected to different ways of knowing the brand and of the brand allowing people to know themselves and to be known by their communities within the organisation and outside. Knowing is also linked to reflection and portrayal. How the brand is portrayed and therefore known is a common narrative thread. Also, knowing is linked to self knowledge as well as collective knowledge. How people know

themselves informs how they know the brand. The brand facilitates knowledge but is also brought into existence through shared meaning and therefore shared knowledge. Knowing the brand in so many ways reveals the brand as being multi-faceted. Having a relationship with the brand and how that relationship is framed is also central here. The organisation's hierarchy was perceived as being open in that management; even the GM knew people. Knowing each other as a family was expressed. Lack of knowledge was also highlighted; i.e. a lack of knowledge and therefore connection between front line and back office teams (P42), and a lack of knowledge and acknowledgement can inevitably lead to detachment from the brand. Knowing is also linked to brand communication, whether that means the brand is communicated by people, process, reward systems, and surveys, or through the visions and values of the organisation. All of these methods were mentioned by participants in Phase Three.

4.4.2 Summary

In this section I have discussed some of the narratives which emerged across the 15 participant interviews which formed Phase Three of my study. I chose those narratives which either integrated or simply extended the narratives which emerged out of the two focus group stages. I have not attempted to include every narrative which had emerged across all three phases but only those which seem relevant to my overarching research question, namely; ***How do employee narratives construct the brand of a large service organisation?*** I have revealed some common ways of perceiving the organisation, brand, self and other actors across the various interview phases, but I have also tried to reveal the complexity of these narratives. There is no one single collective voice in that a variety of views, perspectives and experiences emerge from the data. In addition, there is no stable, unified sense of collective self when considering this body of employees in their common experience with one brand. In the subsequent section I highlight the individual narrations of organisation, self,

brand and other actors in order to show that not only is there complexity across group narratives, but there is complexity within the narratives of individuals.

4.4.3 Vignettes

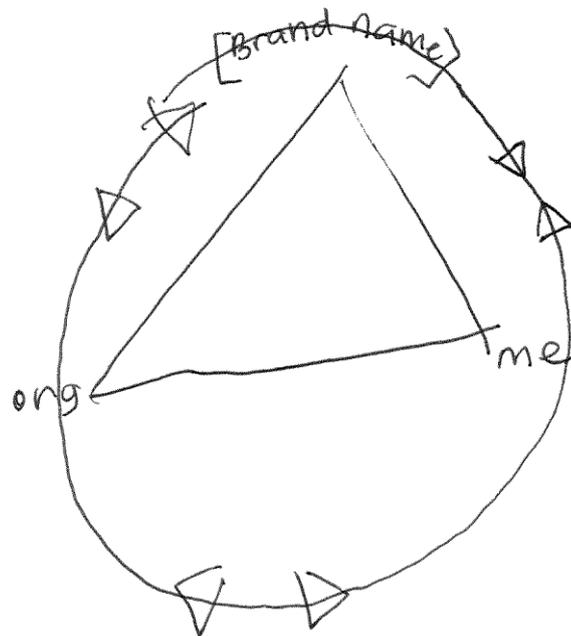
The term 'vignette' is of French origin and has various meanings, including ornamental design on a blank space in a book, the photograph of a head and shoulders, or a short description of something.⁶ The following vignettes combine elements of each of these definitions. First, each vignette includes a drawing (visual text) which was initially intended to embellish the core written text. However, these visual components emerged as much more than embellishments but became instead, part of the core text. Secondly, each vignette presents the branded identity of a particular participant; a metaphorical head and shoulders. Thirdly, each vignette provides a brief description of the self-organisation-brand. The following vignettes are presented in random order; that is, not necessarily in the order the participants were interviewed. In addition, the drawings are authentic replications of the original drawings. Where handwriting is included in the drawing, I have used my own handwriting in order to maintain the anonymity of the participants, but I have attempted to the best of my ability to emulate the original text. For example if a participant wrote some or all of the text using capital letters or lower case, or crossed out words, I have done the same. If the participants have written the actual brand name or the organisation type, I have replaced such terms with bracketed alternatives. I did this in order to maintain the anonymity of the organisation in question and its brand name. To ensure that my renditions of the original pictures were, as I claim, authentic, I showed a fellow colleague who was conversant with qualitative research the original and replicated versions of the drawings, and invited her feedback on the accuracy of each replication.

⁶ "Vignette" The Concise Oxford Dictionary of English Etymology. 1996. Retrieved September 22, 2009 from Encyclopedia.com: <http://www.encyclopedia.com/doc/1O27-vignette.html>.

Participant 26 (P26)

P26 was employed in a front line position at the time of her/his interview. P26 was one of two participants who attended the first focus group interview but not the second. This respondent presented the self-organisation-brand as a triangle inside a circle (Figure 4.1).

Figure 4.1: Participant 26



Her/his visual text is reminiscent of brand models that have been suggested in the extant and managerial literature. At the top of the triangle P26 wrote the brand name to represent the brand, and at each of the bottom corners the participant wrote 'org' (organisation) and 'me' (self). The arrows, which point in opposite directions, suggest a two way relationship flow between each element. In relation to the diagram, the participant explained that the movement has a particular order and direction: *"[It is not] necessarily a tier system, but it's all [BN], the brand, which leads into the organisation which leads into me and I lead back into the brand, so it's like in a circle"* (3-1, ll.415-417). The participant drew, however, forward and backward arrows, thereby

contradicting the verbal uni-directional view. The phrase “*all [BN], the brand*” privileges the brand over the other two elements. Thus, while the circle suggests an equal relationship between each element, the brand is also represented as being more dominant than the other two elements. Furthermore, the brand is visually privileged in its position at the apex of the triangle.

In addition, P26’s narrative represents the relationship between the three elements as being both linked and separate: “[T]hey all link to each other separately as well. I can link myself to the [BN] or I can link myself to the organisation, and so on. I think that would be the best depiction of it” (3-1, ll.421-423). The words “*the best depiction*” suggest that there are other possible depictions which P26 did not choose to draw:

But when you mentioned it the first time, the first thing that came into my head was people hugging each [other], or kind of one of those things holding hands around the world images, but I think this [the drawing] would be more accurate, kind of a triangle and a circle (3-1, ll.427-430).

When asked what is meant by ‘most accurate’ P26 explained: “*Because it kind of links everything together, and also links things separately. One thing leads onto the other but they can interlink separately also*” (3-1, ll.440-441). This statement presents a paradoxical view in that linking can be together and also separate. P26 maintained a position between being linked and being separate:

I think a separation personally. A slight separation [...]. When you actually link things together they’re stronger so it’s a more powerful thing. So each section gives the other strength, because the organisation would be fine but it gets more power from the brand [...]. Then I would be fine as an employee, but I get more power from the organisation and from the brand (3-1, ll.455-458; ll.462-463).

Thus, P26 resisted merging any of the elements together but instead emphasised their linked but separate positions. Furthermore, the participant associated strength with being linked and with the movement or flow between the elements:

So that's how they can link into each other and as they flow around, back and forth, that's how it kind of builds up their strength, but I wouldn't say it was one, I don't see myself as kind of a central aspect of it (3-1, ll.467-469).

In this description, P26 resisted privileging her/himself in any way.

This visual and verbal picture suggests both resistance (separation) and accommodation (linking) between the self and the other elements. There are other elements in P26's verbal narrative which help the reader to understand this stance. First, P26 was aware of others in the organisation who s/he perceived as not being as detached. P26 referred to one person in particular: *"One guy at the [organisation] is called 'the preacher' or something like that, of the [organisation], because he's held in such high esteem [...]. He's always proclaiming how good it is. 'Evangelist', that's the word"* (3-1, ll.485-486; l.490). P26 explained that this particular person: *"[...] believes in it so much, which is quite incredible. And maybe after I've spent as many years in it I may feel the same way"* (3-1, ll.498-499). Thus lack of detachment and belief are associated with long service with the organisation. However P26 also associated this intensity of belief with extreme religious groups: *"[...] which] always have an innate ability to be scary [...]. I don't like the idea of being that involved with something like that; you find yourself hard to detach"* (3-1, l.503; ll.507-508). This perception of cults being dysfunctional was also reiterated later in the interview: *"We all know how bad some cults can get, especially if you start challenging them. It can be very unhealthy"* (3-1, ll.554-556).

P26 also explained that s/he chose to remain detached in order to avoid getting hurt, thereby likening the situation to that of a relationship:

[Y]ou're close, you're friends, but you don't want to bring it to that next level in case something goes on and you have to move abroad or something happens to your partner [...]. You never know what could happen with the [organisation] in years to come [...]. So [...] if you've built your entire life around this brand, this [organisation], and all of a sudden it goes belly up or something drastic happens [...] (3-1, ll.526-529; ll.533-534).

P26 explains that it is healthier to remain detached:

You get very ingrained into [a] culture, which I suppose the problem with that would be that you can't see beyond it, the culture's everything else so you don't have that detachment of looking from the outside in, so sometimes you can miss things (3-1, ll.547-550).

Furthermore, this respondent associated being detached with being fair and open-minded.

Overall, this participant's narrative creates tension between resistance and accommodation. Not only are there elements of resistance (separateness) and accommodation (linking) within the illustration, but P26's choice of one drawing over another that s/he initially thought of drawing revealed an internal conflict (dissonance) around various dualities.

Participant 8 (P8)

P8 played a support role at BN. P8's illustration divides the self-organisation-brand into separate illustrations (**Figure 4.2**). The brand is represented as an external representative of the brand; i.e., a television personality used to communicate the organisation's marketing communications to the external consumers. The organisation is depicted as three stick figures. The self is represented by a heart.

Prior to drawing this montage of images, P8 portrayed her/himself, the brand and the organisation in various ways. First, P8's narrative stressed the role of management: *"I think it is a top/bottom kind of thing. I think it is driven from the top"* (3-

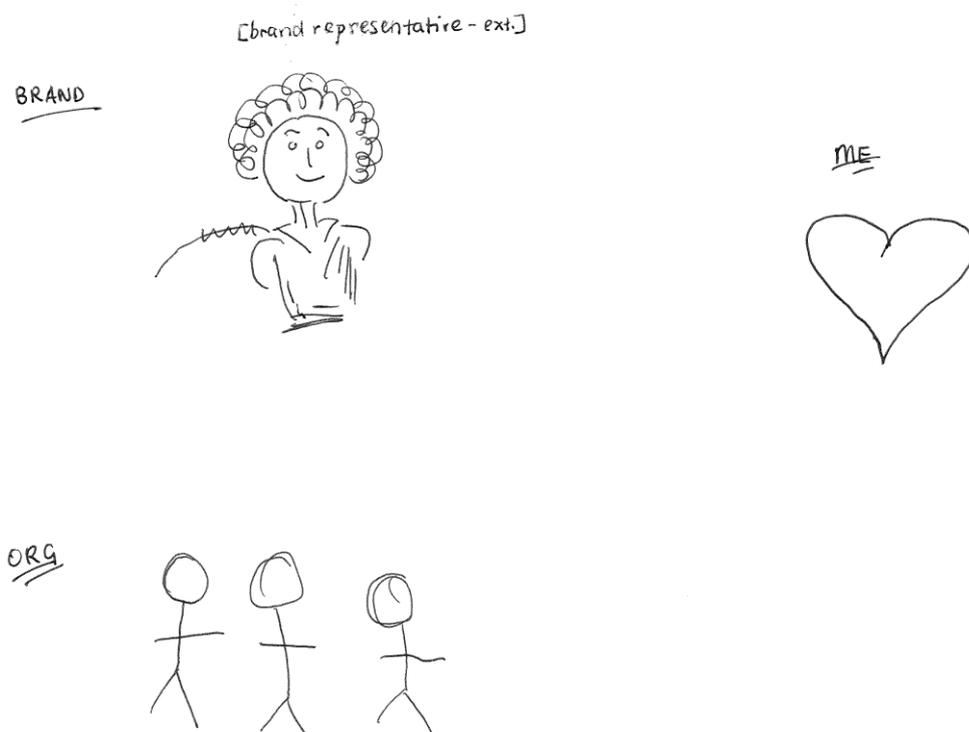
12, l.246). This idea was then developed into the perception of the brand being a person: *“To me, [BN] is more like a person. I am very proud of the brand”* (3-12, l.265).

When asked what kind of person the brand was, P8 suggested that BN is:

[...] a geek [who] will always look to ways of how to improve things because [BN] always look[...] at the positive ways; [a BN] person always asks for the work, they do not always make the decision, they want the whole company’s opinion [...], they look at ways to [...] improve things, that’s me, I always try and improve things to be very efficient (3-12, ll.269-271, ll.271-319).

Thus, P8 presented the brand as a type of person (“a geek”), a group of people (“they”), a particular type of employee (a BN person), and her/himself (“I”).

Figure 4.2: Participant 8



In addition, P8 confirmed that s/he considered her/himself as the brand’s representative and defender:

I am the ambassador of the brand [...] I think as soon as the brand name comes [...] it is my other family, and when they say it is crap and things like that, all of a sudden I have the horn effect; don't tell me that my family is like that. So it is like somebody telling you, like your biological [family] yes, you are just like your dad, and I think that hurts. Perhaps because I felt like if I go in a room and do negotiations or something else, if they said to me 'I want to talk to the [organisation], to me I felt I am the [organisation], you are speaking to the [organisation]. To me I felt I am the person who is representing that brand. So if wherever I go and whatever I do outside of work, it does not matter what I do, I am still [BN] (3-12, l.295; ll.300-308).

In this extract, family emerges as a relationship metaphor to depict P8's relationship with the brand. Also, the organisation, brand and self seem at times to be synonymous.

In addition, P8 described the brand as being a constituent part of her/his life:

It is part of your history, wherever you go [...] so it is actually part of your life history, whether you like it or not, you worked for them for two years, you spend two years of your life trying to actually [be] an advocate to these people, actually it is the brand that does that, the history forms part of your life (3-12, l.331, ll.3333-336).

In turn, P8 represented her/himself as being a constituent part of the brand when s/he described herself as the heart of the brand represented as a physical person:

If you say the brand is the persona, the person, to me it is the little people that make up the parts [...]. Let's say I am the [BN] brand as a physical person and the manager is the nose and I am the heart [...] I think [BN] is a person; you walk into the branch, you meet that person [...] [BN] is [a] face (3-12, ll.531-537).

This metaphor supports P8's assertion that: *"It is the people that are the brand, it is the people who make the brand"* (3-12, l.520). Yet being and making are two different positions. Paradoxically, while P8 also separated and distanced the brand from people

when discussing negative managerial change: *“I would let them know that I am leaving because of the managers, not because of [BN]”* (3-12, ll.514-515). P8 still asserted that management both part of the body and constituent of the brand.

The role of the employees is highlighted when P8 states:

If you say the brand is the persona, the person to me it is the little people that make up the parts (3-12, ll.493-494).

The physical body metaphor is taken even further when P8 explains:

[...] if you stick to my personality person, the brand that is outside to the world is actually your physical appearance so you may [have] long hair, nice hair, pretty eyes and all that, that is what they do know, but they do not know your inside (3-12, ll.513-516).

Thus, P8 represents the brand as an outward facing phenomenon.

This discussion about the brand culminated in the montage of illustrations drawn by P8. The respondent explained that the picture of the person represents BN, while the people are the cells of the body, and the parts of the body are the person. P8 reiterated that s/he was the heart of the body. If people are the brand then the brand also in this case becomes the heart. Paradoxically, P8's description of the face suggests that it could change and morph. Ultimately: *“[BN] is me. I am confident, proactive, I like to do things on time, [I am a] perfectionist”* (3-12, ll.539-540). P8 becomes the brand.

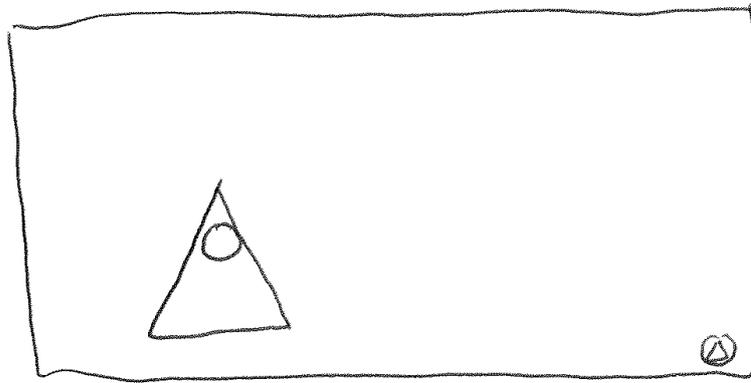
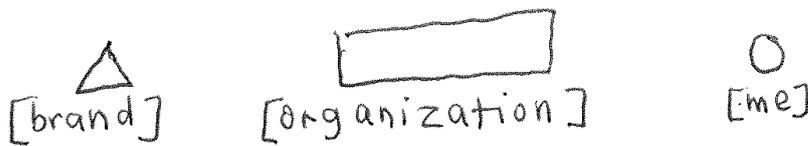
This visual and verbal narrative presents a montage of images which privileges the brand as the most dominant (size and order) element, separates the external and internal brand world, but ultimately blurs any boundaries s/he sets up by declaring that the parts constitute the whole and vice versa. In the end, the brand reflects who P8 sees her/himself as, within the context not only of her/his role at BN, but also in her/his life beyond perceived organisational constraints. Rather than desiring to maintain a

degree of separateness between self, organisation and brand, P8 displayed a desire to still be somehow *a part* of as well as the whole of the brand body - a paradox which allows P8's identity to oscillate between resistance and accommodation.

Participant 38 (P38)

This participant was employed in a support role at the time of the interview. P38's illustration (**Figure 4.3**), presents a fragmented view of both the brand and the self, and employs geometric shapes to represent her/his view.

Figure 4.3: Participant 38



This respondent provided a key to show the reader which shape is used for which element. P38 explained to me (which is why I have used parentheses in the diagram) that the organisation is represented by the rectangle, the brand is represented by the triangle, and the self is represented by circle. P38 explained that her/his allocations were representative of her/his perception of each element:

I've said that the organisation is a rectangle because it's got a very solid base. For some reason I gave the brand a triangle and I've made a smaller triangle inside the big rectangle because I believe it's only part of the organisation; I don't think it's the be all and end all (3-9, ll.299-302).

Thus the stability and size of the various shapes is used here to represent the perceived stability and strength of the brand and organisation. P38 explained that s/he has privileged the organisation because: *"[W]ithout the organisation then there would not be a brand"* (3-9, ll.341). While P38 seemed sure about the strength and stability of the organisation, s/he was unsure about how to draw the circle, representing her/his 'self': *"I think there's probably more than one place to put me [...]. I still don't know how big to make the circle that represents me"* (3-9, l.306; l.314).

Placing her/himself near the base, and inside the brand, was, according to P38, deliberate:

I think I'm [...] part of the foundation, and I think I'm inside the brand triangle because I help to portray the brand rather than it's in me if you know what I mean. You could argue that there is a little triangle inside the circle (P ll.326-329).

P38 also gave details about the value of her/his role: *"My role is quite fluid [...] because of my experience there's probably a lot inside my head which is not on paper anywhere and so there I am quite valued"* (3-9, l.346; ll.348-349). Furthermore, the respondent clarified her/his position in the rectangle: *"The people potentially up the top of the rectangle would be like the front line staff who are just with the customer, so therefore it's almost like [...] they could be replaced, but I would [not] be as easily replaced"* (3-9, ll.354-357). Thus, how the self is placed within the rectangle, shows how important P38 perceived her/his role within the organisation.

In addition, this participant's illustration shows the participant as part of the brand and the brand as part of the participant, and both elements are part of the organisation.

Thus, the visual text shows the brand and self encapsulated inside the organisation. However, elsewhere P38 stated that the brand is an external phenomenon: *“I’m taking the brand to be the real physical things, the logo, the colours, mainly the colours, the policies that make the [organisation]”*(3-9, 376-377). On first reading, the inclusion of policies in this list of ‘real physical things’ seems contradictory. However, when reading the verbal text, it becomes clear that P38 linked the policies with the outward, physical, manifestations of policy decisions. These policies are further revealed in the products and services, and community-based activities:

What is the brand for me? I think it is the products and the services, the branches, the actual physical things that you can see would be the brand for me, and the philosophies of the organisation itself. You know, community based, good sponsorship, that sort of thing (3-9, ll.174-177).

Thus the brand was largely a physical expression for this participant. P38 also described the brand as: *“[T]he face of the organisation [...]. It’s the visible part, and yeah if they told a fib in one of their advertisements or something like that then yes it would definitely cloud the organisation’s [...].”* (3-9, ll.518-520).

This analogy of the brand being the face of the organisation is similar to the P8’s description of the brand. Part of this physical, external expression is the wearing of uniforms. P38, early on in the interview, spoke about the effect of wearing a uniform:

When I did come in we were still wearing uniforms and we did the corporate wardrobe update and that sort of thing [...] and gradually that subsided, and [eventually] the uniform went and I think that people who joined since then haven’t got the same kind of linking with that brand that you did when you did have the uniform (3-9, 96-101).

The wearing of branded, tangible items, is carried on, by P38, into her/his life in the community. When asked about the brand being inside her/him, P38 responded by explaining that:

Everybody know[s] who you work for; I work for [BN] so everybody knows who they are. You don't have to explain (3-9, ll.425-427).

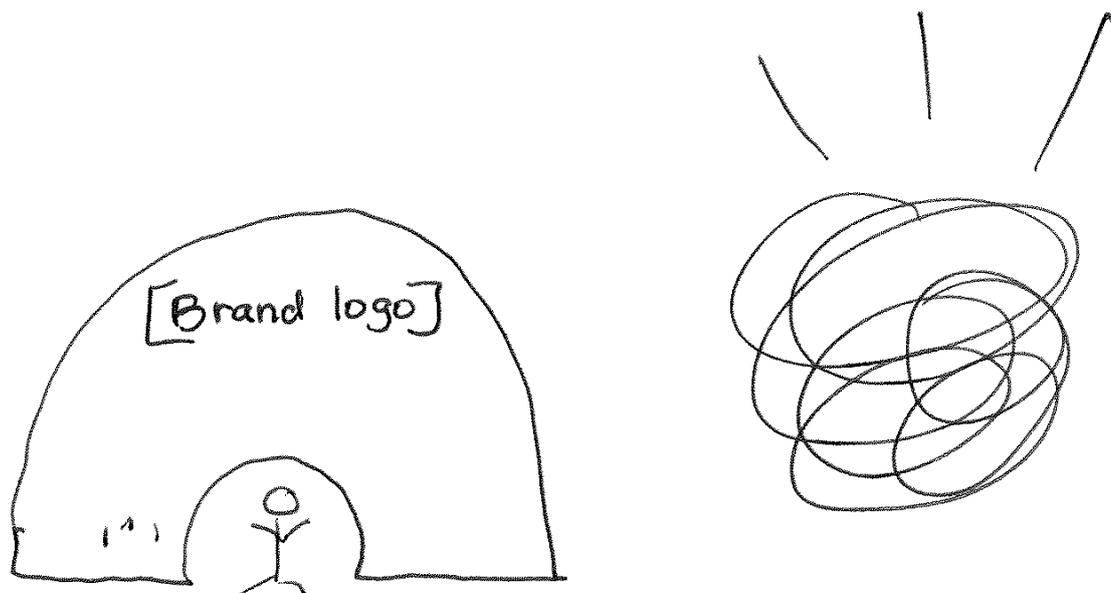
P38 explained that the values behind the vision were values that s/he shared with the organisation and this sharing of values was how the brand reflected who s/he was.

Overall, the visual narrative suggests that the brand and self exist inside the organisation and yet the verbal narrative reveals the brand as the external face of the organisation and the marker which identifies the self within the organisation and community. It could be that these two texts contradict one another on some level (dissonance), or it could be that the organisational lines that are represented by the rectangle are more far reaching than originally assumed.

Participant 42 (P42)

This participant worked in a back office position. Elements of P42's visual text (**Figure 4.4**) have been altered in order to maintain the anonymity of the organisation. P42's representation of the self-organisation-brand presents two views.

Figure 4.4: Participant 42



P42 did not clearly indicate which aspects of the illustration relate to the organisation and the brand. The left side of the illustration shows a modified aspect of the brand logo (labeled as such to indicate what the shape originally was). The self, 'me', is placed under the shape. Whether the self is supporting the shape, or whether the shape is protecting or oppressing the self is unclear. On the right hand side of the picture swirls and lines contrast with the less formless left hand drawing.

The visual text can be read in conjunction with P42's earlier comments about the differences s/he perceived existed between front line and back office viewpoints:

Their customer service ethic is a lot higher [than ours] because they're dealing with that all the time whereas I think ours is a bit more laid back and we perceive that too from other departments because of where we work, what we're doing. We're laid back because we're not service oriented (3-5, ll.15-18).

However, the perception that the back office is laid back compared to the front line is not necessarily supported visually by the more chaotic lines depicting the internal world behind the branded outward facing shape. Alternately the term 'laid back' could be associated with a less orderly experience.

The service culture was further explained:

I come from a service culture [...] and you are dealing directly with the network, with people who are dealing with customers, so you have to respond a lot more quickly, whereas where we are now, you do have to respond but there is not that sense of urgency, and even in other roles, it definitely changes depending on what you are doing. If you're customer facing I think you've got a lot more, there is a lot more to lose than if you are in the back office, because you're dealing with clients all the time (3-5, ll.577-584).

As P42 discussed this issue in more depth, it became clearer how the image of chaos fitted into her/his view:

I think they forget about why they are there. We have squabbles about, we're doing it this way, we're doing it that way, but it does happen. You get people [...] we have things going on between departments [...] because people forget why we're there, instead of people communicating with each other they're all fighting with each other to get something done (3-5, ll.589-594).

This comment helps the reader to understand the visual gap that exists between the front facing part of the illustration and what happens behind it. Furthermore, having a customer orientation is P42's main association with the brand.

When asked to explain the brand and organisation in the illustration, P42 explained that there was no clear distinction between the two: *"I think they're [...] together, organisation and brand definitely together. Even though there [are] differences, but I see them together"* (3-5, ll.519-520). P42 explained that the difference between the brand and organisation is linked to the role differences highlighted earlier:

I think we talked about it before, in one of the other meetings, where we say like we've got [strap line] but our back end stuff sometimes isn't [what the strap line promises]; that's where we've failed [...] [it's more a gap between] what the brand says and what you're actually doing behind the scenes. Our front end customers see everything is all fine and rosy [...] but the back end processes are having trouble picking up sometimes, because there is demand, there is pressure, lack of resource, stuff like that, it's very difficult to meet that impression sometimes (3-5, ll.525-535).

Thus, the external customers see an external view, but they are not aware of the pressure, lack of resources and potential for chaos behind the scenes. What P42 presents, therefore, is that which is visible and that which is invisible.

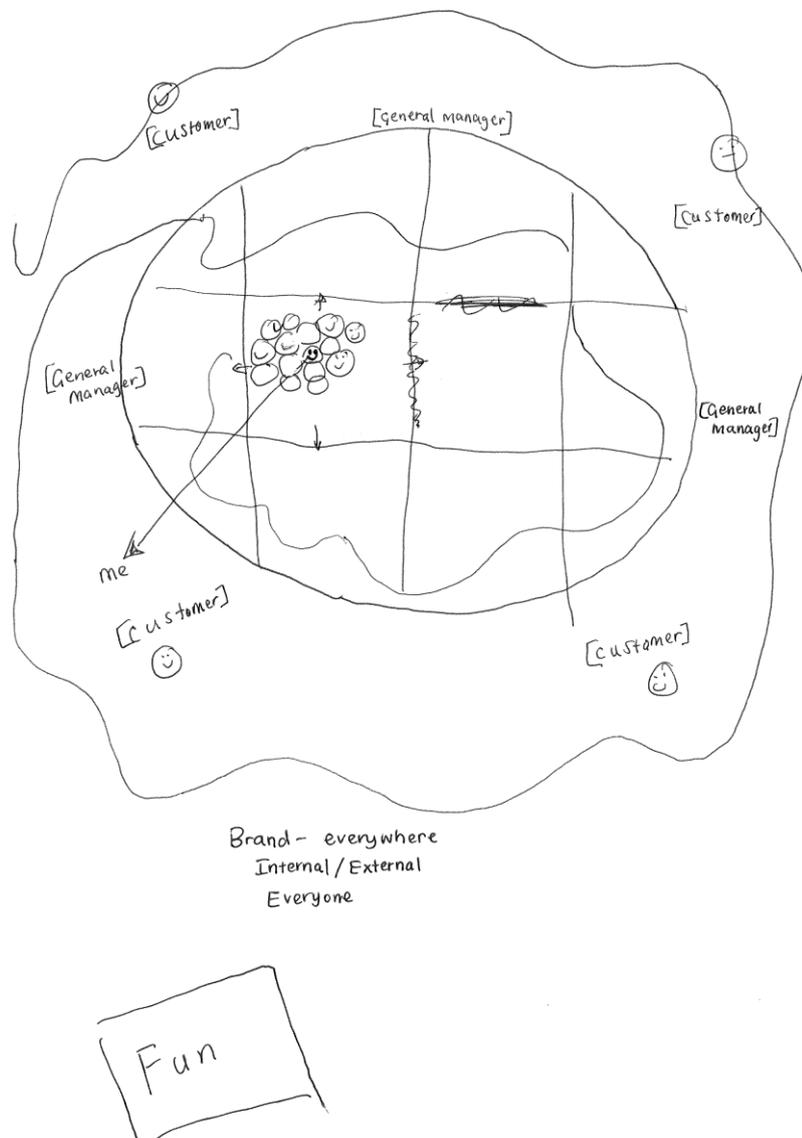
In summary, P42's vignette emphasises an ideal, external facing view which is a front for invisible activity behind the scenes, which to varying degrees, and particularly in certain back office roles, is not aligned with how the organisation presents itself to

the external consumer. Visually, the use of two illustrations side by side represents an outside-inside view, but this visual rendition also disrupts this dichotomy by placing the self which is inside underneath and visible to the external consumer. P42 suggested that having a customer-orientation would help to reintegrate these two views.

Participant 27 (P27)

P27 was, at the time of the interview, in a managerial position. P27's drawing (Figure 4.5) consists of a combination of words, lines and shapes.

Figure 4.5: Participant 27



P27, upon first analysis, seemed to have a detached, even dislocated, view of the brand—s/he prioritised having a good manager over and above all else:

[T]he brand is keeping me here, but I don't come to work each week and think about the brand. I feel I suppose I do subconsciously because if I see the ads on TV for argument's sake, if one or two of them are looking a bit tired, I feel a little bit [...] you know, so I suppose I do a bit because I want them to be good and fresh all the time so I am consciously aware of the advertising, does it look good and that sort of stuff [...]. I love the way our branches look and that is the brand isn't [it] and so I am aware of it probably sub-consciously, but consciously I come to do my job and look after my business unit (3-15, ll.680-688).

The brand is depicted in this excerpt as the outward appearance of the organisation, *"the way the branches look"*, and P27's awareness of the brand is more a sub-conscious phenomenon. However, P27's visual text, while it shows the brand along on the periphery of the organisation, the depiction reveals a much deeper view of what s/he perceived the brand to be and how it interfaces with and constitutes the organisational reality s/he was experiencing.

P27's view of the brand is a cosmological one. P27 places her/himself within one of the various sections that make up the organisation and s/he places the GM of the company in multiple places, providing him with an omniscient quality: *"He's not just at the top; he's all around us"*. When asked if s/he thought the GM was synonymous with the brand P27 answered: *"I think he is actually [...] I think GM is a big part of it [the brand]"* (3-15, l.1101; l.1106). Earlier comments by P27 in the focus groups also highlighted the importance of the organisation's leader but s/he did not directly equate the GM with the brand, other than claiming that a new leader might not be a BN person whereas the current GM was. Thus, the GM, for this participant, vivifies BN principles.

P27 also asserted in the visual text that the organisation is all around us and is made up of external customers as well. Inside the organisation the various

departments are not silos, a perception that is confirmed by a comment P27 made in the focus groups about the open nature of the organisation. This perception is shown visually in the way the participant has scribbled on some of the lines showing the grid containing the people. Earlier, P27 expressed a definite distinction between front line workers and back office staff:

[W]e put ourselves around as customer service leadership [...] the rubber hits the road with us, because we actually deal with the customer [...] whereas if you get right down to a specialist person sitting right down in the [...] bowels of head office somewhere doing a project or something, I think you could, you wouldn't be as engaged (3-15, ll.643-653).

However, this distinction is not reflected in the visual text.

The brand and organisation reveal a world whereby organisational and brand boundaries are wider and more far reaching than traditional views of the organisation and the brand would suggest. The visual text reveals a brand which is all encompassing and yet people are separated and subordinate to the brand. However, P27 also stated that people are the brand and the organisation is nothing to do with money. These statements confound earlier statements made in the focus group interviews that the brand was just the branch look, and that in fact the organisation is very much sales oriented:

Yes we are the brand, yes I see [BN] totally as a people thing [and] nothing to do with money almost [...] it purely is a people thing, service that the people give and it is the amount of service we give that attracts more business to us" (3.15, ll.698-703).

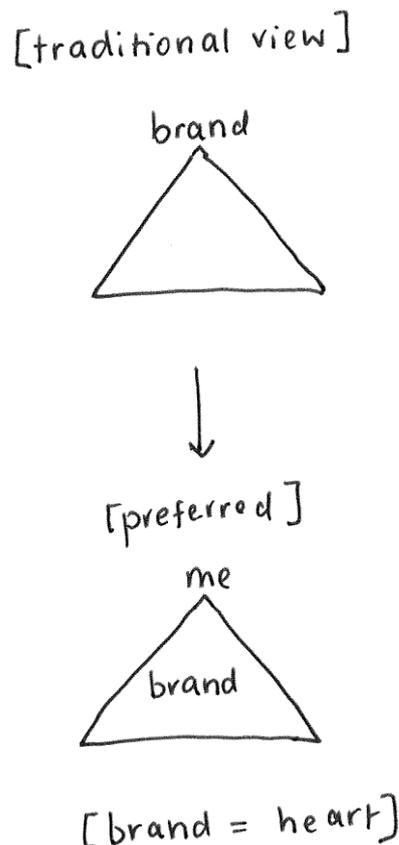
In summary, this participant provided a resistant view of the brand in the focus groups, privileging instead the role of management, yet from the Phase Three data, it becomes clear that this participant's view of the brand is one of the more complex and

conflicting, both verbally and visually. Traditional organisational and brand conceptualisations are challenged with P27's view of the self-brand-organisation triad.

Participant 31 (P31)

P31, who was in a support role, did not draw her/his illustration (**Figure 4.6**) by her/himself. S/he was the first participant I introduced drawing to and so her/his experience was not as standardised as the remaining 14 participants. Also, this participant did not attend both focus groups, but only one. However, her/his data is deemed valuable from a narrative perspective and so was included despite these inconsistencies.

Figure 4.6: Participant 31



P31's drawing experience was different from the experiences of the other participants in that I asked P31 what s/he thought of a view which places the brand in the middle of the triangle. The participant initially depicted a traditional/managerial way of depicting the brand; i.e. with the brand at the top of a triangle, thereby giving the

brand primacy over the organisation and employees. However, upon reflection, P31 decided that s/he preferred to place the brand in the heart of the organisation, thereby giving the brand a more central, and less hierarchical role. During her/his discussion s/he said that s/he preferred the brand to have this central position as it better reflected the role of the brand as the heart of the organisation. P31 did not place her/himself in the diagram but instead focused on depicting and describing the brand in relation to the organisation as whole. This view, while interactive in that the participant reacted to the brand-centered model by comparing it with a managerial model s/he was aware of, is still quite reductive.

This reductive view was not reflected, however, in P31's verbal narrative of the brand. In the focus group interviews, P31 expressed a multi-perspective view of the brand which included a marketing view, a service view and an historical (social) view of the brand. P31 commented about problems relating to the marketing version of the brand when not on the front line:

Internally, yep, I was thinking, why would we be so disjointed? We've got an image of what marketers consider the brand and [BN] and marketing's push to front line, then we have what we call support areas which are in the background, so we're living those values there, but sometimes I don't think they always connect, and for myself, this is for myself, I'm so involved in those values in my processes; the brand is not always relevant to me one hundred percent of the time [...]. So the marketing version of the brand, it's not so important to me in everyday business (3-7, ll.604-616)

Yet P31 preferred to place the brand in the middle of the diagram rather than placing it on the periphery, suggesting that the brand was more to do with the service aspect of the organisation than the marketing view of the brand suggested. P31 also described the brand as being vivified through people:

[C]onsidering the brand is quite like a piece of paper, I think the brand is sometimes is through people and how that's portrayed, whether we

communicate enough of the brand to them, whether they take an interest in the brand themselves to find out about the brand so they can see some correlation between the people side of the brand and the actual, I suppose [...] I don't know how to describe it. I kind of think the brand has to come to life and I almost feel like [...] this building has no life without the people inside it. Because it's quite plain and boring unless someone actually takes the time to explain and to show you why this building was designed and what purposes it has (3-7, ll.105-114)

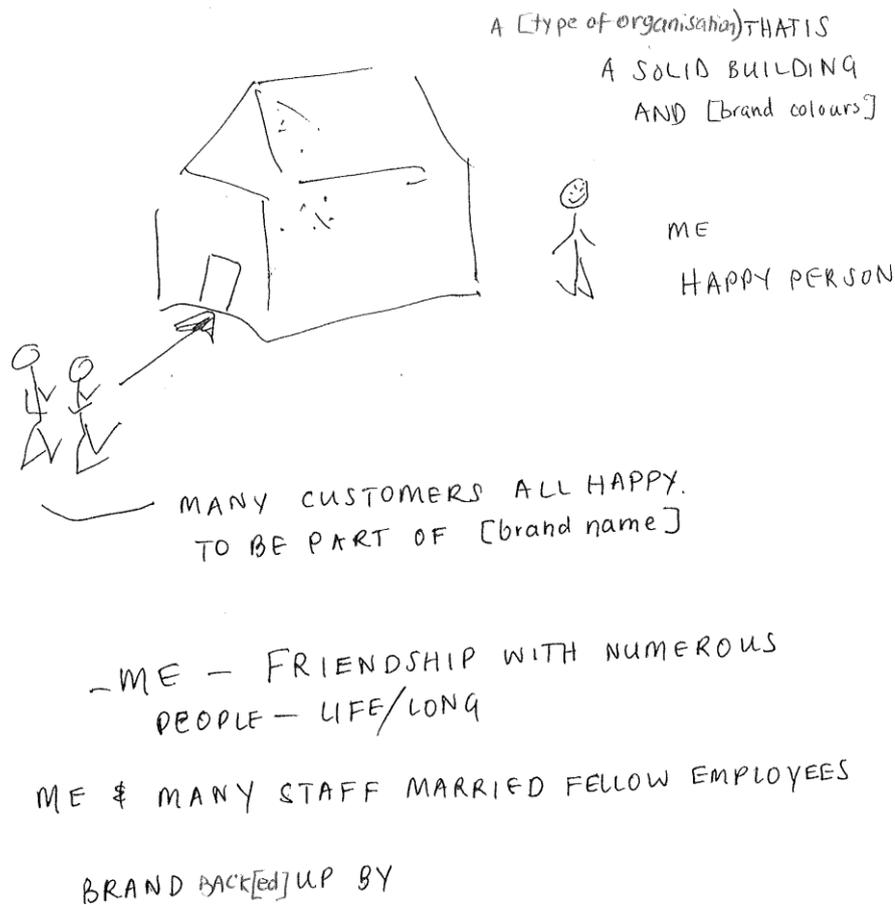
When describing the managerial view of the brand the participant explained that the brand sits at the top *“as a one liner, vision and values and then it's broken down into different parts”* (3-7, ll.464-465). However s/he preferred the brand in the middle because *“it then somehow [is] involving the brand in all areas of the [organisation] including myself”* (3-7, ll.467-469). The participant also explained that s/he preferred the brand being in the middle because *“the heart's roughly in the centre of the body, but pretty much everything gravitates from it and all life extends from it”* (3-7, ll.477-478). The heart moves the reader out of a managerial-reductive view of the brand, suggesting instead a biological or relationship metaphor. The brand becomes a central-life source, a vivifying phenomenon. Yet, paradoxically, P31 suggested that people vivified the brand.

In summary, this participant perceived the brand from different perspectives; i.e. the marketing brand, the service brand and an historical brand. P31 was not particularly conscious of the marketing brand in the service role s/he was in. The participant preferred a brand model which was central, heart-like. P31's visual and verbal narrative, though not entirely self directed, still revealed complex and dissonant views of the brand in relation to the organisation and self.

Participant 12 (P12)

P12 was also in a support role. This participant's drawing (**Figure 4.7**) represents the organisation and brand as a building.

Figure 4.7: Participant 12



The view of the organisation and brand this participant had in the focus groups and the front end of the individual interview, was that it was a family organisation and that people's lives were often facilitated, sometimes inter-generationally, through their association with the brand:

It's the family aspect and a lot of the staff did intermarry and I'm one of those staff members and we formed a lot of long term friendships and perhaps some of you have done the same that you have got friendships there which, which have started out as just work friendships and have turned out to be friendships externally and in my case there are a lot of our good friends that had families and those families know each other so the next generation down has a relationship there too (3-14, ll.618-624).

Thus the brand facilitated P12's life both inside and outside organisational boundaries. The diagram confirms P12's view of the brand facilitating relationships and lives outside the organisation.

This participant's view of the brand was also that it was external facing rather than an internal presence:

[...] it's more of an external (inaudible) here from my perception I would see. It's internally I think most people would think of it as the [organisation], as to the employer, and I think more would see that as the external thing, that it's out there" (3-14, ll.554-557).

Thus the organisation becomes the internal version of the brand, but the brand per se is recognised as such as the external facing of the organisation. The metaphor of the building in the diagram confirms there being an internal-external view of the brand. The use of a building, however, also fuses the organisation and the brand name. Certainly, this participant's view elsewhere was that "*The image of the [organisation] is sits on the brand*" (3-14, l.256) and they are inextricably linked: "*One wouldn't exist without the other for me*" (3-14, l.546). Paradoxically, however, the visual text suggests that the brand sits on the organisation but in this comment, the brand seems to be underneath the organisation holding it up.

For this participant, the brand's image is one of good reputation and history, both of which provide brand strength: "*it's like [another well known local brand], when you hear that name you think of high class, it's still around, it's been around a long time, it's still hear it's going to be around for a long time*" (3-14, ll.704-706). Even though this participant did not work on the front line, and saw her/his role as a defender of the brand, "*the last [person] standing*" (3-14, l.134), P12's view of the brand as being larger than the organisation through its historical, community and relational facets is in keeping with how the visual text represents both self and brand: "*It's a recognised brand that you would be keen and comfortable to recommend to your friends, I think*

that's one of the most important things about a brand" (3-14, ll.782-783). Also, the brand has constituted this participant's life in an extensive way, so again this is in keeping with the visual text. This inside outside view of organisation and brand is also in keeping with P12's view that the organisational and external worlds affect each other. For P12, the brand name has to be protected at all costs; thus its prominence in the visual text.

This vignette suggests that the brand and organisation are inextricably linked and the visual text is in many ways consistent with the verbal text provided by P12. However, there are still inconsistencies around the issue of distinguishing the brand from the organisation. For this participant, the brand is an external phenomenon and yet the brand is also the strength and support of the organisation.

Participant 36 (P36)

P36 had worked in a number of roles in the organisation. At the time of the interview s/he was working in a mixed role (mainly in a support role but with some front line contact). When asked to reflect on what being involved in the research had 'brought up' for her/him, P36 remembered the different views encountered in the focus groups. P36 described her/himself as being *"quite contrasting in my views"* (3-1, l.19) compared to other members of the groups. After I reminded P36 that the differences were to do with views of the brand, P36 attributed these differences to the differences in roles held by participants; not only her/his role per se, but also how P36 perceived her/his role, so perception was also noted as being important:

Well mine was very much attached to the brand because when we're doing running policy and making changes and things like that; the brand's at the forefront, you have to think about what you're going to do and what impact that [is] going to have on the brand [...] Whereas some of the other guys they were just focused on doing their job [...] to the best of their ability and they didn't think so much about, of the brand as such (3-1, ll.40-43, l.47, l.51).

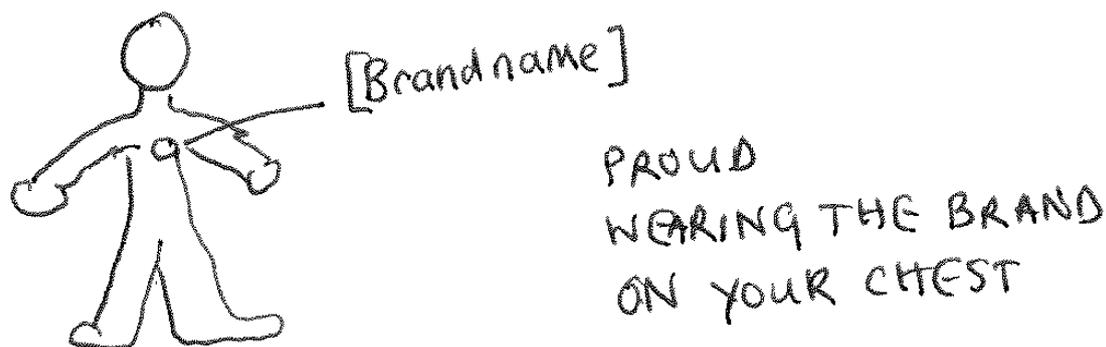
When asked to explain what s/he thought of when s/he thought of the brand, P36 explained that s/he thought of it in two ways: as a customer and as an employee. S/he viewed the organisation as a technology leader and customer friendly: *“from a customer’s perspective I see it as, I would never consider moving anywhere else. All the products and services meet my needs”* (3-1, l.75-77). P36’s loyalty as a customer also extended to being a loyal employee: *“When in the past I have [...] got a bit bored with what I am doing and looking for a new challenge I will always look within [BN] first”* (3-9, l.83-85). This loyalty was also connected to receiving recognition s/he had received in the past for her/his various roles. Security was another word this participant linked to the brand: *“obviously in the current environment it’s a pretty difficult one if you’re in [department], but I feel really secure in [BN] and grateful to be working for [BN]”* (3-1, ll.108-109). The organisation was framed in this interview as being superior technologically and as a customer service provider, and also in the way employees were valued. Valuing employees seemed to engender security for P36.

P36’s visual text (**Figure 4.8**) depicts the brand-self-organisation as a person wearing *“just like a little [BN] badge on my chest, which could kind of indicate pride in working for [BN], like you’re always wearing your badge on your chest regardless of where you are, what you’re doing”* (3-1, ll.450-453). For this participant, even when s/he’s not at work, s/he’s thinking about wearing that badge, albeit subconsciously: *“although it’s not always there, it’s kind of there in the background for anyone to see”* (3-1, ll.461-462). Yet there is resistance in what P36 asserted in relation to people being the brand: *“I think a lot of people see you as the [organisation] even when you’re out socially [...] so you have to almost portray the image when you’re out as well”* (3-1, ll.463-465). Another comment that confirms resistance on the part of P36 when considering whether people are the brand was also made in the individual interview phase:

They like to make you believe that people are the brand and they do to a certain extent, but I think there's probably a differentiation between the two. Yeah, there's, there's certainly, people do make a difference and there's, we are getting to the time where a lot of the executives and people like that are getting to retirement stage and those are the people that were the brand (3-1, ll.204-208)

Those who are genuinely "*the brand*" seem to be those who have been in the organisation for a long time and are close to retirement, but they seem to be disappearing.

Figure 4.8: Participant 36



Despite this resistance, the visual text seems to confirm the view of people being branded as either BN or not. P36 considered management in terms of whether the incoming GM was a BN-er or not. The role of managers and people within the organisation in general as conduits for the brand was also asserted by this participant and so the drawing of a branded person is consistent with this view: "*I think it's, it's always communicated down through people. It's not, it is a bit more personal I guess, rather than just receiving an email to say this is happening and go and do it*" (3-1, ll.266-268). Furthermore, this participant perceived engagement as believing in the system:

“[...] [management] believe in the process, so they’re not negative about it [...] I think our management are very much so engaged in that and, and even if they don’t necessarily believe in it to start with they’ll be shown the way and at the end of the day they’ll come on board for sure. It’s very rare that you’ll have a manager that doesn’t believe in it I guess. (3-1, ll.293-296)

P36 was also of the view that depending on her/his role, an employee may become dislocated from the brand: *“They possibly get a little bit disengaged from what happens in the, you know, the face of the [organisation], and they’re quite focused on their job which yeah doesn’t include anything to do with customers really”* (3-1, ll.404-406). The visual text, therefore, emphasises the representation role that employees have in customer contact positions; i.e. the brand is worn like a badge.

Regarding the organisation, P36 perceived the organisation and the brand as being intertwined, and furthermore, s/he perceived her/himself as intertwined with the organisation and the brand. P36 stated that s/he found it difficult to imagine life without BN and perceived her/his whole value system as being aligned with that of the brand and organisation; P36 trusted *“that they won’t make a decision that long term is going to fall over”* (3-1, ll.534), and this trust is somehow connected to her/his belief in the organisational processes that exist and ultimately the people behind the processes: *“[...] if you believe in the people then you’ll just believe in the process”* (3-1, ll.580-581). The process becomes part of the brand. P36’s depiction of himself, brand and organisation is similar to P36’s combination of these three elements into a person. Her/his depiction also links back to P31’s description of the brand being the heart of the organisation.

This participant viewed management as a major conduit for transmitting the brand culture and values throughout the organisation. S/he associated engagement with believing in the system, the process, through which the brand is transmitted. P36’s drawing is a depiction of her/himself showing the brand in place of a heart. P36 in the drawing, therefore both represents and vivifies the brand. As the participant explained,

s/he felt proud to work for BN, the face of the organisation. Ironically the brand is depicted as an internal organ rather than the external face in the drawing, while the organisation is viewed as the face. P36 suggested, however, that the organisation, brand and self were intertwined, the brand in the picture provides lifeblood and enlivens the body. The metaphor of heart/badge is ambiguous in that heart can represent the process internally but a badge is a symbol worn on the external layer. This picture seems on the surface to be almost simplistic, but when it is considered in conjunction with the verbal text, layers of complexity emerge.

Participant 6 (P6)

P6 was working in a mixed role; i.e. s/he had contact with external customers and also supported the processes within the organisation.

This participant's narrative was dominated by the story of another employee. P6 felt that this other employee had been treated badly, and this situation had consequently affected P6's close relationship with the brand. S/he described how the situation had affected her/him:

It has been really interesting because just the last couple of months have been really eye opening for me [...] and because I love [BN] so much, I have taken it [what had happened] personally (3-4, ll.52-54).

However, when P6 explained what had happened s/he referred to the brand as 'them':

I've only been with them for a year and two months, and do feel that I really do have a deep relationship with them, only because we have the same, I thought we had the same goals, we have the same values, but it seems only on an individual basis to me now (3-4, ll.59-62).

It became clear that the participant was referring to the management team who ran the organisation, but this oscillation between singular and plural representations of the

brand has emerged several times in this study. For this participant, the management at the top, the executive, were major transmitters of the brand:

[W]hat I feel the [executive members] try and do is [...] instill this [...] they do seem like they're very, a lot of integrity and all those things that, you know, the 'warm fuzzies' that make [BN], and they do I think try and have that filtered down but at times I think it's blocked, but others it filters all the way down to, like in my department absolutely fantastic (3-4, ll.66-71).

P6 suggested that that which constitutes the brand is filtered down into the various departments, but sometimes can be blocked, and it became clear that in the case of the employee who had been treated badly, a blockage had occurred. The participant admitted that previously s/he had been seeing the situation at BN in an idealised way, but the incident with the other employee had forced her/him see the situation differently: *"I feel now that I don't have those rose coloured glasses [on] anymore"* (3-4, ll.90).

P6 likened her/his relationship with the brand to that of a parent-child relationship, thereby personifying the brand. It was this closeness characterised her/his experience at BN and also intensified her/his feeling of disappointment. P6's feeling of closeness was linked to the activities of managers. This view is consistent, however, with P6's view that the brand is enacted through people:

[D]oes that make the brand made up of individuals or is it that the individuals make the brand [...] Maybe they go hand in hand. I would say the individuals make the brand, which makes it disappointing that you know individuals make mistakes (3-4, ll.231-234).

For P6, it was people rather than processes that are central to this process. The participant also spoke about hiring people who were BN people to start with. For this participant, a BN person is someone who possesses something special, is engaged,

and does more than is expected. Ironically, the person who had been treated badly was perceived by P6 to have been a BN person.

P6 admitted that other divisions in the organisation did not necessarily have the same level of engagement and connection with the brand, and s/he also noted that other employees did not have the same kind of relationship as s/he had with the brand. Again, P6 referred to the management of BN, making the connection between her/his relationship with the brand and being known and acknowledged by upper management:

Yeah, it's the respect that someone, someone has taken the time to one remember your name, know who you are, and that makes a huge difference. It makes you feel more valued and it goes back to that engagement where you feel valued, respected and that you are making a difference (3-4, ll.575-578).

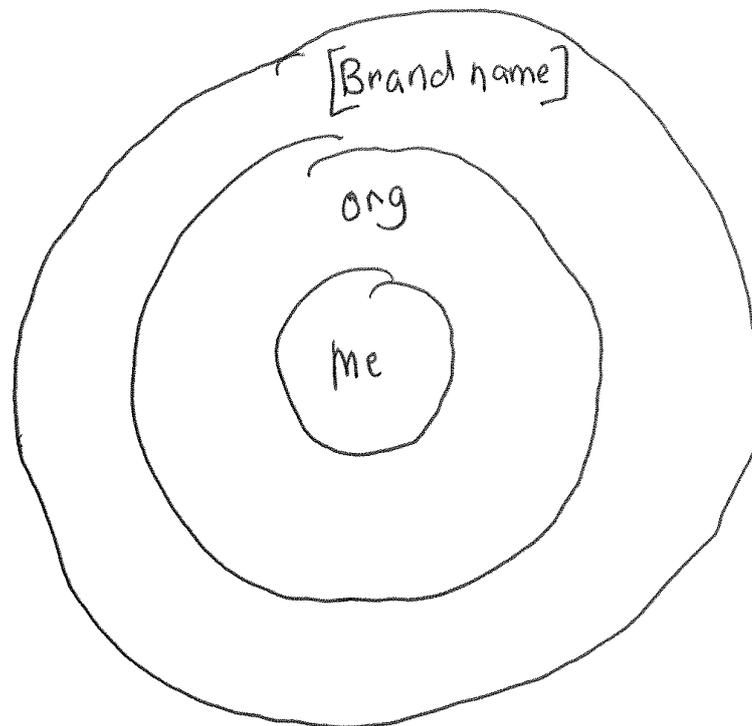
P6 made the point that those people and departments (e.g. IT) who s/he perceived as being detached from the brand were not necessarily engaged, were not necessarily in people positions, and were not involved in interaction with head office. P6 concluded by saying that it was difficult to differentiate between the brand and the individual and in the end, individuals made up the brand. Also apparent in P6's verbal narrative was the sense that despite her/his tarnished view of the brand, s/he still saw BN as a superior service provider compared to other organisations. This was in part down to the organisation hiring BN people.

This participant drew a diagram (**Figure 4.9**) which consists of three circles. The centre circle is allocated to the self ('me'); the next circle is allocated to the organisation ('org'), and the outer circle is allocated to the BN. The self, therefore, is central to the picture, while the brand encapsulates the other elements. The brand, therefore, is visually more powerful. When asked to interpret her/his drawing, P6 stated that the

brand is known, which could explain why the brand is placed in the last circle. P6 stated that s/he did not see the circles as separate:

I wouldn't see it as me, the organisation, [BN] over [here]. This is the only way I could really [...]. I'm part of the organisation of [BN]. [BN] is also, you know, you got [other companies under the BN], you know (3-4, ll.963-965).

Figure 4.9: Participant 6



The participant's explanation was succinct:

Me, the actual company and then the brand of [BN] [...] See, simple, there you go; it's all you're going to get [laughter] (3-4, ll.981, 985).

P6's explanation belies the more complex narrative that prefaced this illustration and reflection.

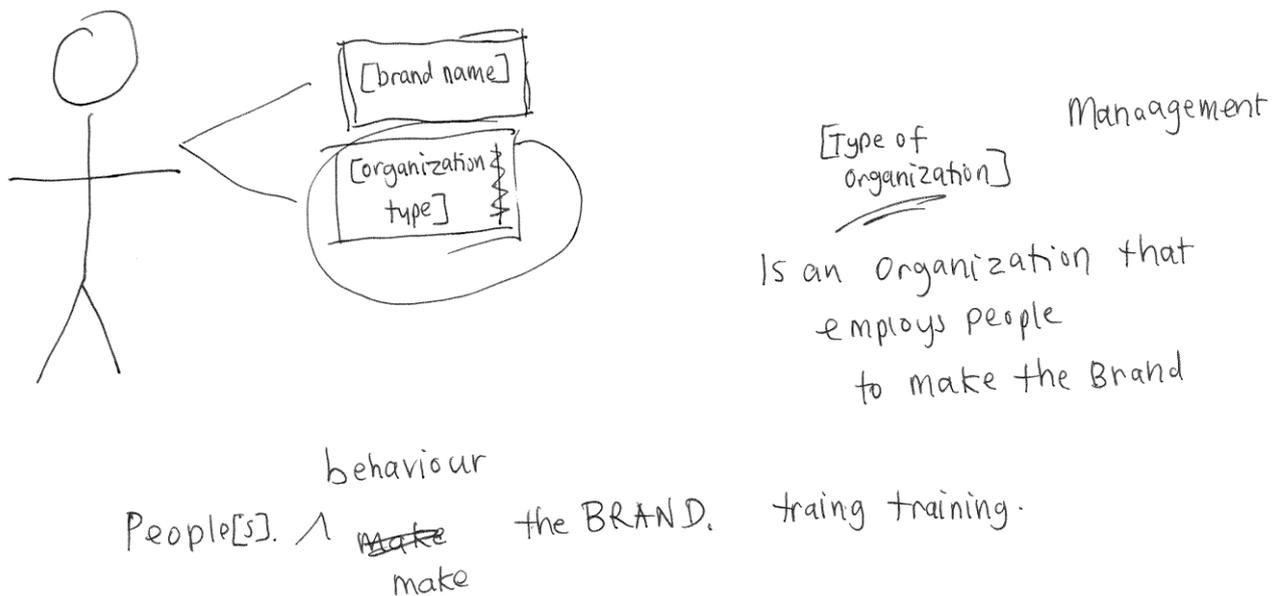
P6 provided a simple, and it could be argued, traditional view of the self-organisation-brand. P6 was of the view that every person portrays the brand.

However, the idea that people make the brand, inevitably has an impact on the brand image when one of those people reacts or acts in a way that P6 does not perceive as being consistent with the brand culture, of which s/he is an active participant and supporter. P6's visual narrative suggests resistance in that the three elements remain separate yet linked. Rather than the brand constituting P6, the participant ultimately constitutes the organisation and the brand. The simplicity of the diagram is underpinned and in some ways contradicted by the strength of her/his relationship with the brand and the complexity of her/his brand relationship, which changed over the course of the three phased interview process.

Participant Ten (P10)

P10 was working in a support role. P10 predominantly used words to express her/his view of the self-organisation-brand (**Figure 4.10**).

Figure 4.10: Participant 10



The body/person is the largest element in the drawing and so can be read as being the most powerful element. This reading is confirmed by the writing: "People[s]"

behavior make the brand". The brand (represented by the BN) is positioned higher than the organisation, perhaps suggesting that this is privileged over the organisation, which is drawn below the brand. The words "management" and "training" are also included in the visual text. "Management" is juxtaposed by "organisation" suggesting that, for this participant, management is representative of the organisation. The word "training" is positioned in a way that suggests it is linked to the way employees "make" the brand. The writing is tentative, crossed out in places, suggesting that the participant at times struggled to express her/his thoughts.

In P10's verbal narrative, s/he viewed BN as a brand that was well recognised outside organisational boundaries. When in social situations, the participant described being recognised as BN representatives: as if they *"had an invisible [BN]"* (3-6, l.134). The participant was also conscious of her/his role to represent the brand in the wider community because of the benefits that could be accrued from representing the brand well: *"I am conscious of it how I present myself and as the [BN] to me is well known and people respect you, you do get personal things from it"* (3-6, ll.279-280). P10 viewed her/his role in her/his local community as also being affected by an association with the brand: *"it's a draw card and even where we work, sorry [name] and I live, people will say to us 'Your [service] was [not working] on the weekend' [...] Yes, all of a sudden the brand becomes mine and that's how people see it.* (3-6, ll.287-289; l.293)

P10 also saw her/his role as being a protector of BN in order to mitigate against the failings of front line staff: *"And it is hard because we have to protect the brand but really the people at the front end have let the brand down"* (3-6, ll.75-76). Furthermore, it was also clear that s/he perceived BN as a national brand which was potentially being let down by different cultural interpretations of the brand culture as the country's demographics and the organisation's demographics changed: *"I've grown up in a country which is like milk and honey"* (3-6, l.144). Thus, P10's perception was that not only is BN special, but it emanates from a superior national and organisational culture,

and both are under threat. The perception that the power that people have to ‘make’ the brand means that the people who are employed by the organisation can have a powerful effect on how the brand is viewed.

While P10 resists forming a close relationship with the brand, s/he asserts that it facilitates relationships between people in the organisation and in her/his personal relationships:

And through the brand I have made some really good friends. You know if you are going to work for the same brand or the same organisation and often you will do something and you’ll be talking to a friend and you will say, ‘oh this, this and this’, but you have to be careful, you have to protect the brand. You have got to look good, feel good (3-6, ll.410-414).

Thus, the overriding position of this participant is as protector of the brand. When asked how the brand helped to create such a sense of loyalty in her/him, P10 answered: *“I personally feel that they encourage you; if you want to go on a course you can do that, so that’s personal development that you can take with you for the rest of your life”* (3-6, ll.429-431). Thus, the brand becomes management; management either represent the brand or enact the brand. When asked what s/he meant by *“make the brand”*, P10 suggested that people make the brand through their behavior: *“The [organisation] [...] employs people that makes the brand”* (3-6, ll.508-509). Training is also added as something else that helps make the brand, perhaps indirectly through affecting the people who make the brand. Finally, and perhaps in contradiction to the visual and verbal text thus far reported, P10 asserted that *“The brand is part of me; that’s the best I can do”* (3-6, l.558).

In summary, this participant struggled at times to explain her/his view of the brand-self-organisation. The self and people were presented as the strongest elements in this vignette. P10 resisted having a relationship with the brand (*“[...] it’s not my family”* 3-6, ll.162-163) and yet admitted that the brand facilitated aspects of her/his work and

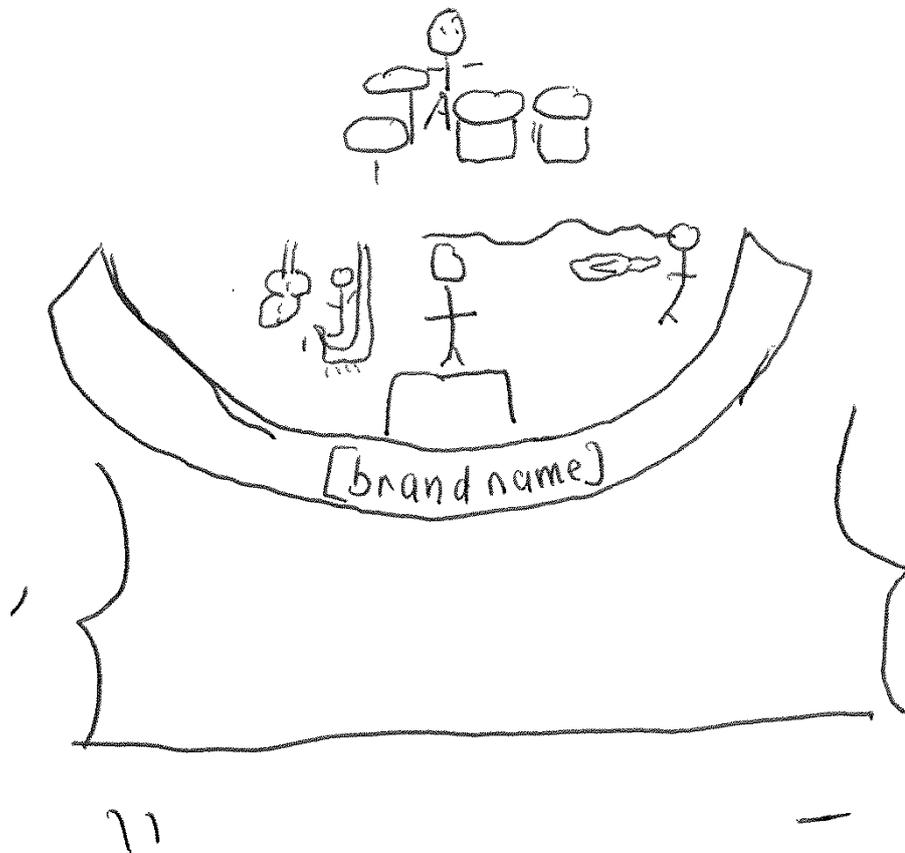
private life. Representing and protecting the brand were priorities for this participant. The role of management was also highlighted. However, despite her/his argument that people make the brand, P10's statement that the brand is part of her/him momentarily fuses and combines self and brand.

Participant 35 (P35)

This participant was in a mixed role at the time of the interview. S/he had some contact with external consumers but was mostly employed to directly support the front line staff. P11 used the metaphor of an orchestra (**Figure 4.11**) to represent her/his view of the self-organisation-brand. This metaphor is in keeping with a comment P35 made earlier: *"I think it makes it a little easier when you know what is expected from you and also everybody wants to make a deal, your contribution, everybody wants to get the best from you"* (3-10, ll.106-108). Thus each person is working towards the same goal (the same performance). The participant's explanation of the illustration is detailed and therefore illuminating:

I am kind of thinking of a concert and an orchestra, and I would be like one part of playing some instrument. That would be my contribution. The maestro is here, the conductor, I would be here playing some instrument. Basically the idea would be the conductor would be our CEO, someone who is taking us to do the performance well and that would be the organisation there, and trying to do our very best for the public here. I would be here playing a part of the big picture. (Interviewer: Is there any difference in terms of the musicians, [the instruments] people play, are the front line people different?) I have put the cello here and the violin here which is more attractive and obviously when you go a concert they have the cello and violins there and would be more like the front line people, the other things would be more like second and third lines (3-10, ll.158-172).

Figure 4.11: Participant 35



When asked whether or not the organisation and brand were the same, P10 initially asserted that the organisation is separate but also connected, but admitted that it would be difficult to separate them. When asked to decipher what the brand was, the participant provided a complex answer:

The brand would be the basic, no basic would be the organisation, the physical basic. (Interviewer: By 'basic' do you mean the platform?). The platform yes which gives it structure; the stage which gives it structure [...] the brand would be like the whole thing (3-10, ll.186-192).

When asked to clarify who the musicians are, given that the organisation is the stage, the participant explained that *"You cannot have the [stage] without people because they have to make it and they have to maintain it as well, so they are going to have it"*

(3-10, ll.206-207). P10 also explained that s/he used the performance metaphor because of its changeableness:

And so one day you play one thing and another day you play something else [...] we offer a lot of different service[s] and different ways to give the service as well [...] and] the people in here they are the ones who can make it happen, any changes and implementation (3-10, ll.209-2).

The participant also explained that the product is represented by the music which in turn is created "*by the brand and the organisation together*" (3-10, l.221). Though not drawn, an audience is also implied as the recipients of the performance. Moreover, P35 ultimately denies separation between the various elements: "*[the brand] it cannot be separate, it has to be, this came from something else and therefore has to be linked with what it came from*" (3-10, ll.366-368). And ultimately people created the stage, thus the question is raised, are people also inextricably linked to the organisation and brand? The participant also associated the brand with an external advertising personality and what that represents. This association is also consistent with a performance, but the orchestra metaphor provides an internal view of the organisation and brand as well as the outward look (the logo on the front of the stage).

In the focus group interviews, P35 described the brand as "*just big*" and "*kind of like a big circle you know and you [are] part of that*" (3-10, ll.1043-1044). P35 also perceived her/himself as being part of a big group who want to be the best. While the circle metaphor is not necessarily consistent with what P35 drew, the perception that P35 was part of a big group is consistent with the depiction of an orchestra. The orchestra metaphor emphasises a distinction between performers and imagined audience. In the focus group, P35 perceived fellow employees as internal customers along with external customers. The diagram confirms this view; i.e. members of an orchestra support and serve each other in order to create a successful performance.

However, the diagram also creates a distinction between internal and external worlds, and yet these worlds are connected in the overall experience of a performance.

This participant's depiction of her/himself, the organisation and the brand, uses the metaphor of a concert and an orchestra. P35 explained that the brand and organisation are separate (resistance) and yet her/his comments also suggest that they are inextricably linked and unable to be separated. The use of a performance metaphor requires and interlinks all the different elements shown in the illustration, including an (implied) audience. Ultimately people seem to be privileged in P35's explanation of her/his visual text insofar as people create the stage, and yet the brand is also purported to be "the whole thing".

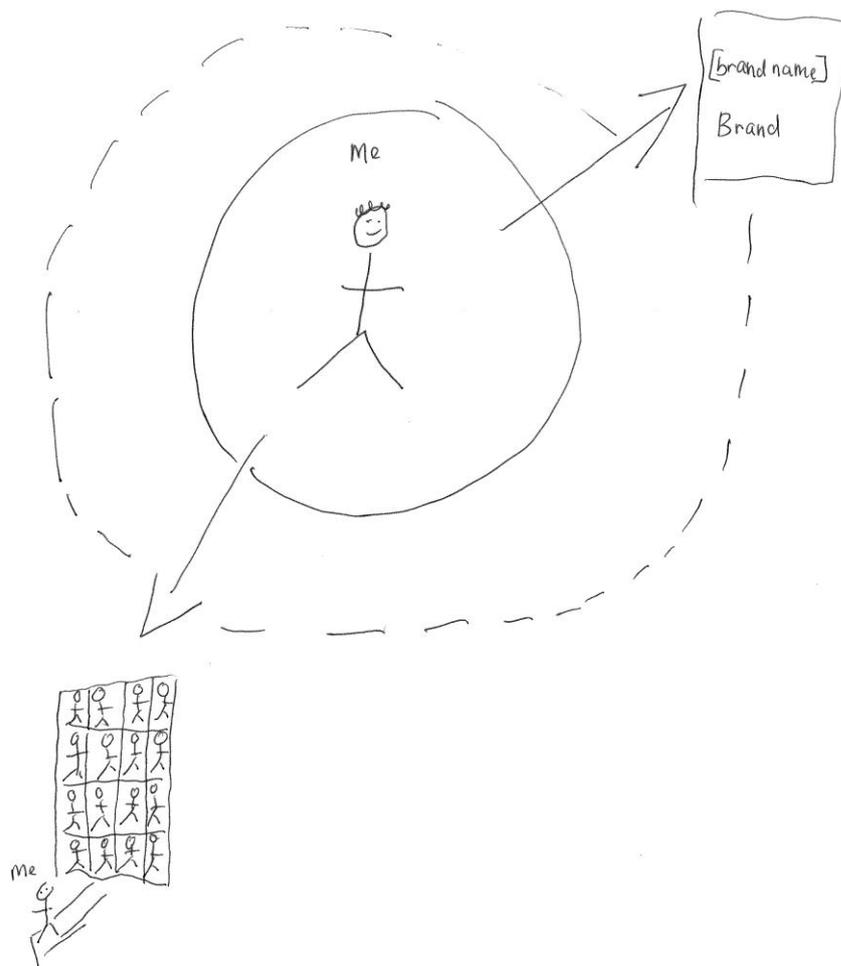
Participant 51 (P51)

This participant worked in a front line role at the time of this interview. P51's illustration (**Figure 4.12**) reveals a fragmented view of the self in that the self is in two different places, centre and bottom left of the picture. In addition, other actors are shown in a grid also at the bottom left. The brand, represented by the brand name, is placed in an upper right hand position. The central self is surrounded by both solid line and then dotted line circles. Arrows coming out of the inner circle point towards the brand and the other actors. P51 explained the position of her/himself: "*I'm in the center, that's me, and what I am saying is that I am the brand and I am part of the organisation and we're all intertwined*" (3-13, ll.5-6). The picture shows separation between these three elements as well as connection.

The participant further explained that "*the dotted line is, it's a whole [...] moving piece [...] and all these little people in my organisation are part of it and that's me walking into the organisation*" (3-13, ll.10-12). P51 thought s/he was critical to the organisation or the brand: "*if they don't have me, the other two can't exist*" (3-13, l.20-21). The participant views her/his role as being pivotal. In the focus group phase, P51 also stated: "*I suppose it's the day to day workers, it's like the ants isn't it who do all the*

work and then you've got the head office and it's just totally different" (3-13, ll.558-560), which is consistent with the way s/he has drawn the other employees within the grid, but not the way P51 has depicted her/himself.

Figure 4.12: Participant 51



However, elsewhere, P51 had admitted that when dealing with customers her/role was less important than that of the brand and organisation together: *"at the end of the day probably about thirty percent was me and seventy percent was more the organisation and the brand"* (3-13, ll.32-34). The participant also explained later that the client was *"basically buying us, and then [BN] is behind us, a sort of halo above us"* (3-13, l.335). S/he perceived that while the brand gave a customer safety, her/his surname alone didn't: *"I'm one person"* (3-13, ll.39-40). The brand is depicted as a

rock and is aligned with safety, conservatism, not a great risk taker “*whereas personally I might be*” (3-13, l.50).

When explaining these divergent views, the participant said: “*even though I’ve written that diagram as myself as being the center [...] the reason is I’ve got to actually just, I’ve got to talk about that brand and I’ve got to represent that brand somehow*” (3-13, ll.52-54). S/he further explained that the circle was a solid line “*because I want to make sure that [...] I’m bigger [laughter]; that’s my head, the brand*” (3-13, ll. 91-92). This divergent view, that the brand is stronger (a rock) but the self is presented as bigger and central, is further confirmed or challenged when comments from the focus groups are considered.

P51 presented a more collective and synthesised view of the employees and the brand in the following dialogue:

(Interviewer: Do you see the organisation and the brand as the same thing or separate?) Because I’ve always said we’re the brand as well [...]
 (Interviewer: So do you see the 3 things as being [...]?) Intertwined [...]
 because without us there is nothing and without brand, well you’re not going to sell much, there’s not going to be the, there’s nothing there; we are the 3 of us (3-13, ll.114-126).

Self, organisation and brand are fused yet intertwined in the statements: “*we’re the brand as well*” and “*we are the three of us*”. These statements suggest a more equal relationship compared to the illustration in Phase Three and accompanying commentary. Elsewhere, P51 privileges the self when s/he asserts that her/his personal values were more important than those of the organisation’s: “*I stand for [BN] so it’s my values that stand up for that and not the [organisation’s]. The [organisation’s] values, I mean I don’t know how you could interpret that, so I find that’s difficult*” (3-13, ll.154-156). In this excerpt, P51 perceives that the brand does not have its own values. Furthermore, P51 was of the view that the brand was changing, which undermines the perception that the brand is like a rock:

Yeah [the brand and organisation are] separate. The brand, it's changed the fact that it was, when we first started was a fairly softy, feely, rah rah sort of stuff. That's changed because now its, economic conditions are tougher, rules have tightened, demands have tightened by the organisation I suppose, by those who run it and pressures, pressure, sorry. (3-13, ll.118-122).

For this participant, the brand can be damaged by a changing organisational culture which is becoming more target-driven.

Overall, this participant presented a view of the self-organisation-brand which privileged the self but also diminished the role of the self, which fused these three elements but also kept them separate and also intertwined. The self was also fragmented in the illustration insofar as it occupied two different places (central and peripheral). P51's verbal testimony contained both confirmation of this visual text but also various contradictions. This vignette emphasises the difficult process of attempting to articulate the brand in relation to other actors within an organisational context.

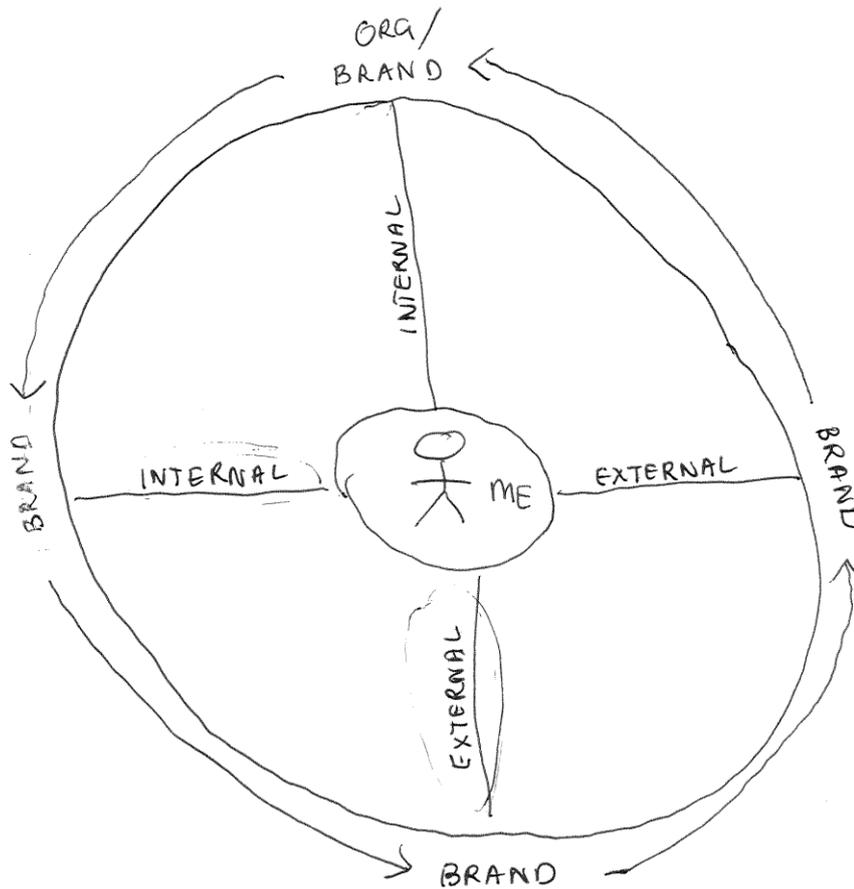
Participant 2 (P2)

This participant was a front line employee at the time of the interview. P2's visual text reveals (**Figure 4.13**) a world whereby organisational boundaries are challenged, the self is central and the brand encapsulates. First, the organisational boundaries are challenged in the way the organisation's structure is shown to consist of both internal and external actors and the organisation is also labeled on the outer ring which largely seems to represent the brand. The self is placed in the middle of the organisational structure. The brand encapsulates both internal and external actors and movement is shown between the various points around the circle.

The comments made by this participant suggested that the organisation and brand are both linked through the processes and visions and values and standards that are set inside the organisation. P2 puts her/himself at the middle of the diagram because

for her/him “it boils down to the individual in there” (3-11, ll.339). At the top you’ve got the brand and the organisation and the brand is created through the scaffolding that exists within the organisation.

Figure 4.13: Participant 2



This participant incorporated the internal and external (customers) within the brand. The brand becomes the force that sets the structure and processes within the organisation. The brand works “*in tandem*” with the organisation. P2 represented her/himself as being “*indirectly*” part of the brand rather than central to it; ironically, her/his illustration suggests otherwise. The brand is “*still separate but somehow encapsulating all of this*” (3-11, ll.534-535). P2 pictured the brand as being big in part

because of the exposure it has in the media and in the community. The brand, for this participant, had a strong physical presence too:

I guess, I suppose it just makes it clearer, just provides a structure and sort of, not stepping stones as such but I suppose the brand sort of sets the processes for the guidelines and structure for which all the internals go by. Does that make sense? (3-11, ll.517-520).

Her/his rationale was that the organisation and brand work in tandem, but that if the brand doesn't exist then the organisation will still exist, but it will not be as effective. P2 also viewed her/his self as being indirectly part of the brand. P2 also proposed that the brand was separate despite encapsulating all the other actors:

Because the organisation, I suppose because it's so big that's what it means, because it's not just a very small thing. I suppose in fairness I could have put them the other way round and put the brand in here and had them stem out from there, but [...]. (Interviewer: You didn't though and [you] put it right around the outside). Yeah, I suppose just because it is big. (Interviewer: How do you quantify the brand though, you say its big, what do you mean by that?). Well big as in exposure, the name of the thing [is] so known, and it's just such, I suppose just so much exposure to it both within where I work and also out there in the media [...] so that's sort of why I've stuck it like that (3-11, ll.537-551)

Being well known was elsewhere expressed as being more than what the customers expected, "*[...] moving into a personal level rather than it all just being business oriented*" (3-11, ll.45), and having a community presence. Also, due to the brand's size, this participant did not think it could be changed in any major way by new leadership.

In contrast to the circular version of the brand, P2 stated elsewhere that the brand started at the top: "*at the top you've got the brand and the name, and then second to that comes the vision and they sort of stream and that sort of goes down, a flow-on*

effect I suppose" (3-11, ll.365-368). This view contradicts the circular structure that represents the brand in the visual text. Furthermore, P2 also asserted that overall the brand was the vision and goal of the organisation. In addition, the participant viewed the brand as a setter of standards. Furthermore, the survey system used by the organisation was perceived as one way employees can connect with the standards of the brand.

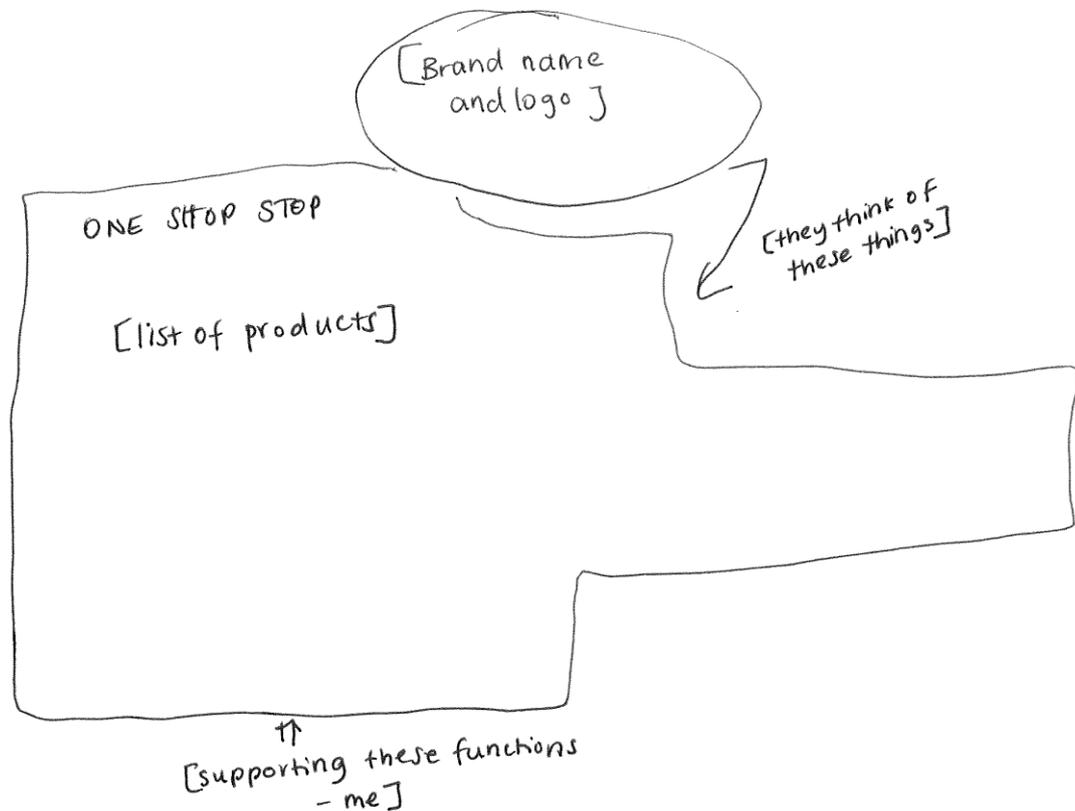
In summary, this participant viewed the brand as a large phenomenon which has a lot of strength and is both circular and encapsulating and hierarchical (top-down). P2 positioned the self in the middle of the organisational structure. Moreover, the structure defied some of the traditional organisational boundary assumptions by including both internal and external actors within the brand, within which sits the organisation. Paradoxically, the brand is on the outer rim and yet it is associated with the structure and standard setting of the organisation.

Participant 16 (P16)

This participant was employed in a support role within the organisation at the time of this interview. P16 struggled to talk about the brand, but would often recount historical detail of her/his experience not only in BN but in the industry in general. S/he emphasised the changes that had occurred in this industry over several decades. In P16's visual text (**Figure 4.14**), the brand is associated with the brand name and the organisation (which could be the large shape, but remains unlabelled) is associated with list of products offered to customers. P16 positions her/himself underneath the large structure, supporting the organisation. The brand is placed on top but smaller than the organisation. The self is in direct contact with the organisation but separated from the brand. When asked to explain the diagram, P16 stipulated that the organisation was not the same as the products, but it produced the products offered to the external customer. When asked to articulate what the organisation was, the participant provided a short history of the organisation in terms of its brand name

changes and regional expansions. Thus in this explanation of the organisation, the organisation and brand emerge in tandem from the dialogue.

Figure 4.14: Participant 16



P16 viewed the brand largely from an external customer's point of view and associated the brand also with the products (which links the brand and organisation):

[W]hen people see the brand they think of these things [...] That's the visible things isn't it, the brand, what you see, you see [famous ice cream brand] and you'll get an ice-cream, so you see a [BN product] [...]" (3-3, ll.456-461).

When asked about her/himself, P16 said: *"I just feel like I'm in a supporting role, I don't feel I'm bringing money in the front door like the people who are selling"* (3-3, ll.230-231). This statement privileges the roles of those who are selling over the role of supporting.

As well as illustrating the brand in relation to the organisation as smaller but connected to the larger organisational shape, P16 also presented the brand as an external presence: *"The brand, you see it everywhere"* (3-3, l.190). P16 also explained that the brand was progressive, represented by the strap line, and evidenced in her/his experience as an employee. P16 was proud to say s/he worked for the organisation but did not see her/himself as being synonymous with the brand. When asked if s/he sees her/himself as being inside the organisation or part of the brand s/he answered that s/he is outside, which seems paradoxical given the supportive nature of her/his role.

In summary, this participant struggled to bring the brand into consciousness and therefore struggled to articulate her/his views of the brand. However, in her/his visual text, P16 privileged the organisation over the brand in size but placed the brand over the organisation. The self was placed in a supportive role. Instead of associating the brand with the products, this participant associated the organisation with the products. Despite the relative simplicity of this view, P16's vignette still contains some dissonance.

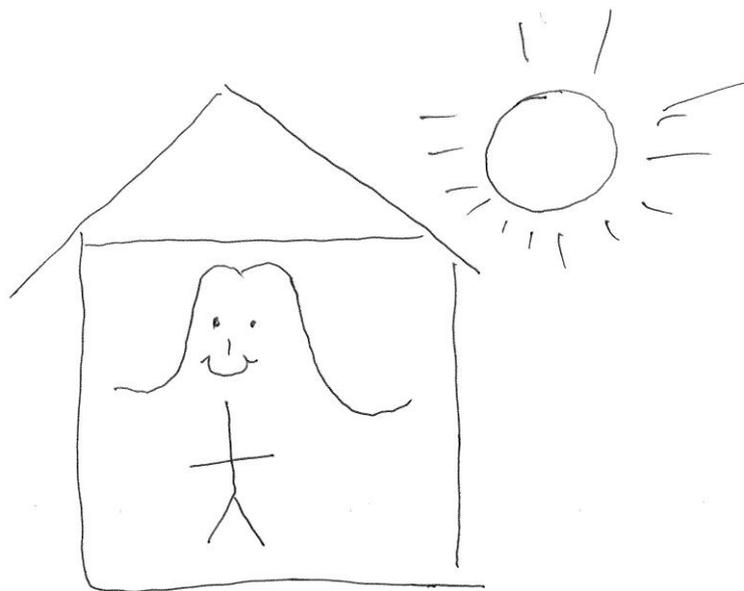
Participant 50 (P50)

This participant was working in a mixed role (both front line and support) when interviewed. P50's diagram (**Figure 4.15**) represents the brand as life giving, smaller in size, but powerful (i.e. the sun). The picture seems to represent a childlike depiction of self existence. The house protects and covers the self, which is drawn as a child. The sun provides light to the world outside the house. I read these three elements as the house being the organisation, and the sun being the brand. The brand, therefore, seems to be the strongest element, despite being the smallest, through the sun's association with the sustainment of life.

When asked to reflect on the illustration, P50 explained that s/he was embarrassed at the childlike nature of the diagram, but had resisted the urge to draw a

more traditional/managerial diagram. S/he described the illustration as “*me in my lovely warm sunny house, with the sun, so that’s me; I guess the house is the, it’s partly the organisation [...] and then the sun is the brand growing, light*” (3-2, ll.475-480). This statement is consistent with earlier comments that the brand had been instrumental in her/his growth as a person. It is also aligned with an earlier statement that the brand was an extension of her/himself, given the way the brand is depicted.

Figure 4.15: Participant 50



The house is only partly the organisation because the house also represents P50’s personal life. Furthermore, the participant explained that the house also represented “*the safe [...] aspect of that organisation, of that [BN], it’s a safe secure*” (3-2, ll.498-499). Also, earlier comments by P50 confirm the view that the brand supports her/his life beyond organisational boundaries, that professional and personal lines are blurred. When asked if the elements in the picture were separate, P50 answered with:

No I don’t think so, I think they, they are all in one, it was one picture, in terms of, separate in terms of how, do I... (Interviewer: Is it more an interdependency or [...])? No I don’t think so, I think it’s all [...]
 (Interviewer: Just one picture?) One picture, one... (Interviewer: But

separate sort of structures [...]?) Yeah I guess they are separate structures but they, they all go together (3-2, ll.511-524).

For P50, the house, the sun and her/his representation of her/himself go together, so while they may be separate, they are connected by the picture requirements (that there has to be these three elements). Moreover, for this participant, the brand is vital for her/his life (without the sun life perishes) and the organisation is constructed as protective. In addition, P50 attributed the brand (the sun) with god-like qualities: *“I should have drawn god instead or depicted a picture of, you know I obviously do see it as being a very strong”* (3-2, ll.745-746).

This illustration and these comments seem consistent with comments made elsewhere. P50 in the focus groups emphasised that people make mistakes but the brand did not. This comment was reiterated in the individual interviews:

“[B]ecause people do make mistakes and I think that, the brand doesn’t represent human error, the brand represents how they resolve mistakes, I guess, whether internally or externally, so that’s no different if we made a mistake with a customer, it’s how we deal with that mistake going forward and that we learn from that mistake so that, that’s a brand philosophy. The mistake itself is a human error” (3-2, ll.34-39).

Yet P50 also proposed that the brand was *“an extension of me”* (3-2, l.254). However, the illustration could also be read so that the self is an extension of the brand, nurtured by the brand. That the brand has facilitated P50’s growth is confirmed in the following statement: *“I have grown up through the [organisation] but I think also that the brand gives me freedom”* (3-2, ll.90-91). Visually, the brand provides life, and the organisation not only protects but could also be read as restricting the self. Elsewhere the participant states that s/he has *“matured through the brand as a person”* (3-2, ll.98-99), whereas before, growth was associated with the organisation. That the brand has become part of her/his life beyond organisational boundaries was confirmed when P50

tried to imagine a life without [BN] and admitted s/he couldn't. For her/him, however, the brand will always be there (like the sun or god): *"the brand will always be there or the [organisation] will always be there, believing in you trusting in you, and letting you deliver on what you see as right, so, yeah"* (3-2, ll.246-248). Thus, the two elements, organisation and brand, are interchanged, thereby challenging separation.

In summary, P50's childlike view of the brand-self-organisation interaction initially seems simple to behold and understand. However, by using this genre, the participant creates a fusion of relationships which blur organisational-personal boundaries, privilege the brand as a life giving, perhaps even god-like element, and position the self within the protection/confines of an enlarged organisational-branded world. Even though this participant presented one of the more consistent views, inconsistency and paradox still emerge from a reading of the verbal and visual narratives.

4.5 Summary

In this section I have conducted a reading of individual views of the brand in relation to the organisation and self. I focused on these three actors in order to focus on the way the brand is constructed through the participant narratives. However, that is not to say that other actors did not emerge from these narratives – they did. And that is why 'other actors' are included in my theoretical model. Each vignette consists of a visual and verbal element. For each of the 15 participants I have explored what the visual texts suggest in isolation from the verbal narratives. I also uncovered what the participants said about their illustrations, and thirdly I highlighted any inconsistencies in what the participants drew, said about their drawings and where necessary, said elsewhere in the interview process. This system of reading the visual and verbal texts highlights the complexity of the various brand narratives.

In order to summarise the main findings from this section, I now present a socially constructed view of these vignettes by bringing the common and dissimilar elements together in **Table 4.3**. I argue that these 15 participants emerge as a representative

group of the original group of 53 participants, who in turn provide a snap shot of the wider organisational context within BN. These illustrations and explanations of the self, organisation and brand can be classified in a number of ways but I have categorised my findings to show that identification with the brand is ultimately contingent. I have noted instances of: *Accommodation*, whereby participants map their identities (and value systems) onto the brand in a negotiated, moderate way; *Resistance*, whereby participants resist identification, emphasising instead their separateness from the brand; *Dissonance*, whereby participants provide contradictory statements which suggest differences between what they say and how they see themselves, the organisation and the brand; and, *Constituted*, whereby participants see their lives or aspects of their lives (and identities) as being not only completely mapped onto the brand but also created by the brand. I have recorded with an 'x' those element which dominated the narratives. It could be argued that each narrative exhibited most if not all of these elements; however, I decided to represent in this table those which seemed to dominate each vignette (visual and verbal texts) . This range of perspectives provides the reader with a snap-shot view of how these 15 employees, who represent a cross-section of the organisation, conceptualised, identified with and related to the brand. It also reveals a discordant view of the constructed relationships between the brand, organisation and self.

Table 4.3: Summary of Visual and Verbal Narratives

	P26	P8	P38	P42	P27	P31	P12	P36	P6	P10	P35	P51	P2	P16	P50
Accommodation	x	x	x	x	x			x	x	x	x	x			x
Resistance	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x			x	x	x	x
Dissonance	x		x		x	x				x	x	x	x	x	
Constituted		x					x	x							x

Chapter Five: Discussion

5.1 Overview

This research has explored the employee-brand experience by providing a rich picture of one particular organisation's brand, within a service industry context. In this chapter, I compare the findings of my research with commonly held views and conceptions of the brand. Thus, I present multiple or cumulative theories toward the study's end, thereby using a discovery-oriented approach (Wolcott 2002). Also, by comparing the findings with the extant literature, I answer the key research question underpinning this thesis; namely, ***How do employee narratives construct the brand of a large service organisation?*** I assert that, while there is some agreement with what the accepted canon states about the brand, it does not reflect the complexity of the employee perspective, a perspective that has not been richly explored (Punjaisri and Wilson 2007). However, my aim is not to replace current thinking, but rather, as Barry and Elmes (1997) assert, "to provide theorists and practitioners with an additional interpretive lens" (p. 430).

There is no right order to unpack the various ways the brand is viewed in the marketing and management literature, but I begin with the internal view as this then seems to lead naturally onto the corporate brand view. Internal branding also leads into a discussion about the external version of the brand, given that the term 'internal brand' suggests the existence of an external brand. Linked to the duality of internal-external is the opposition of corporate versus product brand, which is also briefly discussed. The terms, 'internal', 'corporate' and 'organisational' brand are not always well distinguished in the literature; it seems as though these terms overlap, as do 'internal branding', 'organisational culture', and 'corporate identity', and which I also explore in relation to the data. I also investigate the concept of 'employee branding' as this perspective also connects to internal branding and corporate identity. I also

discuss the distinction, sometimes an arbitrary one, between corporate image and corporate identity. Furthermore, I discuss the findings in relation to the service brand literature and also a service dominant view of the brand. In order to understand how value is created within the scope of the employee-brand experience, I compare the findings with concepts of brand community and brand tribes. After examining the extant literature in this way I present a narrative framing of the brand which extends my original research framework.

5.1.1 Constructing an Internal Brand

Internal branding is often associated with the process of aligning the behaviours of employees with the company's brand values (Punjaisri and Wilson 2007). Internal branding is framed as a way to create powerful corporate brands by creating alignment between the organisational processes and corporate culture with those of the brand (Punjaisri and Wilson 2007). This statement suggests that the organisational processes, corporate culture and brand values are clearly identifiable. However, I found that this was not the case in many of the employee experiences I encountered. What became apparent was that to varying degrees, and with some exceptions, participants did perceive alignment between personal value systems, organisational culture and brand values. However, when pressed to explain what the values were in these cases, the answer was not uniform but seemed to emerge from personal interpretation of the salient values that characterised BN as both an organisation and/or a brand. Thus, the organisation and/or brand in many cases became a mirror for personal value preferences and belief systems. The answers in some cases did resonate with something that identified BN, but it was not always consistent or clear. Furthermore, while an interconnectedness between organisational processes and culture and the brand was evidenced in the findings, there was also dislocation between these three elements. An extreme view was that there was no organisational or brand culture but that only personal values mattered. A less extreme, yet still

disparate, view was that the internal processes were not well connected with the brand, which for some was only an external expression. For others there was recognition of an internal brand and external brand but these were perceived as different. In a few cases the brand was perceived as an historical brand which seemed larger than and external to the organisation, or as a product brand thereby diminishing the brand to merely a customer view. Another view was that the brand and organisation were synonymous, one in the same, rather than merely interconnected. The visual texts illustrated a range of organisation-brand perceptions which reveal separation (e.g. P8, P42, P10), inter connection (e.g. P26, P38, P6) and subsumation (e.g. P42, P27, P35).

Central to the concept of alignment is a shared value system. In some cases the role of management was privileged in the instigation of an aligned (shared) cultural system. I found evidence that management played an important role in mirroring the value system of the organisation and/or brand. However, management was also sometimes associated with alignment gaps and was not always, therefore, associated or aligned with the brand values perceived by participants. Furthermore, there were a range of other agents for value sharing, not the least was the use of recruitment practices to hire those who matched the organisational culture ('The BN Person'). Also evidenced was the perception that the alignment or sharing process was a two-way phenomenon; i.e. the organisation was expected to also become aligned with personal value systems as well as personal value systems being aligned with the organisational culture. Sometimes there was a perceived alignment between personal and brand values but not personal and organisational values. The sharing of values was also perceived to be something that 'rubbed off' onto others, or was connected to shared knowledge ('Knowing').

Alignment becomes a kind of mirroring between systems, cultures, people, and therefore the managerial ideal of everyone having a common 'aligned' view of the organisational culture and corporate brand becomes unattainable in a narrated

organisation where multiple worlds and multiple realities exist. There was also an expectation that the organisation should be aligned with personal values and a few participants thought that even customers should be aligned. Also, the concepts of alignment and engagement were linked together by some participants in that when asked what engagement denoted, some participants asserted that it was being aligned as well as going beyond (the job description). The term 'engaged' was therefore suggestion of a relational version of involvement at a corporate level. A majority of participants perceived the organisational culture and/or brand as distinctive, unique and special, and also superior to competing organisation-brands. There was also a perception that the BN people who made up the brand and organisational culture(s) were also distinctive.

The internal brand concept is based on 'the binary' opposition of inside-outside. Thus an internal view of the brand assumes the existence of an external view of the brand. In much of the internal branding literature, closing the gap between consumer perceptions of these two brand views is seen as the ideal (Davies and Chun 2002). The term 'internal brand' also suggests that the brand has an internal expression that is perceived by internal stakeholders (employees). However, the findings showed that participants were not always conscious of an internal brand and if they were, they did not always present a consistent view of what that was; for example the internal brand was associated with service systems, with internal communication, with the activities and actions of management, and with relationships. In other cases participants could only perceive an external brand which was either the marketing version of the brand, or more widely the brand activities (e.g. community sponsorship) outside the organisation. The brand was also perceived as merely tangible activities or it was viewed as more than the tangible, e.g. a philosophy or vision. Varying perceptions of the brand was sometimes perceived by participants to be to role-based, i.e. front line, mixed or back office, insofar as the brand was often more visible to those connected to front line

activities. The vignettes (the visual and verbal individual texts) construct a complex view of the brand which both confirm but also problematise 'internal-external'. For example, P2's visual text includes internal and external actors as part of the organisational structure, surrounded by the brand. Other authors (e.g. Davies and Chun 2002) comment upon the need for the internal and external brands to be perceived in similar ways; i.e. perceptions of each version of the brand should be aligned. In my study, there was little evidence that the internal and external brand were perceived in a particularly integrated way, despite the organisation's executive management team's commitment to delivering a comprehensive internal training, rewards, and feedback system to all departments at BN.

The concept of internal-external is also linked by participants to theories of organisational boundaries; therefore, the ways participants constructed the brand as either internal or external also mirrored their perceptions of organisational boundary lines. The service-profit chain (Heskett et al. 1994) reveals a link between the organisational climate, employee service delivery and customer satisfaction. The importance of the employee environment and customer environment interface, was confirmed in the findings of the current study. However, the findings also challenged this view of the internal-external relationship by conflating traditional boundaries between organisation and external consumer. For example, P49's visual text disrupts the organisation by picturing it as a home, thereby blurring the work-home binary. In addition, the findings showed that a majority of the participants derived a sense of loyalty and pride from being 'outside' the organisation in the public eye and a few of those actively became brand ambassadors beyond traditional organisational boundaries. There was also evidence that this sense of pride and loyalty also affected employee satisfaction when back in the normal place of work. Thus Heskett et al.'s (1994) model was sometimes problematised by the findings; organisational boundaries

are challenged and the theory that internal service quality leads in a linear and mono-directional fashion into external service value was not consistently verified by the data.

At the centre of brand identity are brand vision and culture, according to Harris and de Chernatony (2001). However, I found that the brand vision and culture were not always clear to employees. Harris and de Chernatony (2001) assert that the organisation's culture "encompasses employees' values and assumptions" (p. 443), and in some cases that did seem to be the case, but in other cases, there was a dislocation between personal and organisational value systems. In some cases personal value systems were used as the ultimate guide for how to behave, particularly in situations which required flexibility; e.g. when customers request a customer representative to provide services outside her/his job description. Also, some participants perceived that the brand enabled them to act outside the scope of organisational guidelines, particularly in relation to sales versus service. In the case of sales versus service, some participants reported that they would actively sidestep bottom line organisational profit-driven goals, by privileging relationships with clients, which they viewed as being more valuable in the long run, or more important than monetary value.

Overall, the findings of this study show that participants did not always perceive the internal brand in the ways management may have been intending, i.e. the findings did not show a uniform view of the internal brand. Instead the data revealed different brand perspectives (internal, external) or brand associations (e.g. some participants equated the brand with people while others associated the brand with products, and still others perceived the brand as being the organisational structure and systems). In addition, participants also sometimes changed their view of the brand through the reflexive methodological process that ensued over the course of the research, thereby constructing a mutable view of the brand.

5.1.2 Constructing a Corporate Brand

Creating a unique organisational culture which reflects the aligned values of employees can provide the organisation with a sustainable competitive advantage (de Chernatony 2002). Alignment is also connected to the view that employees must successfully internalise the desired image before they can project it to others (Miles and Mangold 2004). Hatch and Schultz (2003) see value in integrating the vision, culture and image of the corporate brand. They assert that “Corporate branding requires integration of internal and external communication as well as creating cohesion of expression across a multiplicity of channels and news media” (p. 1045). Again integration suggests alignment between these three facets. However, as I established in the previous section (5.1.1), alignment was not always a straightforward concept when multiple perspectives exist, and my research foregrounds this complexity. The findings reveal degrees of alignment between participants’ values and organisational values, between participants’ values and brand values, and between brand values and organisational values. However, these value alignments were not always consistent, and in the end seemed generic and typical of what would be expected in the industry to which BN belonged.

When considering the core brand values of a particular company, Alexander (2009) found that some values were immutable while others were able to be reconstructed:

On the basis of value levels that were described as the core brand essence, company values, product values and tonal values, the company built a brand map around existing values and desired values [...] there was also a transmogrification so that brand meanings that might be taken for granted became more challenging, “innovative” and “individual” (Alexander 2009, pg. 556).

The participants who took part in this study revealed in their discussions some core values that were common across most of the focus groups, but there was also a sense that values were more reflective of personal value systems.

Corporate branding success comes from “the interplay between strategic vision, organisational culture and the corporate images held by its stakeholders” (Hatch and Schultz 2003, p. 1045). However, sometimes the external images of the corporation formed by stakeholders “have little in common with the images projected by and held within the organisation” (Hatch and Schultz 2003, p.1050). When participants attempted to align their perception of the external marketing message with their perception of the internal brand and/or organisational culture there was often a disparity between these views. Hatch and Schultz (2003) provide a view of a successful corporate brand, i.e. one whereby the vision, culture and image are integrated, aligned:

“[W]e find that the concept of organisational culture held by most corporate branding practitioners is rather naïve. For the most part they fail to distinguish between desired values (such as those contained in many vision statements), and the emergent or practiced values at work in the organisation (current organisational culture)” (Hatch and Schultz 2003, p.1048).

The findings suggest that employees at BN do not have a clear view of the vision in all cases and certainly a gap appeared between the internally marketed view of the organisation and the narrated view. In general, there was perceived alignment between brand, organisational and personal values but there were also examples where alignment between one or more of these actors did not exist, and was even resisted, especially when the issue of sales and service was raised.

Internal marketing and internal branding are linked to corporate identity since projecting a uniform and positive identity is a common aim of business leaders. Corporate identity management authors such as Simões et al. (2005) position

management as key in the development and maintenance of corporate identity, paying particular attention to the internal and controllable aspects of the process; they suggest that corporate identity management includes the dissemination of mission and values, consistent image implementation, and visual identity implementation. I argue that it is important to become aware of the multiplicity and complexity of internal organisational culture, communication streams, informal as well as formal dialogues, and the co-creation of 'the marketing message' and lived experience of the employees who help constitute and in turn are also sometimes constituted by the corporate identity. Thus, management strategy may benefit by first exploring the organisation's identity in terms of not only what that identity is hoped to be, but also in terms of how internal consumers of the brand form their own versions of the brand not only as an object outside themselves, but also as part of their own identity construction.

There is still a lack of clarity about what the corporate brand signifies. Balmer and Gray (2003) suggest that "corporate brands are fundamentally different from product brands in terms of disciplinary scope and management; corporate brands have a multi-stakeholder rather than customer orientation; and the traditional marketing framework is inadequate and requires a radical reappraisal" (p. 976). They also note that there has been a blurring of the margins between the internal and external environment, and the corporate brand "provides a powerful aperture by which to comprehend organisations and their interface with myriad stakeholder groups" (Balmer and Gray 2003, p.991). While on the one hand I found evidence for a powerful corporate brand at BN, I also found evidence that for some participants the corporate brand did not exist and a different type of brand was constructed, or if it did, it was not necessarily powerful or all-encompassing. Product brands differ from the corporate brand (Hatch and Schultz 2003; Balmer 2001). Some participants of this study associated BN with products and customers, or with marketing communications, while others did associate BN with a more strategic, and therefore corporate, role.

As well as there being a number of brand versions, different versions of the corporate brand must also be considered when discussing what the corporate brand is or isn't. Corporate brands can "live both in the past and the future for [...] corporate brands stimulate associations with heritage and articulate strategic visions of what is to come" (Hatch and Schultz 2003, p.1045). The findings show that these versions of the brand existed ('Change') within a majority of the focus groups. In particular, BN was perceived as having a strong heritage both locally and nationally, and therefore unchangeable. However, there was concern about how the current recessionary economic climate might affect the brand, particularly through changes in policy and also a change of leader. However, these perspectives of the brand were not necessarily limited to the corporate brand. For example, the historical brand for one participant (P31) existed alongside what s/he perceived as other versions of the brand (i.e. the service brand and the marketing brand). Blombäck (2009) shows how corporate identity is manifested through historical references, and this was the case for most of those who discussed BN as an historical brand (e.g. P12); however, in the case of P31 narrative about the brand's history, the brand is fragmented, rather than integrated, by historical references. Also, when discussing future changes, whether or not the brand was deemed to be easily changed also suggested different conceptualisations of the brand (e.g. if the brand was perceived as being embodied somehow by the GM and the executive leadership, then a change of GM could signal a change in the brand; if the brand was deemed to be much bigger than the managerial leadership then a change in GM was not so threatening to the stability of the brand culture).

Hatch and Schultz (2003) argue that "the broader scope of the corporate brand pushes brand thinking considerably beyond the product and its relationship to the consumer or customer" (p. 1044), and the corporate brand has external and internal affects on the organisation; i.e. marketplace positioning and internal arrangements

respectively. I found that a few participants associated these internal arrangements with the brand itself, rather than just supporting the brand (e.g. P2), or these arrangements become a different brand altogether (an internal version) when compared with the external 'marketing' brand. Thus, boundaries were either verified or confused.

In addition, corporate brand is a term which is used as part of a wider constellation of terms such as corporate marketing, corporate reputation, corporate brand, corporate (brand) identity, corporate culture, corporate communication (e.g. Balmer 2008). For instance, according to Gotsi and Wilson (2001) "aligning internal practices with brand values is an important component of corporate reputation management" (p.103). These authors emphasise the importance of employee actions on corporate reputation.

Balmer (2008) considers identity-based views of the corporation such as corporate identity, organisational identity, social identity, visual identity, corporate brands and corporate image. This perception of the corporation delimits the corporate brand and image. However, the findings do not uniformly delimit the brand in this way. Balmer (2008) asserts that individual identity can shape corporate identity and certainly that was the case in some of the vignettes that emphasised the role of the GM or CEO's role in infusing the organisation and brand with a certain way of being. For example P27's depiction equates the GM with the brand by constructing the GM as an omniscient and multi-positioned entity encircling the organisation and employees, plus customers. Also, P27 was worried about a new GM coming into the organisation, as was P51. However, others, such as P49 and P2, privileged the strength of the brand over and above individual actions and attributed the brand with powers beyond that of the people to which it was connected.

On a social level, the BN person emerged as a socially (collectively) recognized identity within the organisation and the term was also, on occasion, used to describe departments or groups. The BN person was associated in various ways, e.g. going

beyond the assigned job, engagement, making customers dependent on the the employee and/or the brand, and being aligned to the vision and values of the organisation and/or brand. Participants associated BN people as being different, as being part of a self-perpetuating system involving recruitment, and as extending beyond mere involvement in the organisation (e.g. P12 and P35). Balmer (2008) distinguishes the corporate identity and the collective identity of the members, and yet the findings suggest that this delineation is not clear-cut, or in some cases does not exist.

Balmer (2008) makes the point that “identities are always in the making and are never fully made” (p.8). He also states that:

Comprehending corporate identities, can, in part, be informed by bi-polar/multi-polar notions of identity or what might be called perspectives of the other. For instance, to me, it would seem that corporate identities are contingent (in part draws on other identities) and relational (defined by making reference to other identities: not simply in terms of what we are but what we are not” (Balmer 2008, p. 888).

Balmer’s (2008) view provides support for my assertion that in order to comprehend an employee view of a service brand such as BN, a contingent and relational approach is required, an approach also supported by Harding (2007). Balmer (2008) also suggests that corporate identity is characterised by *complexity* (multifaceted and multidimensional), *variability* (immutable but evolutionary) and *heterogeneous* (informed by multidisciplinary perspectives). The findings suggest that corporate identity is indeed complex and heterogeneous, and variable, but I argue here that identity is mutable rather than immutable, just as Gioia, Schultz and Corley (2000) argue that organisational identity is mutable, unstable. I assert that identity is perceived, mirrored, but never known completely, and is therefore open to interpretation. In a post-structural world, identity, whether collective or individual, corporate or organisational, is variable. Mutability is revealed in the way participants

not only constructed their own identities in multifaceted and multidimensional ways, but also, constructed their identities and the corporate/organisation identities as changeable, when viewed across multiple phases and verbal-visual accounts. For example, P27's narratives displayed an unstable view of the brand (and therefore also of her/his 'self', 'organisation' and 'other actors'); this mutability is particularly highlighted when P27's verbal and visual texts are compared (verbal - the brand sometimes seems to be unimportant and invisible, visual - the brand is everywhere and is everything).

According to van Riel and Balmer (1997), corporate identity has its roots in a mainly visual representation of the company but increasingly this view is being replaced or appended with the perception that "corporate identity refers to an organisation's unique characteristics which are rooted in the behavior of members of the organisation" (p. 341). My research looks beyond the visual representation of the company by using a multi-modal approach. The data reveals that a close connection between organisational culture and the behaviour of members of the organisation exists, but this is also extended to the brand. The brand is supported, created, even tarnished by the behavior of employees and managers. The perception that employees and/or management have the ability to affect the brand in some way was linked to how participants viewed the brand in relation to the organisation and other employees (i.e. the same, different, connected). Van Riel and Balmer (1997) conclude their paper stating that:

The corpus of knowledge on corporate identity is beginning to reach maturity. Management academics are showing a renewed interest in the area who, in addition to marketers, include those undertaking research in organisational behavior, human resources, strategic movement, graphic design, public relations and communication studies" (p. 350).

Thus I would add branding to this listing. If the corporate identity is constituted by employee behavior and if employee behavior is interconnected with branded identity, as this research shows, then corporate identity and branded identity are connected and the corporate identity becomes part of the brand experience.

The multiple identities of the corporation, found by Balmer (2008) and Balmer and Greyser (2002), supports my finding that participants constructed multiple brand identities. In addition, the importance of binary/multiple oppositions in terms of relationship differences with other corporate identities is also of importance. Balmer (2008) labels this system of comparison, the comparative corporate identity. I found evidence that participants established the organisational and/or brand identity of BN, plus their own identities in the majority cases, by constructing BN as special. Balmer (2008) asserts that the outward facing identity often portrayed the ideal or aspirational self and therefore downplayed the actual. However, for some participants at BN the external brand was a reflection of how they viewed the brand and there was no gap. For others there was a dislocation between brand views.

There is a lack of clarity about what 'corporate identity' means. Corporate identity is sometimes interlinked or even synonymous with organisational identity (Melawar 2002), but corporate identity is also sometimes relegated to being an outward facing expression, i.e. visual identity (Aldersley-Williams 2000 in Balmer 2002). Moreover, Balmer (2008) points out that the corporate brand is used by some as a surrogate term for the corporation *per se*. These perspectives reveal multiple views and create a degree of confusion. The same confusion existed in my study, though seen through the lens of self identity. Certainly, there was evidence of a BN identity (employee/linked to corporate identity), the organisational culture at BN was deemed by most participants as distinctive and special (corporate/organisational identity), and the brand had an internal and/or external expression which helped to create an identity

for both internal and external actors (corporate identity). In addition, the mutability of identity was highlighted by the contested, contingent view of participants.

5.1.3 Constructing an Organisational Brand

As found with the corporate brand and corporate identity literature, the extant literature does not always provide a coherent view of the organisation. One view of the organisational brand is that it is a generic form of the corporate brand. According to Balmer (2008), an organisational behaviourist approach would limit the organisational identity to an internal, employee, focus. Furthermore, an organisation's identity and culture are also linked. Deshpande and Webster (1989) define organisational culture as "the pattern of shared values and beliefs that help members of an organisation understand why things happen and thus teach them the behavioral norms in the organisation" (p. 4). Also, "the projected images must tap into the organisational culture of the company in order to create a brand promise that resonates with the actual brand experience offered by organisational members. The organisational culture is the context for the heritage of beliefs, meanings, stories and other rich symbolic resources that are expressed in sense-making and sense-giving patterns that are unique to the company" (Hatch and Schultz 2003, p.1050). Employee alignment with the organisational culture is really employee identification with what they perceive as the organisational identity: it can be argued that stakeholder identification (both customer and employee) is associated with how individuals and groups identify themselves by their relationships with an organisational culture (Balmer 2008). If there is an identify fit, a mirroring of identities, then alignment is seen to occur. In my study, alignment was based upon participant perceptions. How alignment is perceived and measured (employee perception, survey data, customer feedback, managerial perspectives) is at issue here.

Just as marketing scholars have focused on customer perception a corollary concern among organisational behaviourists relates to employee perception (Balmer

2008). The marketing perspective of branding is characterized by the dominance of customer value and the generation of brand value whereas an organisational view is characterized by the need to align the internal culture and external image of the organisation (Bickerton 2000). Bickerton (2000) extends the marketing view to embrace an organisational perspective. I would argue that my work also aims to bring elements from each discipline into a theoretical fusion in order to enlarge our views of the brand, enlarge the role of marketing, and examine what happens when we scratch beneath the surface of various brand models. My aim is not to do away with such models and views, but merely to disrupt a propensity within marketing to accept simplistic or even complicated views of the brand without acknowledging the complexity of human perception and behavior that the literature attempts to explain.

There has been an effort to define and delimit organisational boundaries. I extend the conversations about organisational boundaries by viewing the organisation through employee perceptions of the brand. Whether the organisation, self and brand are perceived as being the same or different from each other, or just connected, changes the way the organisation is constructed in relation to the brand and self. A variety of constructions around these three actors, and other actors within the brand's sphere of influence, both construct and deconstruct the organisation accordingly. There is no stable view of the organisation when viewed through the lens of employee narratives. The organisation is compartmentalised in some employee narratives but enlarged beyond traditional boundary lines in others (e.g. P27 and P50). In other narratives, the organisation is relegated to being that which is behind the brand (e.g. P42), or the producer of products (e.g. P10). The organisation was depicted as the strongest element when compared to the brand and self (e.g. P38), and also as the weaker element when compared to the brand (e.g. P6). The brand and organisation are also fused in some narratives (e.g. P2's visual text) with both the brand and organisation extending past the context of internal actors and into the 'external' realm. When

viewing the organisation in conjunction with the brand, theories of a stable organisational boundary are destabilised. When considering the organisation in terms of power or identity as do Santos and Eisenhardt (2005), “power” is challenged by narrative views of the organisation which award it different levels of power, as is the concept of “identity” whereby organization is narrated as a mutable and therefore unstable concept.

Dutton and Dukerisch (1991) found that the organisation’s identity constrained what members saw as legitimate interpretations and second, the organisation’s identity affected the meanings members gave to an issue. I would also add that the findings here suggest that not only does the organisational identity constrain the responses of employees, but the organisational identity is constrained by the perceptions of employees. The same can be said for the brand, that was perceived as either synonymous, intertwined or separated from the organisational image or identity. That the organisational identity had a constraining and directional quality for employees in Dutton and Dukerisch’s (1991) study is confirmed in the case of my study. The view that the brand could provide guidelines, or in some cases provide a way of going beyond the processes of the organisation, suggests that something intrinsic to how employees perceived the organisation’s and brand’s identity(ies) was at play.

Identity and image are often separated in the extant literature to mean two different concepts. For example, Dutton and Dukerisch (1991) purport, in relation to organizational identity and organisational image:

[...] that what people see as their organisations’ distinctive attributes (identity) and what they believe others see as distinctive about the organisation (image) constrain, mold, and fuel interpretations - help link individual cognitions and behaviours to organisational actions (Dutton and Dukerisch, 1991, p. 550).

This comment seems to make sense and yet, as with corporate identity commentaries, the dislocation of terms such as 'identity' and 'image', is not entirely supported by the findings. Furthermore, it has been argued that an organisation's identity is a prerequisite to the establishment of a corporate brand (Balmer and Gray 2003, p.992). However, my findings show that identity is contingent. Certainly, for some, the organisation gave rise to the brand, but for others, the brand or employee is given the title of creator. The participants' narratives did not reveal a unanimous or normative view of either organisation or brand, or self-identity.

Furthermore, Scott and Lane (2000) assert that organisational identity and individual identity are mutually and reciprocally linked, and that "People seek to define and understand themselves and to impress their understanding on others through an interaction occurring in a particular context with a salient audience" (p. 46). Scott and Lane (2000) address the duality between identity and image, which they associate with internal and external perspectives of the organisation, respectively; they suggest exploring organisational identity in the broader context of stakeholder relationships. The binary opposition of internal-external, identity-image is not reflective of the brand experience which emerged at BN; thus the concept of identity versus image needs to be rethought along the lines of internal and external identity, and internal and external image construction.

5.1.4 Constructing a Services Brand

The service brand, or the branding of services, perspective was originally given prominence with the work of Berry (2000), who linked the brand experience to the creation of value (brand equity). The experiential role of the service brand is also exhorted by P27 et al. (2000). These authors take up Padgett and Allen's (1997) call for attention to be given to customer perceptions of the meaning of the service as a way to understand brand associations. However, it seems as though the call for research into customer experience privileges the external customer, and therefore also

privileges an external, or internal-external interface version of the brand. This thesis presents the internal customer (employee) view of the service brand experience in order to provide a more indepth view of the service brand perspective. I found that participants would sometimes view each other as internal customers. Thus the dualisms of employee-customer or service representative-customer (if looking at this from a frontline perspective only) are disrupted by this inclusion of different layers of employees as internal clients of the service brand.

The service brand perspective emphasises the important role the service brand plays in distinguishing a service (Berry 2000). I found that many of the participants viewed BN as a distinctive brand, with a long history, and superior qualities when compared to competing brands. The special nature of the brand was a dominant narrative in the participant interviews. However, BN was also perceived at times as a generic organisation which was not necessarily special. The service brand suggested by Berry (2000) emphasises brand experience as a builder of brand equity. Brand equity is measured, using Berry's (2000) model, as a measure of loyalty (external customers). However, this model does not emphasise the link between internal as well as external customer loyalty when measuring service brand equity, which in turn is a measure of value, but focuses on the external customer. I found that employee retention rates and length of employment were indicators of the strength of BN.

Berry's (2000) model divides the brand into the presented brand - "the company's controlled communication of its identity and purpose through its advertising, service facilities, and the appearance of the service providers" - and the external brand communications - "information [...] that is essentially uncontrolled by the company" (p. 129). He also makes a distinction between brand awareness and brand meaning. His model seems to focus on the brand as an external phenomenon and focuses on the external consumers of the brand. This gives an incomplete view of the way consumers (both internal and external) construct brand meaning and how that brand meaning

might fit back into the proposed model. What is salient about Berry's (2000) model is his acknowledgement that the primary influence of the customer's construction of meaning is the brand experience. He asserts that "customer's experienced-based beliefs are powerful" and "disproportionately influential" (Berry 2000, p. 129-130). Berry(2000) argues that brand awareness and brand meaning both contribute to brand equity and brand meaning disproportionately affects brand equity. In addition, "product intangibility and the salient role of service in customer value creation focus customer attention on the company as an entity" (Berry 2000, p. 130). Thus, in Berry's (2000) model service performers become a powerful medium for building brand meaning and equity. My findings suggest that internal actors co-create and vivify the concept and values of the service (and brand), rather than this information being a static message that is transmitted or not.

Achieving brand strength is highlighted in the service brand literature as an important goal for a service firm to attain because strong brands offer economic benefits that add materially to the value of the organization (Blackett and Boad 1999; Ueltschy and Laroche 2004). How the participants in my study perceived brand strength was contingent upon how they perceived the brand in relation to other actors. Thus, the brand was represented in varying degrees of strength, from something that could easily be changed and tarnished through to the complete apotheosis of the brand that for at least one participant represented a god-like structure. Thus strength in these narratives was relative. This perception of brand strength provides an alternate to traditional equity measures.

5.1.5 Constructing a Service Brand

One way of viewing the brand which also informed the front end of this study is that of the service brand model proposed by Brodie et al. (2006) who emphasise the service nature of all brands as an extension of the service-dominant logic framework developed by Vargo and Lusch (2004a). The service brand is an attempt to

encapsulate the brand in a newly framed theoretical landscape which recognises the need to enlarge our view of the brand experience. The service model of the brand, as suggested by Brodie et al. (2006), represents the brand as a relationship fulcrum, at the centre of the relationship between the organisation and the various stakeholders, including the customers and employees. My findings also suggest the brand plays this role. Brodie et al. (2006) also suggest that consumers attach meaning to the brand, which in turn affects consumption behavior. This view of the brand is extended in my research to the employee brand experience insofar as employees also attach meaning to the brand and ultimately brand attitudes emerge through their consumption behaviours. Complexity, however, occurs when employees sometimes blur the line between themselves and the customers (they become customers themselves), and also between the internal and external brand.

The service brand plays an important symbolic role in the co-creation of value. Brodie et al.'s (2006) assertion that an "experience-centric co-creation view involves interactions which extend beyond bilateral interactions between the organisation and its end customer" (p.365) represents a movement away from the employee-customer interface view. However, Brodie et al. (2006) still focus on the customer experience, thereby providing a gap out of which my research has emerged. My findings established the role of brand as facilitator, thereby supporting the service dominant view of the brand. However, unlike Brodie et al. (2006), the brand was not always perceived as a relationship fulcrum. Also, where the brand was attributed with facilitation powers, the relationships the brand facilitated were not just those pertaining to the organisation's workings, but extended out into personal relationships such as marriage and friendships. In these cases, the brand moved beyond merely facilitating relationships into constituting employee lives beyond the work realm. Thus, the reach of the service brand model is challenged. Also, the brand was sometimes narrated (visually and verbally) as being in a central position in relation to the other actors.

However, this was not always the case; e.g. the brand was also show to be dislocated from the other actors, or interconnected but equal, or external but encompassing. The variety of views both confirm and confound, therefore, the service brand (service dominant) perspective.

Corporate reputation has been identified as “a particular type of feedback received by an organisation from its stakeholders, concerning the credibility of the organisation’s identity claims” (Whetton and Mackey 2002 in Cretu and Brodie 2005, p. 232). Cretu and Brodie (2005) make a distinction between corporate reputation and brand image. However, I would argue that in a services situation whereby the employee and company *become* the ‘product’ this distinction is blurred. Also, given the premise that service dominates *all* marketing offerings, the blurring between reputation and image is likely to be in all organizational settings, not just service oriented organisations such as BN. Overall, due to the variety and the richness of participant views, my findings did not present a world where concepts such as corporate reputation, brand image and corporate image were readily distinguished.

5.1.6 Constructing an Employee Brand

Individual identity is (along with gender) the most fundamental of all identity types and individual identities can shape institutional (corporate) identities as well as being also determined by institutional (corporate) identities (Motion and Leitch, 2002). Employees become the interface between the brand’s internal and external environment and therefore can powerfully impact upon how consumers perceive the brand (Balmer and Wilkinson 1991; Harris and de Chernatony 2001; King and Grace 2005). My findings show that how external customers perceive the brand can powerfully impact employee perceptions of the organisation, self identity and the brand. Also, not all employees saw themselves as being at an interface between internal and external boundaries. A few of the participants in support roles perceived that they were removed from any dealings with products or customers and were instead focused on

support or service measures within the organisation. This perception accompanied, in some cases, a dislocation from the brand. This dislocation could possibly have an effect on how internal units serve other employees as internal customers.

The employee branding process enables the organisation to consistently deliver its desired brand image to customers, thereby solidifying a clear position in the minds of customers and employees alike (Miles and Mangold 2005). I would argue, however, that this process achieves not so much a clear picture but rather a complex and even confusing picture. At BN, even though the internal and external brand efforts were extensive, participants' perceptions of the internal and external brand expressions and meanings were complex and also mutable. Therein lies one of the main reasons for this study; i.e. the need to look behind reductive models to the lived experience of those whose task it is to vivify the brand. The desired employee brand image is exhorted to be the same or similar to the company brand image "when employees know and understand the desired brand image, and are sufficiently motivated to project it to others" (Miles and Mangold 2005, p. 542). My findings suggest that employee understanding of their own and/or the company brand image is underscored by issues such as perceived role-brand relevance and which version of the brand is being perceived (e.g. internal or organisational, marketing, historical, community and so on). The aim of most companies is to have a successful brand through consistent employee behavior which is aligned with the brand promises being communicated to external stakeholders (Henkel, Tomczak, Heitmann and Hermann 2007). These authors argue that in the case of customer contact employees, management needs to move beyond training employees to merely "socially conform, but also to promote those complex employee behaviours that may generate a highly distinguishing brand performance" (Henkel et al. 2007, p. 316).

According to Harquail (2004), arguments for treating employees as part of the branded product are affected through employee branding, and find visible expression in

the practice of wearing the brand. Beyond “wearing the brand”, I found evidence of employees who perceived that they were living the brand. While some participants did comment on the importance of wearing branded uniforms while on the job, some participants in my study perceived that they were wearing an invisible brand even when outside the hours of employment, or they used wearing branded clothing metaphorically to describe their relationship with the brand in social situations (e.g. P38 and P10). I found, therefore, that “wearing the brand” was diverse in its meaning and application. Even though uniforms had been phased out in some departments in the back office, there was still a sense for some that they were branded. The BN person became an internal brand in some cases, and even by leaving the company, the BN person would not escape the identity of having been part of the organisation (e.g. P12). Thus, my research takes branding employees to a new level whereby employees may keep working for the organisation even when they are outside it or have left and this phenomenon raises the issue of unpaid immaterial labour (Arvidsson 2005).

Organisations which foster a high degree of buy in and ‘living the brand’ need to be conscious of how this strategy may affect employees’ lives even beyond organisation boundaries and employment histories. The move from wearing the brand to living the brand is one that needs to be further investigated. For example, if employees are engaged in the brand to the point where their whole lives are constructed from their brand relationship and the other relationships this brand facilitates, what happens if the company goes out of business, rebrands or makes employees redundant?

Pettinger (2004) asserts that all workers are in some way embodied. In the retail sector “the embodiment of workers is part of the branding of the stores” (Pettinger, 2004, p. 177). I would argue that elements of the retail experience form part of the brand experience at BN. Wearing a uniform may embody employees as frontline workers (the opposite may be true too, i.e. workers may be embodied as support workers by absence of a uniform). Pettinger (2004) found that there was a relationship

between work and consumption in that “consumers work and workers consume” (Pettinger, 2004, p. 180). Pettinger’s findings also show that “the brand is executed by social actors, in pursuit of economic success [...]. Branding can thus be seen as a cultural tool used to enhance organisational economic performance (Pettinger 2004, p. 180). Thus, to an extent there is evidence that the brand was playing a role as a cultural tool at BN. However, the brand at BN was more than just a tool for some, and for others, possibly less. For those who constructed the brand as something that could be worn to signify their identities as such, Pettinger’s (2004) comments are helpful in unraveling the effect of visual branding, i.e. “Work and consumption [...] are entwined most clearly on the bodies of sales assistants” (Pettinger, 2004, p. 180). I would further argue that in some cases work and consumption may become synonymous. For example, when discussing the brand, some participants could not perceive the brand without positioning themselves as customers.

The portrait metaphor is also used to represent corporate or organisational identity. Guthey and Jackson’s (2005) analysis of CEO portraits highlights a growing trend to visualise that which is not visual, to construct in a seemingly stable and authentic format that which resists stable or authentic representation. I have attempted in this study, to explore the paradox of representing that which is not inherently visible but can only be portrayed, namely the brand. Following on from Guthey and Jackson’s (2005) argument that visible signs such as CEO portraits provide authenticity, it could be argued that in an organisation, employees are both authenticated by the brand (it portrays the organisation and them) but they authenticate the brand (they portray the brand and the organisation). How the employee represents the brand, therefore, is central to not only the branded identity of the employee but also, collectively, that of the organisation.

5.1.7 Constructing a Relational Brand

Groups of brand consumers have been classified in the extant literature as brand communities (McAlexander et al. 2002; Muniz and O'Guinn 2001) and brand tribes (Cova and Cova 2001). As well as not being geographically bound, brand communities also have certain other attributes. Most writers in this area agree with Muniz and O'Guinn 2001 that the main attributes of a brand community consist of consciousness of kind, "the intrinsic connection that members feel toward one another, and the collective sense of different from others not in the community", rituals and traditions which "perpetuate the community's shared history, culture and consciousness" and a sense of moral responsibility, "which is a felt sense of duty or obligation to the community as a whole, and to its individual members" (p. 413). Cova and Pace (2006) define the term brand community as a group of people who have a common interest in a specific brand and who form a parallel universe around this brand which is constituted by its own myths, values, rituals, vocabulary and hierarchy. According to Balmer (2008), brand communities refer to those social groupings that are homogeneous, distinct and stable while brand tribes are heterogeneous, ambiguous, short-lived and smaller in size. Balmer (2008) suggests that concepts such as brand cultures and tribes could be applied to corporate brands and would include internal and external stakeholder groups beyond customers. There does seem ample argument, therefore, to include employees in these two commonly agreed upon labels for groups of brand consumers.

The tension between working in groups versus working as individuals was notable for some of the participants. Emphasising commonalities with other members of the cultural grouping as well as highlighting their differences with so-called 'out groups' is a way that company stakeholders affirm their identification to a corporation (Balmer 2008). The perception of 'out groups' included, for those at BN, people who worked elsewhere as well as people in the organisation who were not acting in a way that fitted

the BN identity. Also, a common strategy for the participants from BN was to compare the marketing messages of other brands with those of BN at the expense of the other brands' messages. Clearly, for most of the participants, being part of a group centred around a brand was a powerful identity marker. However, others did not view themselves as being anything other than members of an organization for which they worked. Thus, brand community, though relevant, had limited relevance for some. The group identity of employees at BN seemed like a community (Muniz and O'Guinn 2001) at times (e.g. the BN family), and at other times like a tribe (Cova and Cova 2001) (e.g. different departments would interpret the vision and values differently), and yet in neither case could it be said that social groupings that were homogeneous, distinct and stable (Balmer 2008) thus the distinction between community and even tribe is challenged.

It was certainly true for some participants that the brand created a powerful sense of community, which according to Muniz and O'Guinn (2001) "would generally have greater value to a marketer than a brand with a weak sense of community" (p.47). Brand communities also reveal the socially situated nature of brands (Muniz and O'Guinn 2001). However, more than being socially situated, employees at BN had a view of their community or communities which was contingent upon their brand perspective. Thus BN was actually multiple versions of a brand all of which could be deemed a communal brand, and also all of which could be viewed from an individual perspective. This dialectical tension is evident throughout the findings. Paradoxically, this collective view of BN is held in tension with the competing narratives and versions of the shared vision and I would argue that this is the case of all brand communities or tribes.

The value of brand communities is well established however. For example, Andersen (2005) asserts that brand communities provide additional communication channels and linkages and are an important lever for brand involvement and create a

fabric of relationships. Participants considered the relationships between employees as a source of knowledge, and therefore value. Also, the collective narratives of BN displayed evidence of a shared history, culture and consciousness. The case can be made that brand community theory can be applied to the lives of employees within a large service organisation as well as to those perceived as external consumers. I argue here that certainly a brand community existed at BN, though not necessarily in the form traditionally proposed by brand community and brand tribe theorists. It is obviously important to establish whether or not brand affiliations can exist within an organisational/corporate/service environment because through such affiliations brand equity may be established or strengthened. However, there may also be some negative consequences for the organisation (Schau, Muniz and Arnould 2009) as there is for companies when external customers create brand communities or tribes (Schau, Muniz and Arnould 2009). In addition, the findings suggest that it is not as straightforward as being an internal versus external brand community, but in fact some participants perceived themselves as part of the external brand community as well as or instead of an internal one. It could be argued, therefore, that brand community may reach inside and past traditional organisational boundaries, particularly where opportunities to be both an internal and external customer exist.

As well as being associated with the brand community or tribe, the consumer brand is also associated with brand relationships. That brands can be viewed in terms of relationships is a premise employed by Fournier (1998) in relation to product branding. This premise is extended to include employee-brand relationships. The employee views that are presented here are divergent and therefore reveal the complexity of the employee-brand relationship. The participants' narratives evoked a variety of relationships e.g. parental (brand), romantic, friendly, business-like, defender (of the brand), a god-like construct (the brand). However, the relationships were contingent upon how the brand was narrated (e.g. as an entity, as a reputation, as an

extension of a participant's identity, as a marketing phenomenon), with which a relationship could be formed. Also, relationships did in some cases change over time (e.g. P6's relationship with the brand was 'tarnished'). How relationships were represented in verbal and visual forms were also sometimes divergent. Ying (2005) asks whether or not the brand itself can be unethical or whether it may just represents unethical values or actions, which in turn cast a shadow over the brand and affect corporate reputation. My findings suggest that for some participants, the brand is separated from human actions (P49) but can be tarnished if human actions are deemed unethical or unfair (P6). Another view was the brand needed to be protected so that it is not damaged. In some cases it seems that the brand is something that is inert, a product of human activity, but in other cases the brand is constructed as though it is almost a god-like entity providing life, but above any human dysfunction. Whether the brand itself can be unethical can never be answered without starting with "It depends". It depends on how the brand is perceived by its stakeholders.

I would suggest that both brand community and brand tribe have some relevance here, and yet there is a complexity about the ways participants related to (or did not relate to) the brand which is not easily captured by these terms. Perhaps the use of concepts such as 'community' and 'tribe' needs to be rethought not just within the context of the employee-brand experience but also more generally. However it is clear that employees perceived the community and relationship aspects of the brand as key sources of value within the BN context; thus these are combined here as the relational brand.

5.1.8 Value Creation

In the extant literature, value is linked to brand equity. Corporate brand equity relates to the attitudes and associations that stakeholders have of a company (Ying 2005). Relational brand equity is often assessed through measures of loyalty (and I would add, staff retention in the case of employee relational brand equity measures).

King and Grace (2010) expand the existing brand equity literature by including the employee, i.e. by reflecting the perceptions of employees. Berthon et al. (2005) argue that both managers and academics need to understand the wider dimensions of brand equity and in doing so will gain insights into the management of brands. By unveiling employee constructions of a brand, insight into value creation is also unveiled. I argue here that by gaining insight into the conception of brands from a wide range of stakeholders, our understanding of value creation within an organisational and branded context, will be widened. Being branded may create value for the firm insofar as “forms of culture, both material and symbolic, contribute to the economic through contributing to the performance of the brand and thereby enhancing selling” (Pettinger, 2004, p. 181). Also, through brand-related communications, the brand acts as a mechanism to engage both buyer and seller in a long term trusting relationship (Duncan and Moriarty 1998; Fournier 1998).

The tension a number of participants felt about traditional value indicators, i.e. bottom line targets and sales, however, revealed a complex view of value creation at BN. Reactions to ‘sales’ were fourfold. Some participants denied the importance of sales, privileging relationships with customers instead. Others justified the pressure to sell by employing the brand (not like any other brand, belief in the brand). Another view was to completely reject selling, which is problematic for the business given that meeting bottom-line targets is a major form of value creation. Finally, some participants were pragmatic in that they admitted that selling was the bottom line, and, therefore, a necessary function of the business. This array of reactions to the core business at BN was also linked to alignment (e.g. selling signified a gap in the alignment process for some) and engagement (e.g. the brand asks me to do more than just work within my job description). In this case the brand was not necessarily creating value in a way that management potentially had planned. While on one hand the brand enabled employees to sell, on the other hand it also gave employees

permission to avoid sales and instead privilege both employee to employee and customer relationships. The view, therefore, that company image is a major driver of customer value creation and loyalty in certain large scale service industries (Brodie, Sajtos and Kreis 2010) is on one hand supported but on the other hand is confounded by the findings of my study.

Knowledge and knowing are also connected to the creation of value. Knowledge creation goes hand-in-hand with value creation (BN). At BN participants often perceived knowledge as a valuable resource that they utilised and fostered. A lack of knowing was also perceived as a reason for gaps between individuals and departments to appear. Being known was often viewed as a positive feature of the BN culture in that it fostered relationships between management and staff, enabled performance in the job and effective customer service, provided recognition, and fostered belonging and self identity. Knowing and being known was for a majority of the participants a major form of tacit knowledge (Hackley 1999). Moreover, the findings extend the concept of 'value-in-use' (Merz et al. 2009) in that value is not only co-created, but it was co-created between each of the various actors (self, brand, organisation and other). Thus value was constructed in the narratives as relational exchange between actors. This perspective supports Cova's (1997, 2004) focus on the emotional and communal phenomenon of consumption and the 'linking value' that exists between individuals who exist in societal groups (tribes).

A response to these findings could be found in Doyle's (2001) comment that traditional marketing assumptions about creating value are too narrow, and instead there is a need for new marketing thinking. This suggestion for a wider view of value creation is certainly supported by the findings of this study. There is a need for marketing to extend its focus and address the need to generate value for additional company stakeholders other than the customer (Berry 1981; Gounaris, Vassilikopoulou and Chatzipanagiotou 2010). Broadening how value creation is viewed would also

inevitably lead to a broadening of the marketing concept and the role of marketing. I envisage the need to move away from normative models which may well reflect a complicated view of marketing systems but do not acknowledge the complexity of the lived experiences of marketing actors and the organic nature of organic systems. Hearn and Pace (2006) suggest framing value creation as an ecological phenomenon and suggest shifting from thinking about value chains to thinking about 'value networks'. I contend, along with Hatch and Rubin (2006) that "brands have value not only because they are used symbolically to make and communicate meaning, but also because of the variety of interpretations they invoke across time and place" (p. 55). The variability of brand meaning that had emerged from this study not only challenges normative perceptions of what value is but is also a source of value. By letting go of an illusory sense of autonomy and integration that which has been suppressed, or 'othered' can be explored and enacted (Alvesson and Willmott 2002).

5.1.9 The Narrated Brand

I will end this discussion with one more version of the brand, the narrated brand. First I will explain how this view of the brand arose. Within the context of organisational-level studies, it has been established that collective self-narratives are likely to be fractured, contested and multi-layered, given the pluralism and polyphony that characterise organisations (Brown et al. 2005; Humphreys and Brown 2002). I found a similar view of the brand within BN. Organisations are posited as a site of multiple communities that each make meaning (Hopkinson 2003) and constructed through acts of languaging (Brown et al. 2005, p. 313). I have extended this view by employing a multi-modal approach. The deployment of a narrative (language) view of the organisation is well established. In conducting this research, I have extended this view of the organisation into the lived experience of employees within a large service organisation.

In this discussion chapter I have foregrounded the findings in light of various brand conceptions in order to show both support for but also complexity in relation to these views. I have labeled this final section the narrated brand because the findings of this study suggest that the gamut of terms used to describe the brand as it is experienced by employees are insufficient. Thus I have resisted using any of the brand labels listed in this discussion. What emerges from the data are the storied, lived experiences of the participants who took part in this research. The central research question is ***How do employee narratives construct the brand of a large service organisation?*** The narratives of the participants who took part in this study do not provide a uniform picture and so I cannot say, "This is the brand!" Instead a different picture appears, one that is not stable or uniform, but is contested, contingent and poly-vocal. The world which appears is the type of organisational world described by Harding (2007) who provides her reader with a poststructuralist account of the organisation and self, an account which suggests that there is no such thing as 'the organisation' or 'the employed self', but instead "mutual imbrications provides organisation/self/self/organisation" (Harding 2007, p. 1761). Thus, I employed the same overlapping or imbrication of the main players in the narratives that were generated: the brand/organisation/self/other actors. The inclusion of Harding's (2007) Lacanian inspired framework uses the mirror as the central image in the quest for identity formation and integration, and it is the story of the mirror which ultimately becomes the meta-narrative of the collection of narratives which emerged from this research. My main conclusion, therefore, is that any search for a stable and irrefutable view of the brand which can be easily communicated across and through and beyond organisational spaces, is futile; instead it becomes mutable, constructed, contingent and contested. However, it is in this futility that my findings become significant. The impossibility of ever 'finding' the full identity of the brand, or the organisation, or the self

becomes apparent when using a narrative approach to discovering how the brand is constructed. As Deetz (2003) assert:

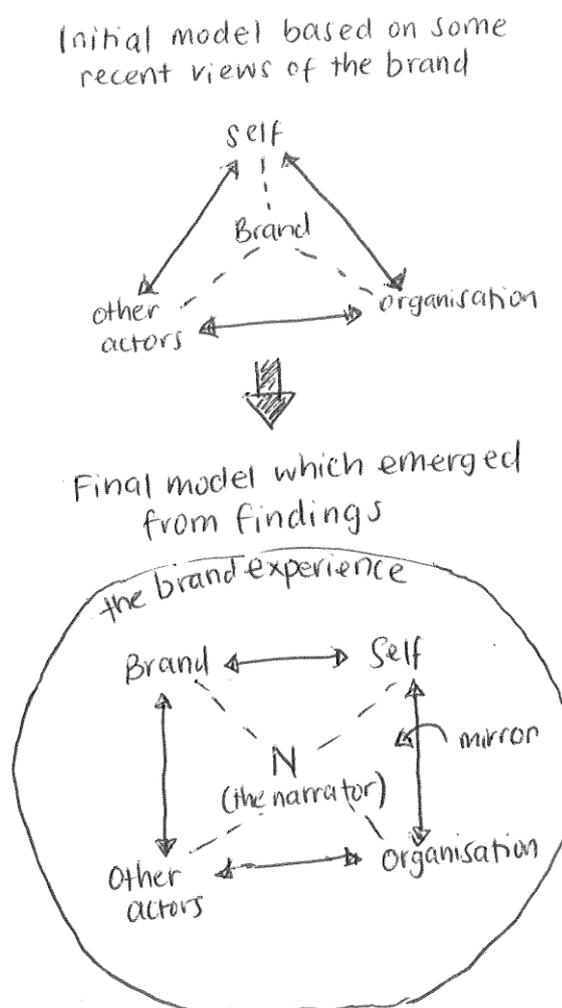
The recognition of the 'otherness of the other' and the resultant complexity of self in regard to the other, breaks a discursive stoppage by posing questions to any particular conception of self or other. The 'other' exceeds every possible conception of it and in doing so deconstructs any singularity of the self (Deetz 2003, p. 43).

What I have generated, therefore, is a kind of ante- (predictive) and anti- (resistant) thesis of what mainstream branding literature attempts to find. That is not to say that these narratives do not provide collective evidence for popular theories of the internal, corporate, organisational, services, service, and employee and relational perspectives of the brand. However, these narratives also disrupt these popular theories by presenting a deconstructed view of the organisation-brand-self-other, and of the research process itself. However, I argue, as a central finding of my work, that this futility gets us closer to understanding what we wish to study, paradoxical though that may seem. My major contribution to theory, therefore, is to provide, through the narrative lens, a poststructuralist view of the employee-brand experience, which extends this philosophical and theoretical lens from organisational studies into the increasingly contested theoretical realms of service branding, and more generally, marketing theory.

So what of the stories that I generated in my readings of the transcribed data? Adopting a poststructuralist view of these texts does not put to death the idea that the brand exists. It does exist but only in relation to the other (organisation, self, and other actors), just as, according to Harding (2007), the self and organisation result from a kind of psycholinguistic tussle between each other. The narratives that emerged from the focus group and individual interviews compete with each other as do the narratives which Brown et al. (2005) used in their quest to explore the organizational space of

Laskarina Holidays. Furthermore, the inclusion of participants' drawings of self-brand-organisation presents an additional layer of complexity that highlights the mutable nature of individual participant views across and within interviews. It is this complexity and richness which accentuates the futility of pinning down identity, whether that is self identity, organisational identity, corporate identity or brand identity. What is discovered in my reading of the visual and verbal texts that constitute my research data is that the brand experience becomes a mirror into which the self can gaze in order to see itself in relation to other actors. In keeping with what I requested of my participants, with the transformational nature of discursive struggle, and with the narrative perspective, if I were to sketch this I would do so as follows (**Figure 5.1**):

Figure 5.1 The Narrated Brand



What I initially thought was the focus of my research (constructing a view of the brand) ultimately becomes a reflection of the negotiation of identity, as it is played out within the context of the brand experience. Therefore, the narrator becomes the ultimate focus of the model rather than the brand and this also shifts the reader's gaze from a brand-centric to a narrator-centric worldview.

5.2 Summary

In this chapter I have compared my findings with some commonly held views of the brand: namely internal-external views of the brand, the corporate brand, the organisational brand, the employee brand, and the communal brand. I have also explored value creation in the light of my findings. Finally, I have then offered an alternate framing of the brand, i.e. a narrated brand, which better reflects the lived (brand) experiences of the participants at BN. In offering this final version of the brand as an alternate lens through which to view the employee-brand experience I have answered the question at the centre of this research: ***How do employee narratives construct the brand of a large service organisation?***

Chapter Six: Conclusions

6.1 Overview

In conducting this research I have responded to the call for marketing to “broaden and update its mental images and research techniques” (Gummesson 1998, p. 248). I employed a narrative approach to explore how employees of a large service organisation constructed the organisation’s brand. By using a narrative lens to reading and analysing the resulting data I allowed the richness and complexity of the employee experience of the brand to emerge. In keeping with a social constructionist approach, I have presented a reading of those narratives which were evidenced across all three phases of interviews. Having three phases of data allowed narrative threads to intensify and interweave, culminating in the added reflexivity provided by the use of visual texts. Finally, I presented a narrated version of the brand whereby the brand is viewed as a mirroring device which reflects the identity of the narrator. This mirrored view of the brand emphasises the interplay between the various actors (e.g. self, brand, organisation and other actors) and reflects the mutability of the brand when perceived by the employee.

In this chapter I summarise how my findings have answered each of the research questions which underpin the overarching research question. Then I present the main implication of my findings, namely theoretical, methodological and managerial. I also acknowledge the limitations of my research and suggest opportunities for future research into this area.

6.2 Research Questions

The overarching research question is as follows: ***How do employee narratives construct the brand of a large service organisation?*** I have answered this question by answering the following sub-questions. The first two sub-questions are based on

Hopkinson's (2003) exploration into how narratives construct the organisation through their constructions of self, customer and manufacturer, and their constructions of the relationships linking these three sets of actors. The third question focuses on the experience of the consumer (the employee), which is one way the service-dominant logic framework has been extended in the literature (e.g. Haahti 2003). This question also alludes to the value inherent in using a narrative approach. Finally, the fourth question focuses on the role of value creation (a central construct within marketing) within the narrated, experiential world of the employee.

Question 1

How do employee narratives construct the brand through constructions of the organisation, brand, self and other actors?

Employee narratives constructed the brand as a multi-faceted, unstable, mutable and contingent phenomenon. The narrated brand presented the brand through various perspectives, with different levels of strength, playing different roles and holding different positions in relation to the organisation, self and other actors. The exploration of these narratives has demonstrated that what were previously perceived as mostly discrete entities are collapsed. Thus, it is difficult to answer this question without impinging upon the context of question 2.

Question 2

2. How do employee narratives construct the brand through the constructed relationships between each of these actors?

The brand experience becomes an interplay of the various mutual imbrications (Harding 2007) of 'brand', 'organisation', 'self', and 'other actors'. Employee narratives constructed the brand from various perspectives (e.g. internal-external, customer-employee) and in various roles and relationships. The relationships between each of the actors was often constructed as a form of alignment. In turn, alignment became a mirroring between and of different systems, cultures, people and therefore the concept

that these entities can be fully integrated and aligned becomes unattainable when multiple worlds and multiple realities exist.

Question 3

3. How does using narrative analysis help to unpack the employee-brand experience?;

Using a narrative perspective and approach to generating, coding and interpreting the data has unveiled the complexity of the lived experience of the employees involved. In addition, using a three-phased interview process plus a multi-modal approach (visual and verbal texts) created an even more complex view of the employee-brand experience than would have been created if a single interview phased, single modality method had been employed. This design not only increased the complexity, and created a 'thick description' (Geertz 1973), of one case study context, but also increased the reflexivity of the narratives which emerged. By exploring visual narratives, the reflexivity of the narrative accounts was intensified due to the iterative nature of the process. Moreover, the multi-modal approach demonstrated differences between verbal and visual narratives employed by the same participant. This enabled the capture and explanation of complexity and fragmentation of the brand experience.

Question 4

4. What does this unpacking of the employee-brand experience reveal about value creation?

Unveiling the complexity of the employee-brand experience, through using narrative approach, reveals the interconnectedness of the various actors (organisation, brand, self and other actors). It also highlights the relational nature of value creation and the centrality of the (employee) narrator in how value is perceived. Thus alignment and relationships, rather than bottom line targets and profits, were privileged in many of the participant narratives as being a source of value. By extending the ways we think about brand, i.e. it's not the centrality of the brand but the centrality of the narrator, common conceptions of value creation also need to be reviewed and enlarged. To

demonstrate the complexity and creation of variant values of brand experience, I exhort researchers to let go of an illusory sense of autonomy and integration of that which has been suppressed, or 'othered' (Alvesson and Willmott 2002), so that new models of value creation can be explored and enacted.

6.3 Contributions

I have made contributions in three main areas: theoretical, methodological and managerial.

6.3.1 Theoretical Contribution

In light of a large body of extant literature on the external consumer's perspective, my study furthers our understanding of the employee experience of the brand within a newly contested theoretical landscape. I have confirmed but also confounded commonly held views of the brand as it pertains to the organisation, corporation, service industries, a service orientation, the employee, and brand communities. I have presented the narrated brand as an alternate to these other brand perspectives. In doing so, the narrated brand replaces the previously contended central place of the brand as a relationship fulcrum with the central figure of the narrator (refer to Figure 5.1). In this model, I have constructed the brand experience as the mutual imbrications (Harding 2007) of various actors ('brand', 'organisation', 'self', 'other actors'). This model allows for various interpretations of the brand to exist within the larger framing of what I have termed, 'the brand experience', which could be the experience of anyone, employee, customer, manager, and so on. This view positions the brand as a mirror into which the narrator constructs not only her/his own identity but also the identity of the brand, organisation and other actors. Furthermore, by conducting this research I have dissolved the boundary between marketing and other disciplines such as management and organisational studies. I have also expanded what we understand by value creation and the role of marketing by unveiling the complexity that exists behind

both simple and complicated brand descriptions and models. This research, therefore, could have implications for how relational brand equity is theorised, and how marketing, as both discipline and practice, is envisaged.

6.3.2 Methodological Contribution

The proposed study contributes to research methodology by enlarging the use of a framework and tool, narrative analysis, that has been thus far under-used in marketing, but which is well represented as a qualitative tool in other fields. I took my cue from other marketing academics and from organisational theorists to enlarge the use of the narrative perspective to explore the employee perspective of a brand. By doing so, I was able to unveil the complexity of this view, which in turn disrupted commonly held views of the brand. Thus using narrative analysis enabled the complexity of the employees' lived experiences to emerge. In addition, I also used a three-phase approach to generating data and included a multi-modal approach in the final phase. I did this in order to increase the complexity and reflexivity of the narratives that were told. Finally, when analysing the narratives, I initially structured my findings to highlight the various mutual imbrications of sets of actors to highlight the contingent nature of narrative constructions. I also utilised a socially constructed approach to gathering dominant narratives in order to provide a collective view of the brand. Overall, my methodological contribution revealed a different view of the brand of a large service organisation. Moreover, I resisted the temptation to only employ thematic analysis and label it narrative. Instead, I gained entry into the narratives through the relationships between (mutual imbrications) the various actors. This method of analysis provided a relational view of the narrative threads which emerged. Also, by using a three phase, multi-modal, and therefore reflexive, approach I foregrounded the discord within and between participant constructions of the brand. Overall, I have not only extend the use of narrative analysis within the marketing discipline but I have done so in a novel and yet rigorous way.

6.3.3 Managerial Contribution

A number of managerial implications emerged over the course of this research. One of the main findings was that organisational members are important contributors to the creation of brand culture, brand identity and brand value. The diversity of views at BN means that organisations such as BN who value a high degree of alignment and employee buy-in need to acknowledge the complexity of the employee experience and also the propensity for various versions of the brand/brand culture/organisational culture/corporate image etc to exist. In addition, more work needs to be done to integrate internal and external versions of the brand to avoid the kind of dislocation that some of the participants in my study experienced. Building the brand in an integrated way by employing reflexive research techniques, and inviting qualitative feedback from employees rather than solely using surveys, would be a practical way forward for a large organisation to create a better link between employees in different departments and the brand that the organisation is trying to communicate. While I acknowledge that finding powerful ways to communicate a multi-faceted brand to employees is a challenge, continually engaging with employees in a manner consistent with the brand values of the organisation may ensure that all business units and teams create a brand connection. Engendering an engaged body of staff has positive spin-offs for organisations but there are also potential problems as well as ethical considerations. For instance, staff may deploy their relationship with the brand to privilege customer relationships over sales, which may not be something desired by management. Furthermore, employees may extend their relationship with the brand outside organizational boundaries and job descriptions. Thus, issues such as immaterial labour, changing the brand, and redundancies, need to be considered by service organisations such as BN, which engender a high degree of buy in to the brand. Finally, service organisations should avoid overly simplistic interpretations of the brand in order to understand more fully and in new ways, the creation of value.

6.4 Limitations

In this research, only one case is used, which could be construed as a limitation. However, the embedded case approach ensures that a complex view of one organisational context is provided. Because case study findings of the type suggested here are not generalisable to the population, the findings would need to be further tested quantitatively to achieve this. However, the purpose of the proposed research is not to be generalisable to a population, but rather to strengthen theory through an exploration of narrative data. Gummesson (2005) asserts that case study research is “systemic and holistic, aimed to give full and rich accounts of the relationships and interactions between a host of events and factors” (p. 322). In order to maintain a professional, rigorous approach to the research event, Klein and Myers (1999) framework for conducting interpretive studies in information systems, Gummesson’s (2000) checklist for quality assurance of case study research, and Miles and Huberman’s (1994) guide to text analysis were employed. Lastly, it is argued here that any perceived gaps in the current research design may point towards future research directions that could complement the achievements predicted here.

6.5 Future Research

Various research directions and methodologies could be used to complement the proposed research. For example, there is opportunity for the research to be repeated in other contexts, using the same methodology. It could be used in different organisational settings (other service-dominant industries, tangible dominant industries, invisible product based industries, government organisations, educational settings, non-profit organisations). Alternately, the same context could be explored using a different methodology or other contexts using other methodologies. The use of different methodologies would challenge and hopefully strengthen the conclusions made in the current context. Any further research emerging from the findings of the

proposed study would continue to enlarge the conversation that this research has engaged in and attempts to extend in a meaningful way.

In addition, questions that did not get answered in this research could become the focus of future research. For example, the reflexive nature of this study was not fully explored due to the scope of the thesis. The benefits of using a reflexive approach to managing the employee brand experiences and associations could be explored. Employee identification with the brand (and which brand) also emerged from this thesis as an important research direction to explore given that this variance could have had an effect on how employees perceived the brand. The concept of brand relationships was also touched upon, as was brand community. I suggest that there could be further investigation into the scope (reach and intensity) of an organisation's brand and whether or not this can be deployed as a predictive device for (relational) brand equity. This kind of study could involve multiple organisations with varying degrees of community exposure. And the question could be, 'Does having a strong community presence affect the way employees perceive the brand from within the organisation?' In addition, regional differences, culture and gender were not accounted for in the selection of participants as categorising functions when analysing data.

Also, there needs to be more research around the term 'engagement'. A closer reading of the data generated for this study could provide interesting leads for further data collection of a similar kind, but with brand engagement as the focus. In particular, a link between alignment, and not just alignment, but the perception of going beyond required roles, and embodiment of the brand, and engagement was evidenced by this study. Furthermore, ethical considerations in relation to the engendering of brand engagement, especially when this engagement goes beyond the level of intensity intended by the organisational management, is an issue my research briefly touched upon, but warrants further study.

The data could also be analysed more closely for the narrative of 'change'. This study was conducted as the world entered the 2008 recession and the organisation was looking to change its leadership. Thus, this data provides a window into employee perceptions of and reactions to a changing environment outside and a potential change of culture internally, and this data could provide, therefore, important insights into managing change, particularly changing brand relationships.

6.6 Final Comment

Overall, my research has opened up opportunities to employ visual and verbal methods to explore the narrative constructions not only of organisational actors such as employee's but any actors within the marketing system. By disrupting the normative view of these marketing systems we open up new possibilities for knowledge construction and creative solutions which acknowledge the complexity of the lived experience. This research has answered the question, ***How do employees narratives construct the brand of a large service organisation?*** I will finish, therefore, with the words of one of the participants of this study, for it is from words such as these that an answer to this question has emerged: *"I suppose brand is people"* (1-8, ll.1036).

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Appendices (A-M)

Appendix A: Summary of Principles for Interpretive Field Research (Klein and Myers 1999)

1. The Fundamental Principle of the Hermeneutic Circle

This principle suggests that all human understanding is achieved by iterating between considering the interdependent meaning of parts and the whole that they form. This principle of human understanding is fundamental to all the other principles.

2. The Principle of Contextualization

Requires critical reflection of the social and historical background of the research setting, so that the intended audience can see how the current situation under investigation emerged.

3. The Principle of Interaction Between the Researchers and the Subjects

Requires critical reflection on how the research materials (or “data”) were socially constructed through the interaction between the researchers and participants.

4. The Principle of Abstraction and Generalization

Requires relating the idiographic details revealed by the data interpretation through the application of principles one and two to theoretical, general concepts that describe the nature of human understanding and social action.

5. The Principle of Dialogical Reasoning

Requires sensitivity to possible contradictions between the theoretical preconceptions guiding the research design and actual findings (“the story which the data tell”) with subsequent cycles of revision.

6. The Principle of Multiple Interpretations

Requires sensitivity to possible differences in interpretations among the participants as are typically expressed in multiple narratives or stories of the same sequence of events under study. Similar to multiple witness accounts even if all tell it as they saw it.

7. The Principle of Suspicion

Requires sensitivity to possible “biases” and systematic “distortions” in the narratives collected from the participants.

Appendix B: Process of Gaining Access to BN

1. Email and phone contact with Marketing Manager
2. Meeting with Marketing Manager, submitted and discussed initial proposal
3. Round table with Marketing Manager, other managers and support staff
4. Meeting with Marketing Manager and HR representative
5. Visit to the organisation for a day
6. Meeting with HR Manager and support staff
7. Agreed to supply BN with company reports (to executive managers)
8. Interviews with participants over three phases
9. Lunch with the management and all support staff involved in the process,
submission of preliminary report
10. Submission of a Phase One company report
11. Submission of Phase Two company report
12. Submission of Phase Three company report
13. Submission of final company report integrating the findings from all three
phases of interviews

Appendix C: Checklist for Quality Assurance of Case Study Research (Gummesson 2007b)

Readers should be able to follow the research process and draw conclusions of their own	<p>Well written, intelligible report</p> <p>A comprehensive account of the research process</p> <p>A statement of the problem, purpose and research process</p> <p>A statement of the problem, purpose and research questions of the study</p> <p>A description of methods of data collection, coding, analysis and interpretation procedures</p> <p>A well documented and rich description of cases</p> <p>Motives for the selection of cases</p> <p>Limits of the research project</p> <p>Clear presentation of results and conclusions</p> <p>Information to the reader if taboo information has been discovered but is made anonymous or been disregarded</p>
As far as realistically feasible researchers should present their paradigm and pre-understanding	<p>Personal and professional values and if these have changed in the course of the research</p> <p>Values of the system under analysis</p> <p>Theories and concepts that govern the project together with the reasons for the choice of these theories and concepts</p> <p>The researcher's prior experience and other pertinent information on the researcher</p>
The research should possess credibility	<p>Correct data including correct rendering of statements and views of informants</p> <p>How analysis and interpretation are supported by data</p> <p>Demonstrated confidence in the theory, concepts and conclusions that are used or generated in the research</p> <p>Honest presentation of alternative interpretations and contradictory data</p> <p>The avoidance of deliberate or unintentional deception</p> <p>The conclusions should accord with one another (internal logical consistency)</p> <p>The actors in the cases should be able to recognize what is presented in the report (external logical consistency)</p> <p>Presentation of all relevant data and information used in the case study</p> <p>Selected methods and techniques should be appropriate to the problem, purpose and research questions</p>
The researcher should have adequate access	<p>Used methods and techniques that ensured adequate access to the process under study</p> <p>Account of any difficulties in deploying desired access methods</p> <p>Account of any problems and limitations which arose through denied access</p> <p>Account of any problems and limitations in access which arose through time and money constraints</p> <p>How access limitations have possibly impaired the research</p>
An assessment on the generality and validity of the assessment	<p>To what areas the results apply</p> <p>How closely the researcher represents the phenomenon which the researcher aimed to study</p> <p>If other research confirms or disconfirms the findings</p> <p>If results bear out or disagree with extant theories and concepts</p>
The research should make a contribution	<p>Contribute to increased knowledge</p> <p>Deal with relevant problems</p> <p>Optimize the trade-off between methods, techniques and results</p> <p>Be of value to the scientific community, the client, and the public</p> <p>Actively be made available to the scientific community, the client, and the public</p>
The research process should be dynamic	<p>The extent to which the researcher has continuously learnt through own reflection and dialogue with others</p> <p>Demonstrated creativity and openness to new information and interpretations</p> <p>The ability to switch between deep involvement and distance</p> <p>A demonstrated awareness of changes of research design, methods application and so on during the research process</p>
The researcher should possess certain personal qualities	<p>Commitment to the task of research</p> <p>Integrity and honesty, being able to voice his or her conviction</p> <p>Flexibility and openness, being able to adjust to changed conditions and new – even disturbing – information</p>

Appendix D: Company Information Letter

Company Participant Information Sheet

RESEARCH INTO THE SERVICE BRAND FROM AN INTERNAL (INSIDE THE ORGANISATION) PERSPECTIVE

Dear <NAME>

My name is Sandy Bennett. I am from the Department of Marketing at the University of Auckland, and I am currently conducting research for my doctoral thesis.

I would like to ask your permission to conduct a single case study within your organisation. This project is part of an academic study looking into how employees of a particular organisation perceive and relate to the service brand they represent. As part of this study, I would like to interview groups (6-8 people) and also individual members of your staff.

At the start of the group and individual interviews, I will ask each employee to participate in a short writing exercise which involves completing a sentence. The aim of this exercise is to get the group members to think about the service brand, <BN>. I will then ask the participants to speak either as part of the group or as an individual accordingly. I will use your company's website information, the writing they have completed, and some talking points, to drive these group or individual conversations. After the individual interviews, the participants will be asked to read the transcript of the audio-tape in order to omit or clarify parts of the interview.

For both the group and individual interviews, it should be noted that this is a study of personal perceptions and opinions, and, therefore, there will be no right or wrong answers. The entire interview process for both types of data generation will take no more than one hour, will be accompanied by refreshments, and will be audio-taped. By way of thanks, each participant will receive a \$25 book token upon completion of the interview process. Funding for this project will be obtained through the University of Auckland Scholarships Office.

Each interviewee will be able to withdraw from the study at any time until 01/11/08, although those who participate in the group interviews will not be able to retract what they have said after taking part. In relation to the focus group and individual interviews, all findings will be reported in a way that will not identify any participant as the source. All material from the interview process will be kept in a locked cabinet at the University of Auckland, Department of Marketing, for no longer than six years, and will not be disclosed to anyone other than my supervisor, and the transcriber. The transcriber will be required to sign a confidentiality agreement. The responses from this study will be used in my PhD thesis, and may be used in other publications such as conference proceedings, journal papers or future marketing studies.

This research is entirely for academic purposes, but we respect the commercial sensitivities surrounding this project. We can, therefore, keep your company's name confidential throughout this process if you request this action. Additionally, we would ask that you provide an assurance that participation or non-participation in this study will in no way affect any participant's position or reputation or future prospects as an employee of <BN>.

If you decide to allow this project to take place within <BN> please fill in the attached consent form. If you have any queries or wish to know more please e-mail me at s.bennett@auckland.ac.nz, or phone or text me on 021 0475714. All contacts relevant to this study are listed for your information below.

Thank you for taking the time to consider participating in this study.

Sandy Bennett

Department of Marketing
The University of Auckland
Private Bag 92101
Auckland
Mobile 021 0475714

My supervisor is:

Associate Professor Margo Buchanan-Oliver
Department of Marketing
The University of Auckland
Private Bag 92101
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Telephone 3737599, extension 86898

The Head of Department is:

Professor Rod Brodie
Department of Marketing
The University of Auckland
Private Bag 92101
Auckland
Telephone 3737599 extension 87523

For any queries regarding ethical concerns please contact:

The Chair

The University of Auckland Human Participation Ethics Committee
The University of Auckland
Private Bag 92019
Auckland
Telephone 3737599 extension 83711

Appendix E: Company Consent Form

Company Consent Form

This form will be held for a period of six years

RESEARCH INTO THE SERVICE BRAND FROM AN INTERNAL (INSIDE THE ORGANISATION) PERSPECTIVE

Researcher: Sandy Bennett

I have been given and have understood an explanation of this research project. I have had an opportunity to ask questions and have them answered.

I understand that the results of this study may be used for publication purposes and/or future marketing studies.

I understand that the participation and identity of employees who take part will be treated confidentially, and their responses will be reported, in any report or publication arising from or relating to this study, in a way that does not identify them as a source.

I understand that only those directly involved with the research (the researcher, the researcher's supervisor, and the transcriber), will have access to interview responses and other information associated with any employee's participation in the study.

I understand that the transcriber will be required to sign a confidentiality agreement before the transcription process takes place.

I understand that all materials relating to this study will be stored in a locked cabinet at the University of Auckland, Department of Marketing for a period of no more than six years from the date of the interview.

I understand that participants of the individual interview may read the transcript of their responses after the interview has taken place in order to omit and/or clarify comments that they may have made during the interview process.

I understand that participants will be able to withdraw themselves or any information traceable to them up until 01/11/08 without giving a reason. However, those participating in the group interview will not be able to retract any information traceable to them once the group interview has taken place.

I agree that any employees who either participate or decide not to participate in this research, or who pull out of the research process at any stage, will in no way jeopardize their position, reputation or future prospects as an employee of <BN>.

I understand that each participant will receive a \$25 book token upon completion of the interview process.

- I agree that employees from <NAME OF COMPANY> can take part in this research
- I agree that focus group and individual interviews are to be audio-taped

Signed:

Name (please print clearly):

Date:

Appendix F: Participant Information Letter (Focus Group)

Focus Group Interview Participant Information Sheet

RESEARCH INTO THE SERVICE BRAND FROM AN INTERNAL (INSIDE THE ORGANISATION) PERSPECTIVE

Dear <NAME>

My name is Sandy Bennett. I am from the Department of Marketing at the University of Auckland, and I am currently conducting research for my doctoral thesis.

I have been given permission by your employer to conduct a single case study within your organisation. Your name has been provided by your employer as a possible participant in my study. Therefore, you are invited to take part in this research and I would appreciate any assistance you can offer me. However, your employer has given the assurance that your participation or non-participation in this study will in no way affect your position or reputation or future prospects as an employee of <BN>.

This project is part of an academic study looking into how employees of a particular organisation perceive and relate to the service brand they represent. As part of this study, I am planning to interview groups of employees. At the start of the group interview, I will ask you to participate in a short writing exercise which involves completing a sentence. The aim of this exercise is to get you thinking about the service brand, <BN>. I will then ask you to speak as part of the group. I will use your company's website information, the writing you have completed, and some talking points, to drive this group conversation.

Please note that this is a study of personal perceptions and opinions, and there will be no right or wrong answers. The entire group interview will take no more than one hour, will be accompanied by refreshments, and will be audio-taped. By way of thanks, you will receive a \$25 book token upon completion of the interview process. Funding for this project will be obtained through the University of Auckland Scholarships Office.

You will be able to withdraw from the study at any time until 01/11/08, although, since the interview is a group one, you will not be able to retract what you have said after taking part. Given the nature of the focus group experience, your anonymity as a participant can not be guaranteed. However, your participation, identity, and the focus group findings will be reported in a way that will not identify you as the source. All material from the interview process will be kept in a locked cabinet at the University of Auckland, Department of Marketing, for no longer than six years, and will not be disclosed to anyone other than my supervisor, and the transcriber. The transcriber will be required to sign a confidentiality agreement. The responses from this study will be used in my PhD thesis, and may be used in other publications such as conference proceedings, journal papers or future marketing studies.

This research is entirely for academic purposes, but we respect the commercial sensitivities surrounding this project.

If you wish to participate in this study please let me know by filling in a consent form and sending it to me by fax (09 3737444) or mail (see contact details below). If you have any queries or wish to know more please e-mail me at s.bennett@auckland.ac.nz, or phone or text me on 021 0475714. All contacts relevant to this study are listed for your information below.

Thank you for taking the time to consider participating in this study.

Sandy Bennett
Department of Marketing
The University of Auckland

Private Bag 92101
Auckland
Mobile 021 0475714

My supervisor is:

Associate Professor Margo Buchanan-Oliver
Department of Marketing
The University of Auckland
Private Bag 92101
Auckland
Telephone 3737599, extension 86898

The Head of Department is:

Professor Rod Brodie
Department of Marketing
The University of Auckland
Private Bag 92101
Auckland
Telephone 3737599 extension 87523

For any queries regarding ethical concerns please contact:

The Chair

The University of Auckland Human Participation Ethics Committee
The University of Auckland
Private Bag 92019
Auckland
Telephone 3737599 extension 83711

Appendix G: Participant Consent Form (Focus Group)**Focus Group Participant Consent Form**

This form will be held for a period of six years

RESEARCH INTO THE SERVICE BRAND FROM AN INTERNAL (INSIDE THE ORGANISATION) PERSPECTIVE
Researcher: Sandy Bennett

I have had an opportunity to ask questions and have them answered.

I understand that the results of this study may be used for publication purposes and/or future marketing studies.

I understand that my participation and my identity will be treated confidentially, and my responses will be reported, in any report or publication arising from or relating to this study, in a way that does not identify me as a source.

I understand that only those directly involved with the research (the researcher, the researcher's supervisor, and the transcriber), will have access to my interview responses and other information associated with my participation in the study.

I understand that the transcriber will be required to sign a confidentiality agreement before the transcription process takes place.

I understand that all materials relating to this study will be stored in a locked cabinet at the University of Auckland, Department of Marketing for a period of no more than six years from I have been given and have understood an explanation of this research project. the date of the interview.

I understand that I will be able to withdraw myself at any time up until 01/11/08, but I will not be able to retract any information traceable to me once the group interview has taken place.

I understand that participating in this research will in no way jeopardize my position, reputation or future prospects as an employee of <BN>.

I understand that I will receive a \$25 book token upon completion of the interview process.

- I agree to take part in this research
- I agree that the focus group discussion will be audio-taped

Signed:

Name (please print clearly):

Date:

Appendix H: Participant Information Letter (Individual Interview)

Individual Depth Interview Participant Information Sheet

RESEARCH INTO THE SERVICE BRAND FROM AN INTERNAL (INSIDE THE ORGANISATION) PERSPECTIVE

Dear <NAME>

My name is Sandy Bennett. I am from the Department of Marketing at the University of Auckland, and I am currently conducting research for my doctoral thesis.

I have been given permission by your employer to conduct a single case study within your organisation. Your name has been provided by your employer as a possible participant in my study. Subsequently, you are invited to take part in this research and I would appreciate any assistance you can offer me. However, your employer has given the assurance that your participation or non-participation in this study will in no way affect your position, reputation or future prospects as an employee of <BN>.

This project is part of an academic study looking into how employees of a particular organisation perceive and relate to the service brand they represent. As part of this study, I am planning to interview individual employees. At the start of the individual interview, I will ask you to complete a short writing exercise which involves completing a sentence. The aim of this exercise is to get you thinking about the service brand, <BN>. Then I will use your company's website information, the writing you have completed, and some talking points, to conduct an in-depth with you about how you see <BN> both in relation to yourself and others, and the role this particular service brand plays within your organisation.

Please note that this is a study of personal perceptions and opinions, and there will be no right or wrong answers. The entire interview will take no more than one hour, will be accompanied by refreshments, and will be audio-taped. By way of thanks, you will receive a \$25 book token upon completion of the interview process. Funding for this project will be obtained through the University of Auckland Scholarship Office.

After the interview you will be invited to read the transcript of the audio-tape in order to omit or clarify parts of the interview. Your participation and identity will be treated confidentially, and any findings will be reported in a way that will not identify you as the source. All material from the interview process will be kept in a locked cabinet at the University of Auckland, Department of Marketing for a period of not more than six years, and will not be disclosed to anyone other than my supervisor, and the transcriber. The transcriber will be required to sign a confidentiality agreement. The responses from this study will be used in my PhD thesis and may be used in other publications such as conference proceedings, journal papers or future marketing studies. You may withdraw from the study at any time up to 01/11/08.

This research is entirely for academic purposes, but we respect the commercial sensitivities surrounding this project.

If you wish to participate in this study please let me know by filling in a consent form and sending it to me by fax (09 3737444) or mail (see contact details below). If you have any queries or wish to know more please e-mail me at s.bennett@auckland.ac.nz, phone or text me on 021 0475714. All contacts relevant to this study are listed for your information below.

Thank you for taking the time to consider participating in this study.

Sandy Bennett
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The Chair

The University of Auckland Human Participation Ethics Committee
The University of Auckland
Private Bag 92019
Auckland
Telephone 3737599 extension 83711

Appendix I: Participant Consent Form (Individual Interview)

Individual Depth Interview Participant Consent Form

This form will be held for a period of six years

RESEARCH INTO THE SERVICE BRAND FROM AN INTERNAL (INSIDE THE ORGANISATION) PERSPECTIVE

Researcher: Sandy Bennett

I have been given and have understood an explanation of this research project. I have had an opportunity to ask questions and have them answered.

I understand that the results of this study may be used for publication purposes and/or future marketing studies.

I understand that my participation and my identity will be treated confidentially, and my responses will be reported, in any report or publication arising from or relating to this study, in a way that does not identify me as a source.

I understand that only those directly involved with the research (the researcher, the researcher's supervisor, and the transcriber), will have access to my interview responses and other information associated with my participation in the study.

I understand that the transcriber will be required to sign a confidentiality agreement before the transcription process takes place.

I understand that all materials relating to this study will be stored in a locked cabinet at the University of Auckland, Department of Marketing for a period of no more than six years from the date of the interview.

I understand that I may read the transcript of my responses after the interview has taken place in order to omit and/or clarify comments that I may have made during the interview process.

I understand that I will be able to withdraw myself or any information traceable to me up until 01/11/08 without giving a reason.

I understand that participating in this research (or deciding to not participate after initially agreeing to participate) will in no way jeopardize my position, reputation or future prospects as an employee of <BN>.

I understand that I will receive a \$25 book token upon completion of the interview process.

- I agree to take part in this research
- I agree that the individual interview will be audio-taped

Signed:

Name (please print clearly):

Date:

Appendix J: Record of participant attendances across three phases

Participants	Phase One	Phase Two	Phase Three
P1	*		
P2	*	*	*
P3	*	*	
P4	*		
P5	*		
P6	*	*	*
P7	*	*	
P8	*	*	*
P9	*		
P10	*	*	*
P11	*		
P12	*	*	*
P13	*		
P14	*		
P15	*		
P16	*	*	*
P17	*		
P18	*	*	
P19	*		
P20	*	*	
P21	*	*	
P22	*		
P23	*		
P24	*		
P25	*		
P26	*		*
P27	*	*	*
P28	*		
P29	*		
P30	*		
P31	*		*
P32	*		
P33	*		
P34	*		
P35	*	*	*
P36	*	*	*
P37	*		
P38	*	*	*
P39	*		
P40	*	*	
P41	*		
P42	*	*	*
P43	*		
P44	*		
P45	*		
P46	*		
P47	*	*	
P48	*		
P49	*	*	
P50	*	*	*
P51	*	*	*
P52	*	*	
P53	*		
P54	*		
TOTAL	54	22	15

Appendix K: Phase One Group Descriptors

Group	Role descriptor
1	Consisted of a mix of frontline staff from CSR representative to sales representative. While the group was representative of a wide range of front line departments, each participant had significant contact with external consumers.
2	Consisted of participants from a mix of role types, but none were front line. All had either limited or no interface with the external customer. This group was less homogenous compared to the previous groups in terms of proximity to the front line and type of role.
3	Mainly support (back office) employees, although at least one spoke about having contact with the external customers (mainly business) and therefore could be considered mixed.
4	Frontline staff or manager of front line staff (mixed). Overall, this group had a freer flow of thoughts about the brand compared to previous groups. In fact, this interview provided some very insightful comments about the nature of the brand, at least how it is perceived by those working for it.
5	All participants in this meeting were front line staff at various levels (managerial down to call centre).
6	This interview was with back of shop employees who were playing mainly support rather than frontline roles. This group was characterised by some disagreement between at least two of the participants over brand conceptualisation, or perhaps more accurately brand visibility.
7	This group of participants were difficult to categorise because they are what you could call right in the back room and some were involved in the creation of and testing of products. On one hand these types of employees are as far back as possible from the front line but on the other hand they are close to the frontline products and are dealing in some cases with business suppliers.
8	This group was made up of front line staff such as customer service representatives and sales representatives.
9	This focus group provided one of the most contentious interviews in this first phase. The participants were playing a support role and had quite strong views about some of the issues around values and branding.

Appendix L: Interview Protocols (Phases One, Two and Three)

Phase	Interview Protocols
One	<p>During the focus groups in the first phase, participants were asked to discuss the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Their role or roles within the organisation • Their interactions and the nature of those interactions • The value participants perceived were present (or absent) in those interactions • The shared values within the organisation • How values came to be shared • Which values they perceived belonged to the brand • The brand more generally (e.g. relationships and/or personality)
Two	<p>During the focus groups in the second phase, participants were asked to do/discuss the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reflect on previous phase • Personal values that participants perceived they took to work with them • Organisational values (recollected from Phase One) • Alignment of personal and organisational values • Lack of alignment (gaps) • Brand meaning (starting with brand values)
Three	<p>During the individual interviews in the phase three, participants were guided through the following stages (not necessarily in the same order each time):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Reflection</i> on aspects of the group interviews (either what others had said or what the interviewee had said) • <i>Discussion</i> on the degree to which the brand has facilitated the interviewee in his or her position at BN • <i>Invitation</i> to illustrate and then discuss the relationship between them(self), the organisation and the brand

Appendix M: External Verification of the Researcher's Work

Brand Stories: A Narrative Approach to Exploring the Service Brand Experience within an Organisation, Qualitative Research Group, University of Auckland Business School, Oct 2, 2007.

Brand Stories: A Narrative Approach to Exploring the Service Brand Experience within an Organisation, Department of Marketing Seminar, Nov. 11, 2007

Brand Stories: A Narrative Approach to Exploring the Service Brand Experience within an Organisation, Department of Marketing, University of Auckland, Proposal Defence, Feb 7, 2008

Bennett, S. (2007), 'Brand stories: a narrative approach to exploring the service brand experience within an organisation,' Australia New Zealand Marketing Association Conference Proceedings The University of Otago, Dunedin.

Brand Stories: A Narrative Approach to Exploring the Service Brand Experience within an Organisation, PhD Conference, University of Auckland Business School, Oct., 2007. **[Best Presentation award]**

Company Report: 'Preliminary Report,' Dec. 2008.

Company Report: 'Phase One: Scoping,' Feb., 2009.

Company Report: 'Phase Two: Group Interviews,' Mar., 2009.

Company Report: 'Phase Three: Interviews,' Apr., 2009.

Company Report: 'Brand Stories: A Narrative Approach to Exploring the Service Brand Experience within an Organisation'

Positioning, Analysis and Contestation: Three Perspectives of Narrative Enquiry. Presenters: Gordon Hunter (The University of Lethbridge, Alberta, Canada); Brigid Carroll (Department of Management and International Business); Sandra Bennett (Department of Marketing), Qualitative Research Group, University of Auckland Business School, May 6, 2008.

Using Narrative Analysis to Explore Employee Constructions of Self, the Organisation and the Brand, PhD Conference, University of Auckland Business School, Oct. 28, 2008. **[Best Presentation award]**

Bennett, S. (2008), 'Using narrative analysis to explore employee constructions of self, the organisation and the brand,' Australia, The University of Western Australia, Sydney, New Zealand Marketing Association Conference Proceedings.

Buchanan-Oliver, M. and Bennett, S., (2009), 'Brand Portraits: Exploring Textual Representations of the Employee-Brand Relationship within a Large Organisation,' European Academy of Management, The University of Liverpool, Liverpool, UK. **[Best paper in track: 'Branded Lives: Identity and Work in the Era of the Brand']**

A Narrative Portrayal of the Employee-Brand Experience within a Large Service Organisation, Qualitative Research Group, University of Auckland Business School, Oct 13, 2009.

Brand Stories: A Strategic Approach, Department of Marketing seminar, University of Auckland Business School, Oct. 20, 2009.

Bennett, S., and Buchanan-Oliver, M., 'The Branded Self: Employees, Identify and Resistance,' for the text *Branded Lives: Identity and Work in the Era of the Brand* (a collection of works to be published by Edward Elgar, 2011). **[Draft submitted and accepted, 2010]**
