UNIVERSITY OF CAMBRIDGE
Department of Engineering

CONSTRUCTION ENGINEERING MASTERS DISSERTATION ABSTRACT

Power Relations of Corporate and Personal Branding: Insights from Managers and Collaborators in a Professional Service Firm

A dearth of widely agreed frameworks for corporate or personal brand management exists among academics and practitioners. Moreover, supressed rivalry and influence exists between engineering firms' corporate brands and their employees' personal brands, possibly leading to corporate brand identity tensions and confusion among stakeholders.

The aim of this dissertation is to address how personal and corporate branding influence each other within a professional service firm. The study takes a Foucauldian perspective of branding to shed light on the causes and basic nature of personal and corporate branding phenomena. Foucault's (1982) framework for the analysis of power relations is adopted to provide original insights into these complex social phenomena.

A case study of an engineering consultancy's UK branch was used to address the need for empirical evidence in the professional service firm context. A qualitative exploratory research approach was adopted, primarily involving semi-structured interviews with key personnel across the case study business.

The findings suggest the existence of strategies of power in play, using the discourse practices of personal and corporate branding. Based on a thematic analysis, the salient concepts suggest corporate branding filters down through the organisation's leaders whose personification of the firm's attributes affects the corporate branding efficacy. Likewise, personal branding is typically delivered top-down and creates subcultures which influence the organisational ethos and in-turn the corporate branding strategy. Moreover, further salient concepts suggest the causes and basic nature underlying power relations of personal and corporate branding.

This dissertation enriches the theoretical understanding of personal and corporate branding as power relations, providing empirical evidence of strategies brought into play in these relationships. The adaptation of Foucault's framework also enabled the research to explicate the basic nature and specific causes underlying power relations of personal and corporate branding within the case study firm. Understanding of the underlying mechanisms unique to an organisation has practical implications to the management of personal and corporate branding strategies within that firm.

Sean Henley
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