



What about context in internal brand management? Understanding employee brand commitment in the public sector

Ulrika Leijerholt

To cite this article: Ulrika Leijerholt (2021) What about context in internal brand management? Understanding employee brand commitment in the public sector, Journal of Marketing Management, 37:13-14, 1243-1266, DOI: [10.1080/0267257X.2021.1909106](https://doi.org/10.1080/0267257X.2021.1909106)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/0267257X.2021.1909106>



© 2021 The Author(s). Published by Informa UK Limited, trading as Taylor & Francis Group.



Published online: 22 Apr 2021.



Submit your article to this journal [↗](#)



Article views: 795



View related articles [↗](#)



View Crossmark data [↗](#)

What about context in internal brand management? Understanding employee brand commitment in the public sector

Ulrika Leijerholt

Umeå School of Business, Economics and Statistics, Umeå University, Umeå, Sweden

ABSTRACT

Branding has become an established means for many public sector organisations to support the desired perceptions of the organisation. While branding is often presented as useful and advantageous for the organisations, this study cautions against oversimplifying the issue. By focusing on the perspective of employees, this case study investigates contextual factors that influence the affective outcome of internal brand management, employee brand commitment, in the public sector. The findings reveal the critical importance of the identity and values of an organisation and its employees, and its leadership, in the form of political governance. These factors may have considerable influence on both the implementation and the key principles of public sector branding, not least its internal brand management.

ARTICLE HISTORY

Received 19 September 2019
Accepted 25 January 2021

KEYWORDS

Public sector branding; internal brand management; internal branding; employee brand commitment; political leadership; identity and values

Introduction

Branding is no longer solely a matter for companies and corporations, it is also becoming widespread in the public sector (Gromark & Melin, 2013; Sataøen & Wæraas, 2015). Its increase appears to coincide with the adoption of New Public Management (NPM). Indeed, public sector organisations have been faced with new challenges and pressures, sometimes to the extent that their whole existence is questioned (Gromark & Melin, 2013). For such organisations, branding can be a means of supporting greater legitimacy and trust (Dahlqvist & Melin, 2010; Sataøen & Wæraas, 2015). Thus, the emergence of branding in public sector organisations is not surprising.

Accordingly, research has begun to provide insight and an understanding of the nature and applicability of public sector branding. From a management perspective, research has provided evidence of its relevance and benefits (Leijerholt, Biedenbach et al., 2019). Certain insight have also emerged regarding how public sector organisations can strengthen their relationship with external stakeholders (Leijerholt, Biedenbach et al., 2019). The key role of employees in public sector branding has also been highlighted (Hudson, 2009; Hytti et al., 2015; Kuoppakangas et al., 2020), although insight into the employee-brand relationship are quite scarce (Leijerholt, Biedenbach et al., 2019).

CONTACT Ulrika Leijerholt  ulrika.leijerholt@umu.se  Umeå University, Umeå 901 87, Sweden

© 2021 The Author(s). Published by Informa UK Limited, trading as Taylor & Francis Group.
This is an Open Access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>), which permits non-commercial re-use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited, and is not altered, transformed, or built upon in any way.

The employee perspective is essential since employee behaviour influences the brand perception of external stakeholders (Bettencourt et al., 2001; De Chernatony et al., 2006; Sirianni et al., 2013). Building a strong and positive brand requires consistency between employee behaviour and the brand values. Thus, internal brand management is necessary as a means of reinforcing the consistency between the brand values and employee behaviour (Harris & De Chernatony, 2001).

In order to achieve this, employee brand commitment is generally considered a prerequisite (Burmam & Zeplin, 2005; King & Grace, 2012). Employee brand commitment can be defined as 'the extent of psychological attachment of employees to the brand, which influences their willingness to exert extra effort towards reaching the brand goals – in other words, to exert brand citizenship behaviour' (Burmam & Zeplin, 2005, p. 284). Brand logic suggests that employees who are committed to the organisational brand are more likely to live up to its values. Indeed, employee brand commitment is an antecedent of employee brand-related behaviour (Burmam & Zeplin, 2005; King & Grace, 2012). Such buy-in of the brand is often considered to be a prerequisite for employees to demonstrate the brand values in interactions with external stakeholders (King & Grace, 2012). The link between internal brand management and employee brand commitment has been established in the literature (Burmam et al., 2009; King & Grace, 2008; Suomi et al., 2019). Studies have highlighted a number of key considerations for supporting an emotional relationship between the employees and the brand. Such factors include core organisational features (e.g., organisational culture, working environment, and values) (Suomi et al., 2019), HR (e.g., training, reward structures and other HR practices) (Suomi et al., 2019), and communication (e.g., organisational and brand-related information) (King & Grace, 2008). Further, the role of leadership and social interaction are also highlighted (Burmam et al., 2009; Vallaster & Lindgreen, 2013). However, organisations also need to recognise that in order to support employee brand commitment, a holistic and strategic mindset is required that consider employees as active participants in the co-creation of the brand value (Saleem & Iglesias, 2016; Suomi et al., 2019).

However, in internal brand management research private companies have received the majority of the attention. Further, there is cause to question whether theories and models from the private sector can be directly transferred to a public context. While similarities exist between the two sectors, for example, the perceived usefulness of marketing and branding (Gromark & Melin, 2013; Wright et al., 2012), differences are also evident (Leijerholt, Chapleo et al., 2019; Wæraas, 2008; Wæraas & Solbakk, 2009). For example, previous studies have highlighted the need to reconsider some core brand strategies (Leijerholt, Chapleo et al., 2019) and the role of consistency in identity structures (Wæraas, 2008; Wæraas & Solbakk, 2009). These differences suggest that branding, not least internal brand management, needs to be approached in a cautious manner. Public sector organisations should not expect the implementation and effect of brand-related efforts to automatically adhere to traditional knowledge (Wæraas & Byrkjeflot, 2012). Rather, context matters as it may constrain and enable organisations and provide specific sector-related challenges and opportunities (Wæraas & Byrkjeflot, 2012). Thus, this paper argues for the need to understand the integrated role of the public sector context in internal brand management. The automatic application of traditional brand principles to the public sector should be scrutinised.

This paper answers the call for further studies on internal brand management outcomes related to the employees of public sector organisations (Leijerholt, Biedenbach et al., 2019; Piehler et al., 2018). One critical knowledge gap relates to how to ensure internal brand support among public sector employees (Leijerholt, Biedenbach et al., 2019). Research often highlights the challenges of gaining internal support for the brand in the public sector (Chapleo, 2015a, 2010). However, 'it is necessary to determine whether the problems in gaining support and employee commitment are caused by the implementation of branding activities or if these problems are symptoms of deeper conflicts that have little, if anything, to do with the branding efforts.' (Leijerholt, Biedenbach et al., 2019, p. 134). Indeed, research has highlighted the outcomes of internal brand management as 'a context-bound phenomenon', influenced by the role and professional identity of employees (Suomi et al., 2019). It is therefore not unreasonable to suggest that there is a need to understand the role of the public sector context in internal brand management outcomes. Thus, the purpose of this paper is to provide insight into how contextual factors in the public sector influence internal brand management, specifically focused on its main affective outcome, employee brand commitment.

Theoretical framework

Internal brand management

Drawing on De Chernatony (2002), a brand can be defined as a cluster of the functional and emotional values that users of the brand can expect to experience. Brand management aims to support a consistent perception of the values in all stakeholder groups, including management, employees, and external stakeholders (Hatch & Schultz, 2001). Thus, the interrelated nature of the strategic vision, organisational culture, and corporate image must align (Hatch & Schultz, 2003). From a brand management perspective, it is important to recognise that the brand is not solely communicated through advertising and other communication activities, but also through interactions between employees and various stakeholders (De Chernatony et al., 2006). Indeed, employees play a critical role in influencing external stakeholders' brand experience and perception (Berry et al., 2006). Thus, internal brand management is a means of supporting consistency in how the brand is communicated and delivered (Burmans & Zeplin, 2005; Punjaisri & Wilson, 2007).

For public sector organisations involved in branding, internal brand management is arguably equally important as it is in the private sector. However, research on internal brand management in public sector organisations is still quite underdeveloped (Leijerholt, Biedenbach et al., 2019). Existing studies provide insight into aspects such as the role of brand architecture (Leijerholt, Chapleo et al., 2019) and how to manage a rebranding process (Chapleo & Clark, 2016; Kuoppakangas et al., 2020), including the need for organisations to involve and empower employees in order to manage the rebranding process (Kuoppakangas et al., 2020). Studies have also highlighted the role of the employee experience in internal brand management: organisations need to recognise the significance of the employees' experiences of the brand (Juntunen et al., 2013) and how this brand experience and social interaction co-create brand meaning (Dean et al., 2016). Evidence is beginning to emerge of the organisational factors that support internal brand management.

Interestingly, research suggests that there are certain differences between branding in the public and private sectors. Some of these differences relate to brand identity (Wæraas & Byrkjeflot, 2012; Wæraas & Solbakk, 2009) and cultural challenges regarding employee relationships with the brand (Chapleo, 2015a, 2010). The complexity of gaining internal brand support in public sector organisations should not be underestimated (Chapleo, 2015b; Leijerholt, Chapleo et al., 2019; Wæraas & Solbakk, 2009); it has been suggested that organisations may fail to support integration of brand values in the minds of employees (Leijerholt, Chapleo et al., 2019). This may not solely be about a lack of sufficient internal brand management but about underlying motivational forces among employees that impact the employee-brand relationship (Leijerholt, Chapleo et al., 2019).

To get to the core of this complexity, it may be necessary to examine the differences between the public and private sector regarding its purposes, in which private companies rely on profit maximisation and financial success while the survival of public sector organisations rely on how well they provide societal values (Hoggett, 2006), as well as the institutional pressure within the sectors, with its coercive, mimetic, and normative mechanisms (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983). The latter influences organisations in the form of the 'rules, norms, and beliefs that describe reality for the organisation, explaining what is and is not, what can be acted upon and what cannot' (Hoffman, 1999, p. 351). This is in line with the literature, which suggest that the core of internal brand management efforts comprises functional, symbolic, behavioural, and experiential components that reflect what the organisation does and what it stands for, management behaviour, as well as experiences in the organisation (Hankinson, 2004). However, public sector organisations may need to consider these components in light of contextual factors related to the distinct nature of the sector.

Therefore, it is necessary to understand how sector-specific factors affect employee brand commitment in public sector organisations. From the preceding discussion, it can be concluded that these factors may reside in identities, values, leadership, and employee experience, which are discussed in the upcoming sections.

Identity and values

Organisational identity and values lie at the core of internal brand management (Saleem & Iglesias, 2016). However, scholars have found that organisational identity is seldom uniform. Instead organisations have a multiplicity of identities, with various internal perceptions of what constitutes organisational identity (Pratt & Foreman, 2000; Wæraas & Solbakk, 2009). Multiple identities and inconsistent values are often a reality in the public sector (Albert & Whetten, 1985; Wæraas, 2008). This can be explained by the need for public sector organisations to secure both public and individual interests, as well as the need to be both authoritative and user-friendly (Wæraas, 2008). Further, many public sector organisations are characterised by plurality in which, despite management efforts, the notions of the essence and identity of the organisation varies between units and individuals (Wæraas & Solbakk, 2009). Thus, it has been suggested that the complexity and fragmented nature of many public sector organisations may make it difficult to achieve a single identity and consistency (Wæraas & Byrkjeflot, 2012; Wæraas & Solbakk, 2009).

This is interesting as brand literature argues that ensuring employee brand commitment requires consistency in identity structure, brand communication and shared values

(Harris & De Chernatony, 2001; Vallaster & De Chernatony, 2006). Indeed, internal silos or division can complicate brand orientation in an organisation (Gyrd-Jones et al., 2013).

Thus, a lack of consistency because of a fragmented organisation can be problematic when considering that the literature highlights the critical role of aligning employee values with brand values (Matanda & Ndubisi, 2013); employee acceptance and buy-in of brand values increase the likelihood of brand success.

Viewing this traditional brand principle of consistency in light of the inherent reality of the public sector environment reveals a potential conflict between brand principles and the context. The multiple identities, inconsistent values (Albert & Whetten, 1985; Wæraas, 2008), and plurality of organisations (Wæraas & Solbakk, 2009) would appear to create a challenging environment for branding. It should be noted that even in the private sector, gaining employee buy-in may be easier said than done as it is common for companies to experience a misalignment between employee and organisational values (Burmann et al., 2009; MacLaverly et al., 2007). However, in the public sector, there is reason to believe that such value alignment may potentially be less difficult to achieve. The underlying rationale of this argument is that public sector employees tend to have an ambition to do good for society and others (Hondegghem & Perry, 2009; Perry & Wise, 1990). While not exclusive to this sector, such public service motivation tends to be more common in public sector organisations (Perry & Hondegghem, 2008) and may serve as a potential advantage in internal brand management. This makes it interesting to examine how such identity and value motivation influences employee brand commitment in this context.

Leadership

The literature suggests that leaders play a crucial role in internal brand management. Employee-leader relationships help to shape employee perceptions of the organisational environment (Punjaisri & Wilson, 2011). Further, the leaders of an organisation can define and direct the brand vision and support the alignment between brand values and employee behaviour (Vallaster & De Chernatony, 2005). Leaders can also enhance employee internalisation of brand values (Burmann & Zeplin, 2005; Morhart et al., 2009). However, in order to achieve this, it has been argued that management behaviour must reflect the brand and be a good role model for other organisational members (McCoy & Venter, 2016; Vallaster & Lindgreen, 2013). Indeed, management set the standards for the rest of the organisation. Top management is said to play a key role in this process, which requires it to show its commitment, live the brand, and trust its employees (Vallaster & Lindgreen, 2013). Further, management can encourage greater employee brand responsibility and improve employee receptiveness to brand-related information (Vallaster & Lindgreen, 2013) through communication characterised by dialogue (Whisman, 2009) and interaction (Vallaster & Lindgreen, 2013).

Compared to the private sector, public sector organisations are subject to an additional level of leadership: the political management level. Consequently, the organisational mission, objectives, and strategy decisions are not in the hands of its civil management. Rather, public sector organisations are the means by which politicians implement their policies (Wæraas & Byrkjeflot, 2012). As a 'political, superordinate level' (Wæraas & Byrkjeflot, 2012, p. 193), political leadership has a major influence on the organisation and its strategic decisions, yet it is separated from its daily organisational activities and

operations. Thus, this governing body represents an additional management level which, in practice, conducts brand management, while preventing full organisational autonomy.

It has been suggested that there may be a number of differences and challenges in the political aspects of the public sector regarding brand considerations (Wæraas et al., 2015). There may be potential conflicts between organisational and political concerns (Wæraas et al., 2015) that could affect internal brand management efforts. However, while research has argued for the essential role of both top and middle managers in the implementation of public sector branding (Wæraas et al., 2015), virtually nothing is known about the role of political leadership in internal brand management. Consequently, it is of interest to examine how political management influences employee brand commitment.

Employee experience

Employee experiences of the brand should not be underestimated regarding internal brand management. Research suggests that employees continuously learn about the brand from their experience with the organisation (Dean et al., 2016). This experience, in terms of interaction with management, other employees, and external stakeholders influence employees' interpretation of the brand (Dean et al., 2016). When there are perceived discrepancies between what employees are told about the brand, and what they experience, their own brand experiences will take precedence in the way they interpret the brand meaning (Dean et al., 2016). This, in turn, shapes how the brand is communicated to external stakeholders. Employee experiences are generally reflected in their interactions with external stakeholders (King & Grace, 2008, 2012).

The need to recognise the key role of employee experience in internal brand management appears to also be true in the public sector. Indeed, research suggests that to support the desired outcomes regarding external stakeholders, public sector organisations need to ensure positive brand experience among employees and how this is communicated to external stakeholders (Juntunen et al., 2013). However, in order to achieve this, it is imperative that we gain a thorough understanding of how this brand experience is formed and influenced in relation to the public context.

Method

A case study involves the holistic study of a 'bounded entity', i.e. a social phenomenon such as a person or an organisation (Yin, 2012, p. 6) using one or more methods (Thomas, 2011). It allows researchers to explore complex issues that influence everyday work activities (Eisenhardt & Graebner, 2007; Silverman, 2011). By simultaneously considering the subject of the case, in this instance, a public sector organisation, and the object of the study, i.e. internal brand management and employee commitment, it provides a basis for understanding the topic at hand (Thomas, 2011). A case study approach is therefore particularly suitable when the phenomenon and context are deeply intertwined (Yin, 2003). Thus, a case study approach was deemed appropriate for this study.

The selected case organisation is a Swedish county council. Thus, it represents a public sector organisation that is publicly owned and funded, and is subject to government steering and control, also called a bureau (Perry & Rainey, 1988). Its main responsibility is to provide health care in the region, along with some other

responsibilities, for example, dental care for adolescents up to 20 years of age, public transport, regional development, and culture. The focus of the case study is on the organisation's health care responsibilities.

The organisation is well-established and is a familiar brand in the region. Its brand has been developed in the form of brand values: a vision, a mission (in the form of a core values statement), as well as various core values that are communicated both internally and externally. The organisation also conducts regular employee surveys on its brand values.

In the case organisation, theoretical sampling (Eisenhardt & Graebner, 2007; Glaser & Strauss, 1967) has been utilised. In order to provide a valuable basis for developing insight into the topic at hand, it is necessary to select cases that will contribute to an understanding of the phenomenon. Theoretical sampling allows researchers to select cases not on the basis of their randomness, but on the basis that they 'are particularly suitable for illuminating and extending relationships and logic among constructs' (Eisenhardt & Graebner, 2007, p. 27). This can include either pursuing a study based on a single case, or including multiple cases in a particular case (Eisenhardt & Graebner, 2007).

A cross-section of departments was therefore selected in order to gain a thorough understanding of factors relating to the organisation's internal brand management. This enabled insights to be gained from the different hierarchical levels, with different responsibilities, representing a diversity of organisational voices and perceptions. Thus, while the focus of the study remained on the healthcare responsibilities, the selected departments did not solely include departments with operational medical roles but also departments with strategic organisational roles. The selected departments comprised a strategic department, a strategic development department, an R&D department, and an operational department. Representatives of the communications department were also included in order to gain the official brand perspective of the organisation.

Twenty in-depth interviews were conducted with twenty-one respondents representing various levels and roles in the departments. The respondent sample comprised seven managers and 14 employees whose working tasks included operational and strategic issues. In one interview with the communications department, two respondents participated: the head of communication and a communication strategist. Twenty interviews were deemed suitable as data saturation started to emerge during the latter part of the interview process. By the time that all employees had been interviewed all the main themes had emerged. This is in line with suggestions that data saturation can be achieved after twelve interviews, at which point the definitions of codes tend to be rather stable (Guest et al., 2006). All but one of the interviews was conducted between February and November, 2016. The final interview, with representatives of the communications department, was conducted in June 2017. The interviews lasted an average of one hour and 13 minutes. All interviews were recorded and then transcribed verbatim, resulting in 462 single-line transcriptions.

The interviews allowed for rich and detailed data to be collected, which provided a comprehensive understanding of employees' feelings, actions, perceptions, as well as the context and structures of their environment (Charmaz, 2006). Thus, the interviews provided insight into how the organisational context and brand-related factors were received and understood, and how it influenced the employees' relationship with the brand. A semi-structured interview guide was developed in order to elicit the employees'

perspectives, including cognitive and affective employee-brand relationships, and probes were used to facilitate further reflection on the interview topics. The topics included, but were not limited to, leadership, brand values, internal and external communication, as well as perceptions and experience of the organisation and the public sector.

In addition to the interviews, the data collection encompassed observations of seven meetings, including weekly and monthly staff meetings, as well as bi-annual planning days. The observations at these meetings enabled an understanding to be gained of the relationships in the organisation and how the branding efforts were integrated into daily work and internal communication. While the interviews accounted for respondent perceptions and experience, the observations made it possible to understand how respondents talked about and explained various brand-related issues in the groups, thereby providing important insight into the topic, not least in combination with the interview data. The observations were documented by taking field notes, resulting in 57 single-line transcriptions.

The data were analysed manually using Nvivo. The coding procedures were in accordance with the steps proposed by Charmaz (2006) for extracting themes in the data. Each step allowed an additional level of abstraction and helped define themes that illustrated how the contextual factors influenced employee brand commitment. The first step analysed the whole text without any restrictions on topics. This provided a number of interesting issues concerning branding and its outcomes. In the second step, the focus shifted to the contextual factors that influenced employee brand commitment. In the final step, the themes were refined in order to analyse their underlying meaning and importance. This step-by-step refinement of the themes helped identify the key themes and explain how and why certain factors influence employee brand commitment in the organisation.

Quotes have been used to illustrate the empirical findings. As all interviews were conducted in Swedish, care has been taken to ensure that the message and tone has been translated correctly into English. Following an agreement with the respondents, their identities, the departments and organisation have been anonymised.

Empirical findings

Identity and values of employees and organisations

The interviews revealed that the heterogeneous service offerings and multitude of internal cultures across the different departments created a fragmented organisation that formed part of the organisational identity. One impact on employees appeared to be a greater psychological gap in the organisation, with a tendency to divide employees into 'us' and 'them', depending on which department the respective employee belonged to. This was not necessarily in a negative sense, but an indication of the employees' sense of belonging and the impact of the fragmented organisation on organisational relationships. In fact, it became clear that some departments had, or were perceived to have, an 'internal stakeholder relationship' with other departments, i.e. stakeholders could include not only external stakeholders, such as residents of the region, but also other departments in the organisation. Thus, internal relationships could resemble a kind of 'customer' relationship, although the departments were part of the same organisation. Other departments could be seen as a target audience for departmental communication and relationships and as a separate

entity regarding financial considerations. The latter appeared to be enhanced by internal invoicing and departmental budget considerations. This internal stakeholder relationship could result in both positive and negative internal brand-related outcomes; it could contribute to bringing the organisation together or creating greater division in the organisation.

The various identities and stakeholder relationships in the organisation meant that developing and promoting a consistent and all-encompassing brand became a particularly complex and challenging task. As one respondent explained:

It's difficult. In a way, the organisation is too big for you to ... it is too fragmented ... I mean, it's one thing to create a brand for IKEA. They make various kinds of furniture, right? But, a county council, which is supposed to manage communication, culture ... Then it also offers healthcare, including everything from brain surgery to looking after infants or maternal care and such like ... finding a common denominator for such a large organisation, it becomes too difficult. (manager)

This has geared the organisation towards a rather condensed version of the brand, suitable for most of the organisation, despite its variety of responsibilities and services. Thus, while recognising the complexity of defining a common organisational brand for this organisation, the solution has been to take a more fundamental approach, making the brand as simple and general as possible. However, integrating various parts of the organisation into the brand values may not be a completely straightforward task. Different departments may associate with the brand to a greater or lesser extent, based on their role in the organisation. Thus, there could be certain internal complications regarding department-brand relationships in which employees could take a rather detached view of organisational brand values.

The main organisational vision – we might discuss it tomorrow. Otherwise, we'll e-mail it out. It doesn't affect us directly, but it's good to know the overarching organisation's vision. (statement by a manager during a meeting)

This is not surprising, considering the brand values sometimes reflect a strategic ambition relating to the management's desire to highlight certain areas of the organisation. This is, for example, the case with the vision, which clearly highlights a specific aspect of the organisation.

The brand is pretty fragmented in [the organisation]. The vision is aimed more towards [one aspect of the organisation] as it originated in the idea that this work needs to be emphasised. (employee)

The result is that some parts of the brand values, i.e. the vision, appeared to primarily gain a cognitive understanding among the employees. This was also the case with other brand values. However, one exception was the brand values that were connected to the employees' motivation to do good for society and others. These values appeared to create an emotional connection with most of the employees.

Thus, it is clear that a fragmented organisation affects the brand in the organisation. This appears to originate in the varied and heterogeneous responsibilities of this kind of public sector organisation, and complex internal relationships, which complicate the organisational relationships, both between departments and between employees and the organisational brand. This also served as a complicating aspect in defining the brand values.

That said, there also appeared to be an aligning force in the organisation in the form of public service motivation among the employees, i.e. a desire to be of benefit to society and others. This was generally a significant motivation for employees in their work and was at the core of many employees' mindsets:

The main reason [that I work for the organisation] is that I want to be part of and contribute to change. I also feel that it's a large and interesting organisation that actually has excellent staff who want to make a difference. So that's pretty unique in a way. This also goes on in private companies, but not in the same way as here. (manager)

Another respondent agrees.

Like, everyone who works, particularly in health care and the public sector has another focus, and that is to take care of other people, make a difference to other people. It attracts a different type of personality than someone who merely produces for the benefit of shareholders. That's another type of person. (manager)

Many of the respondents expressed such sentiments. This happened in all departments included in the study, whether on a more strategic or operational level, creating a sense of meaningfulness and affective commitment among the employees:

It's clear that we have an important role to play . . . in our work and we do that where we work. It becomes clear that if this isn't done, it's bad for the patients. So, you see, this is important. And that makes it easy to feel commitment to your workplace. (employee)

It's like, when you work for the county council you may consider, you may ask, who does my work benefit? Because in some way I feel that my salary is paid for by the general public. And then I shouldn't just sit idly by but try to do some meaningful work. So, I think it's important to think about these core values and such like. (employee)

Indeed, the interviews suggest that employees may be more committed to doing good for others and society than being committed to the organisational brand. Having brand values that are aligned with the sector-specific purpose of the organisation, and having a greater sense of purpose, was key to employee brand commitment and supporting alignment in the organisation. The organisational brand values that were associated with this motivation appeared to have a stronger employee brand commitment. However, it should also be mentioned that this motivation may be challenged by the NPM principles that have clearly permeated the organisation. Increased focus on efficiency and production have become a feature of the organisation, to a point where these values are sometimes perceived as overshadowing other aspects of organisational life, including the official brand values. Becoming part of the organisational identity, these values are continuously communicated throughout the organisation in the form of practical considerations, for example, aims, targets, and communication from management. This greatly influences the employee experience and voices have been raised that the work increasingly resembles an assembly line rather than a service organisation, particularly for patient-interactive roles. While a moderate focus on production and efficiency is certainly not regarded as negative, the intense focus on such NPM values is problematic due to the underlying public service motivation of many employees. When employees felt that there was a conflict between their underlying commitment related to public service motivation and NPM considerations, it appears that the employee-organisational relationship sometimes suffered.

It should also be mentioned that a focus on production and efficiency often seems to drive employees towards a more local departmental identity. This may complicate organisational relationships and psychological attachment to the organisation and its brand. It may also result in less consideration being given to other departments and the organisation as a whole. This may naturally magnify an already fragmented organisation, complicating the internal brand management efforts and outcomes.

The role of leadership

Empirical data show that, like in the private sector, leadership in the organisation had a central influence in its internal brand management. However, it was interesting to note that political leadership also appeared to play a major role, and not necessarily in a positive manner. While the respondents generally expressed a detachment from the political management, its influence was noticeable in the organisation and created an environment that influenced the outcomes of internal brand management. The behaviour of the political leadership sometimes appeared to complicate the organisational identification and psychological attachment of the employees. Indeed, the relationship between the employees and the political leadership often appeared to be rather strained. This was particularly noticeable with regard to the political leaders' short-sighted election focus, conflicts related to political ideologies, and a psychological gap between the organisation and its political leadership.

First, many respondents felt there was a short-term political focus that created an inconsistent organisational environment. With different priorities during the political periods, driven by what was perceived as political populism, the organisation may be subject to conditions influenced by the 'topic of the day'. As one respondent explained:

We clearly notice when it's election time ... that's when certain types of decisions are made - then the following year, the decisions are completely different, because the focus is often on savings. And in previous years, they don't save, but spend. So, they grandstand for electoral reasons, which we really need to get away from. (manager)

Thus, the official brand values may be undermined as political decisions and short-term focus influence organisational considerations. Further, several respondents suggested that this made long-term planning difficult and also created a sense of uncertainty. This was the result of short-sighted election focus and the nature of political governance, not knowing which political ideology would be dominant in the next term. Such uncertainty had a negative influence on organisational life, although not in the form of daily concerns for employees. Rather, these uncertainties created a negative perception of the political leadership, which also influenced employee relationships with the organisation and its brand.

Second, the respondents repeatedly mentioned issues related to conflicts of political ideologies. There were clear indications that differences between political ideologies – which manifested in political squabbles – influenced organisational relationships. As one respondent stated: 'In a politically governed organisation, the political conflict is embedded' (employee).

This was relevant as the organisation's political nature appeared to create a situation in which the organisation could find itself in the middle of, and a target of, the political debate. One employee stated:

I'm almost afraid that one party is going to pursue the issue because, if it comes from the wrong political side, it ends there. It's not like they [the politicians] consider the proposals, if they are good or bad. Instead, it's very much a question of where [which political party] it's coming from. (employee)

Thus, the political leadership often communicated values that did not align with core organisational concerns and brand values, but rather originated in political considerations. Employees may therefore feel that living up to the organisational brand values are not a priority for the political leadership.

Further, conflicts between political ideology and organisational concerns could complicate matters. Indeed, the brand values may sometimes be overshadowed by political ambitions:

Like, this business about new jobs versus good health care, [organisational brand values], efficiency, where I am 100 % focused on offering good health care for the residents [of the region], and efficient health care, and such like. And the other things are secondary, such as how many job opportunities there are in a certain location. But for a politician, it may not be about that, it's about getting votes. (employee)

Thus, employees may feel that the best decisions and the well-being of the organisation and its stakeholders were not necessarily in focus, but rather, it was a matter of winning the political argument. From a brand perspective, this may be problematic as it creates a challenging environment for internal brand management efforts. It may be difficult to successfully promote brand values in an organisation in which the main loyalty of its top management, i.e. political leadership, lies in its political ideology rather than the organisation and its brand.

The conflicting political ideologies required the organisation to distance itself from the political game, while recognising that it also influenced brand perceptions:

It's about keeping track of what has been decided and the current situation so that we don't end up in some kind of political debate, but respond to the decisions made and the focus that has been decided. And this is decided by the [political] majority – that's how it works. But then, of course, it affects [the brand] in the way that the image of our organisation is affected by everything that is communicated. But, that's part of the democratic process, that's how it is. (manager)

Collectively, the political leaders' short-sighted election focus and conflicts related to political ideology sometimes created what could be described as antipathy towards the political steering, but also an awareness of the political game. While the respondents were able to differentiate between the organisation and the political leadership, the nature of the political game certainly influenced the employee-organisational relationship. Indeed, it sometimes created a misalignment between organisational concerns and the brand values compared to the behaviour of the political leadership. Third, the data analysis revealed that the political level was perceived as being rather unclear, lacking a close organisational relationship. Thus, there was a gap between the political level and the organisation, manifesting in a psychological distance. While

politicians were responsible for the strategic direction of the organisation, many respondents thought that the political leadership had limited understanding and knowledge, not least regarding what could be operationally implemented in the organisation.

Indeed, the respondents often felt that the political leadership was very distant from the everyday operations and reality of a health care environment, yet their decisions had considerable influence on the organisation. Thus, many employees appeared to experience a sense of divide in the employee-top management relationship. This divide was not only physical, but also appeared to have an emotional aspect where the political leadership may be perceived to provide a firm, top-down, leadership with little or no employee involvement and consideration.

The feeling I get is that they have no grasp of the reality of operations, how things are down here at a lower level. Instead, they sit in a completely different building, quite far away from operations and you never see them around. It's not like . . . let's do this - this is how things are - visiting the departments and giving a briefing. Instead, it's like, they sit over there in their building and we're over here having to implement their decisions . . . And it feels like there is too much ignorance of healthcare and what it means. It doesn't feel like they really grasp the consequences of their decisions. (employee)

In the departments in which there were political interests and which received visits from politicians, perceptions tended to be somewhat more positive as it was understood that politicians wanted to learn about the organisation and its operations. As such, it created a sense of importance that seemed to create positive emotional outcomes.

That said, the perceived distance sometimes manifested as a sense of disdain for the political leadership, creating further internal schisms:

I don't think they are competent, really. It doesn't feel right that they have so much power over certain issues, because, the civil management has both awareness and knowledge of various issues. So I think it's a bit strange when certain decisions are made. I've seen quite a few organisations . . . in my previous jobs and . . . I think there are better ways to govern an organisation. (employee)

This psychological distance between the organisation and its political leadership sometimes made it difficult for political decisions to gain internal support. Further, scepticism about the political leadership increased the distance between employees and the organisation, thereby complicating the internal brand management. Although the employees were able to differentiate between the political leadership and the organisation it influenced their perception of the organisation, particularly its strategic levels. Further, it made it difficult to direct the brand identity and values as the political leadership might fail to set the standards for the organisation.

Summary of empirical findings

The empirical data highlights several key findings that help provide an understanding of the complexity of internal brand management and the nature of employee brand commitment in the public sector. These are presented in [Table 1](#), which provides a brief summary of the findings, associated with contextual factors in the public sector that influence internal brand management.

Table 1. Key factors influencing internal brand management in the public sector.

Key findings	Contextual factors
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A fragmented organisation that is part of the identity • There is complexity in the organisation related to internal stakeholder relationships • Brand values that may be more related to a specific part of the organisation, with varying association with other departments 	Multiple identities
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • NPM principles may magnify the fragmentation of an already fragmented organisation • Public service motivation form part of employee identity and values, and are key to employee brand commitment • Internal alignment is enhanced by employee public service motivation 	Public service motivation
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • NPM principles may overshadow brand values and employee public service motivation, as well as undermine employee brand commitment • Brand values should be aligned with the sector’s purpose and employee motivation • Political considerations and ambitions may take precedence over or undermine the brand values; organisational brand values may not be a key consideration for the political leadership • Conflicts of political ideologies complicate employee brand commitment 	Political leadership
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There is a psychological distance between the organisation and its political leadership that may complicate employee brand commitment • The nature of political governance may be incompatible with organisational brand considerations 	

Discussion

The findings reported in this study are based on the identification of three contextual factors with important internal brand management implications in the form of their influence on employee brand commitment, as illustrated in [Figure 1](#).

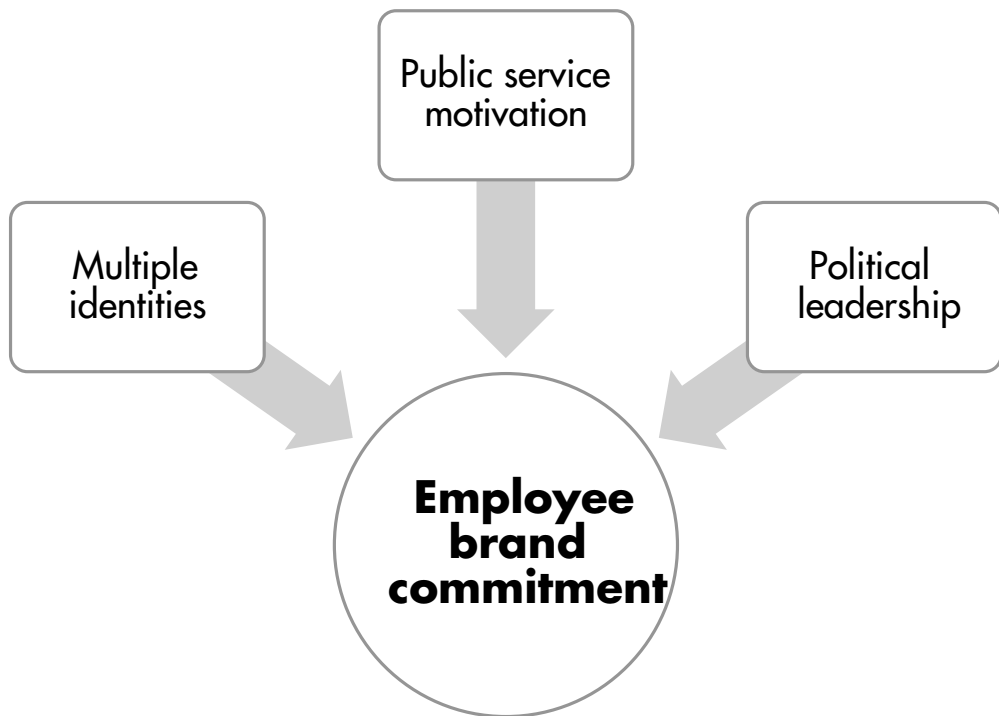


Figure 1. Public sector contextual factors influencing employee brand commitment.

Multiple identities

The data confirms the assertions of fragmented organisations with multiple identities (Wæraas & Byrkjeflot, 2012; Wæraas & Solbakk, 2009), that exist within the realms of the organisation. From an internal brand management perspective this might be problematic as multiple internal identities could cause various departments to lack a strong relationship with the brand values. Indeed, the empirical evidence suggests that a fragmented organisation makes it difficult to define and promote a suitable brand that was integrated into the entire organisation.

However, this study also provides evidence that fragmentation in this type of organisation may be amplified by the implementation of NPM. The existing internal brand management literature highlights the need to consider the culture, working environment and values in order to support the emotional employee-brand relationship (Suomi et al., 2019). From a public sector perspective this is interesting as this study indicates that implementing NPM may further fragment the organisation. This is because NPM-related values may cause an internal value shift that may supersede existing internal considerations and brand values, push employees towards a greater departmental focus, and worsen employee-organisational relationships.

This is particularly interesting as this organisation appears to be subject to a rather complex internal relationship in which many departments have an 'internal stakeholder relationship' with other departments. Contemporary brand management recognises employees as co-creators of brand values (Saleem & Iglesias, 2016; Suomi et al., 2019). Thus, the implications of this complex internal relationship are twofold. First, an organisation in which individual departments may perceive other departments through a customer-like lens may contribute to greater internal fragmentation and push employees towards a greater departmental commitment. In such situations, organisations need to be careful about how this may impact internal brand management efforts to infuse and influence the brand values in the organisation. Second, internal brand management may not solely be a means of influencing the external stakeholders' perceptions of the brand (De Chernatony et al., 2006; Sirianni et al., 2013). Rather, internal stakeholders, in the form of various departments, may need to be regarded as a secondary audience, and an indirect means of supporting the organisation's brand values. This is particularly interesting considering that public sector organisations need to consider the employee brand experience and how this is communicated to external stakeholders (Juntunen et al., 2013). In this organisation, the same may be true from an internal perspective. Thus, through departmental interaction, positive brand experiences in one department could be communicated to, as well as serve to provide positive brand experiences in other departments, thereby influencing internal brand perceptions of those departments. The internal brand management aimed at one department could thereby serve as an internal brand management effort in another.

A very interesting finding is that while a consistent identity structure (Harris & De Chernatony, 2001; Vallaster & de Chernatony, 2006) may be difficult to achieve, in this context it may not be as problematic as traditional brand knowledge suggests. Rather, in a public sector organisation, employees tend to share similar values, which act as a buffer.

Public service motivation

This study confirms the prevalence of employee ambitions to do good for society and others in the public sector (Hondegghem & Perry, 2009; Perry & Wise, 1990). Thus, there is a certain public service motivation among employees in this organisation and this motivation is part of their employee identity and values. Further, it acts as an aligning force in the organisation. These motives lie at the core of the employees' commitment; it is the public sector purpose that appears to gain employee commitment rather than brand values.

These are noteworthy findings that have implications for both brand development and internal brand management. Many public sector organisations have adopted branding as a means of supporting the desired perceptions of and benefits for the organisation (Gromark & Melin, 2013; Sataøen & Wæraas, 2015). Yet, a brand logic requires employee behaviours that support the brand values (Bettencourt et al., 2001; De Chernatony et al., 2006; Sirianni et al., 2013). If employees' commitment is mainly related to their motivation to do good for society and others (Hondegghem & Perry, 2009; Perry & Wise, 1990), the brand may actually become a source of conflict if it does not enhance this motivation.

Thus, public sector organisations may need to carefully integrate these values and motivation into their organisational brand values. Indeed, the evidence in this study indicates that such brand values have an increased ability to achieve an emotional connection in employees. Consequently, the role of the organisation in society and the employees' motivation to help others should be highlighted in internal brand-enhancing efforts. By aligning the brand with the employees' motivation rather than attempting to align the employees' values with the defined brand values, employee-organisational value misalignment may be reduced, and greater employee brand commitment may be supported. Thus, this approach may actually become an opportunity for public sector organisations to overcome value misalignment between employees and the organisation, a misalignment that is not only common, but may also prevent employee acceptance and buy-in of the brand values (Burmman et al., 2009; MacLaverly et al., 2007). This may result in internal brand management that requires a more moderate approach as the alignment between the employees and the brand is already in place. Naturally, this relationship only holds true if organisations can recruit and retain employees with public service motivation.

However, it should be noted that this motivation could be threatened by NPM principles becoming institutionalised in the organisation. Thus, a greater focus on efficiency, production and performance may sometimes overshadow the official brand values and shift employee focus towards quantitatively rather than qualitatively measured targets. If employees feel that the focal point has been shifted from patient to production considerations, it will influence the values that they associate with the organisation and the brand; employee brand experience takes precedent over official brand claims in interpreting the brand meaning (Dean et al., 2016). As brand values that integrate the employees' public service motivation tend to receive greater employee brand commitment, implementing values that overshadow this motivation may be problematic for employee brand commitment.

Previous research has demonstrated that employee experiences triumph over official brand communication (Dean et al., 2016) and that those experiences are often reflected in

employee interactions with external parties (King & Grace, 2012, 2008). While a mindset that ensures efficiency in operations may be perceived as positive, if applied in moderation, organisations must be careful to ensure that production focus does not triumph over brand values, particularly in this kind of organisation, in which public service motivation is prevalent among employees. There would appear to be an important lesson here for public sector organisations, i.e. finding a suitable middle ground between a production and a human-centric focus.

Leadership

Previous studies have emphasised the critical role of leadership in internal brand management. Management behaviour can enhance employee internalisation of brand values (Burmam & Zeplin, 2005; Morhart et al., 2009) and support alignment between brand values and employee behaviour (Vallaster & De Chernatony, 2005). The role of top management in supporting these outcomes is essential; it can be facilitated by showing commitment to and living the brand, as well as showing trust in its employees (Vallaster & Lindgreen, 2013). Thus, managers need to be good role models for brand values (McCoy & Venter, 2016; Vallaster & Lindgreen, 2013).

However, in the public sector, organisations are subject to an additional management level in the form of political leadership. On the one hand, this level represents a top management level in its role as a policy maker that directs and focuses organisational decisions and strategies, yet, on the other hand it represents an external stakeholder in its role as a representative for the general public. It has been suggested that this conflicting role is a potential reason for challenges regarding brand concerns (Wæraas et al., 2015). This study provides evidence for such suggestions. Thus, this study shows that the values, decisions and behaviour of political leadership are often inconsistent with the officially defined brand values. This appears to represent a major challenge for internal brand management and employee brand commitment.

The nature of political leadership, with its innate ideological differences and tendency to play the political game, may be problematic for a number of reasons. First, it may serve as a basis for misalignment between the values of the political leadership and the official brand values. For the political leadership, its main loyalty may reside in the brand of the party and its ideological foundation, rather than in organisational brand values. From a traditional brand perspective this may be problematic for two reasons. First, the literature advocates for the need to support alignment between the vision, culture, and image (Hatch & Schultz, 2001). If the political leadership has separate loyalties and a tendency to use the organisation as a political tool, not least in the political debate, alignment may be difficult to achieve. Second, top management has a key role in supporting brand-aligned values and behaviours among employees (Vallaster & de Chernatony, 2006; Vallaster & Lindgreen, 2013). The findings in this paper suggest that the nature of the political leadership may result in a psychological distance between employees and top management. This kind of psychological distance may cause problems for managers in setting the standards for the brand (Vallaster & Lindgreen, 2013). Indeed, it may prevent the political leadership from serving as role models regarding the brand (McCoy & Venter, 2016; Vallaster & Lindgreen, 2013). Problems that negatively influence employees' brand commitment are likely to occur if employees perceive that

there are discrepancies between the official brand values and the values conveyed by the political leadership; employee experience strongly influence employee interpretation of the brand meaning (Dean et al., 2016).

Second, decisions may not always be based on what is in the best interests of the organisation, but rather on political standpoints and a desire to win the political argument. Decisions that would otherwise be beneficial to the organisation may be abandoned if they originate on the wrong side of the political spectrum. The implications for employee-brand relationships could be serious if the political leadership fails to act in the best interests of the organisation and its brand; employee internalisation of brand values requires managers to take the lead and act as good role models for the brand (McCoy & Venter, 2016; Vallaster & Lindgreen, 2013).

Third, it may enhance the short-term focus on decisions whereby different decisions are taken depending on the current phase of the election process, more generous approach before elections, and increased stringency afterwards. This may have an unfavourable effect on organisational life. The consequences could be an unfavourable perception of the political leadership among employees, a perception that was also reflected in employee relationships with the organisation and its brand. Thus, the short-term focus of political leadership stands in sharp contrast to the recommendations in brand management research that advocate a long-term approach and alignment of stakeholder image (Hatch & Schultz, 2001).

Finally, the physical and psychological distance between politicians and the organisation may cause employees to question the competence of its political leadership. This is because of decisions being made that could sometimes be perceived as being unsuitable for implementation. Management-employee trust (Vallaster & Lindgreen, 2013), dialogue (Whisman, 2009) and interaction (Vallaster & Lindgreen, 2013) are key factors to successful internal brand management. This study confirms this and shows that the rather complex relationship between political leadership and the organisation unfavourably influences employee perceptions of their organisation and its brand. In order to ensure a positive relationship, employees need to perceive that politicians understand and consider employee experiences at lower levels of the organisation. In an organisation where employee involvement and consideration are not perceived to be a main concern for its political leadership, it may be difficult to ensure an affective commitment among employees.

To conclude, in many cases, the nature of political leadership is in contrast to what traditional brand literature describes as brand-enhancing management influences. This may seriously complicate the issue of internal brand management in the public sector to the extent that the political governance may be considered incompatible with organisational brand considerations.

Conclusion

This study answers the call for further research on public sector organisations and internal brand management outcomes (Leijerholt, Biedenbach et al., 2019; Piehler et al., 2018). It provides insight into how contextual factors in the public sector influence employee perceptions and relationships with the organisational brand, focusing on the affective outcome of internal brand management, i.e. employee brand commitment. Empirical

evidence has been found to suggest that such an influence relates to the identity and values of employees and organisations, in the form of multiple identities and public service motivation, and its leadership, in the form of political leadership. These factors shape the conditions for branding and internal brand management. They therefore have important implications for both brand implementation and key brand principles.

Theoretical and managerial implications

This study confirms the fragmented nature of many public sector organisations, but also contributes to the literature on public sector branding by adding a level of complexity in order to understand this fragmentation and its impact on internal brand management efforts and outcomes. It has been found that NPM implementation may increase internal fragmentation and push employees towards greater focus and commitment in the individual department, rather than on the organisational brand. Further, in this public sector organisation, there appears to be a complex internal relationship between departments in the form of an 'internal stakeholder relationship' that could both assist and complicate internal brand management. However, public sector organisations may not have to regard such fragmentation as being a critical problem for internal brand management efforts as there are aligning factors in employee public service motivation that provide a certain level of support.

Thus, the second contribution of this study is the role of public service motivation in public sector branding. In this organisation, the employees' motivation to do good for society and others appear to act as an aligning force, serving as a potential benefit to internal brand management. Therefore, in the public sector, organisations can facilitate greater employee brand commitment by integrating values related to the public sector into their brand values. Indeed, this study has found that it is employee public service motivation that lies at the core of employees' commitment. The role of the brand itself appears to be rather marginal in supporting employee brand commitment, unless it is rooted in employee public service motivation. Thus, the core aligning force may not lie in the brand but in the purpose of the sector. The implication of this finding is that the defining of the brand must originate in the context rather than in organisational ambitions. This could naturally enable greater employee brand commitment, requiring a more moderate internal brand management effort that is focused on the cognitive and behavioural aspects of the outcomes. However, it should be mentioned that this public service motivation could be undermined by a strong NPM approach that may shift organisational focus towards performance-related issues, at the expense of brand values. It is therefore important that increased production focus is managed with care, ensuring that it is used as a supportive tool rather than as a behavioural driver in the organisation. If this does not happen, employee motivation may be undermined, which could seriously damage the organisational brand.

A third contribution of this paper lies in the area of internal brand management and leadership. This study shows that political leadership complicates internal brand management and the relationship between employees and the brand. The core issue of this argument lies in the nature of political leadership with its innate ideological differences and tendency to play the political game. The influence of political leadership on employee relationships with and commitment to the brand should not be underestimated. Indeed, the findings of this study suggest that political leadership may be incompatible with some key principles of branding.

To conclude, this study shows that public sector organisations need to carefully consider how branding, not least internal brand management, is approached in the sector. While organisations may consider branding to be a necessary means of supporting the desired perceptions and assets of the organisation (Gromark & Melin, 2013; Sataøen & Wæraas, 2015), there are contextual issues that may serve as both an advantage and a challenge to internal brand management efforts and employee brand commitment. Indeed, there are a number of brand-related contextual challenges and opportunities in the public sector that need to be considered (Wæraas & Byrkjeflot, 2012). This study questions a number of current perspectives on the construction and implementation of public sector branding and demonstrates that it is critical to understand how contextual factors influence internal brand management efforts and their outcome in the form of employee brand commitment in a public sector organisation. Thus, while branding may not be at odds with a public context, it needs to be carefully fostered to suit its nature.

The managerial implications of these findings are that the implementation of brand management principles directly drawn from a private context need to be reconsidered regarding its suitability for organisations in this sector. Indeed, public sector managers need to carefully consider traditional brand principles and how well-suited they are for a public context. It is necessary that organisations must carefully consider how their organisational structure, in terms of both architecture and the means of steering, supports alignment in the organisation rather than unnecessarily adding to its fragmentation, as well as the role of employee motivation in minimising this fragmentation. Further, employees' public service motivation can benefit internal brand management efforts if handled properly. This requires the consideration of both brand-defining issues and organisational experiences. Finally, public sector organisations must carefully analyse how their political leadership influences their internal brand management efforts and outcomes in order to minimise the negative consequences.

Limitations and further research

The applicability of this study is believed to have relevance for comparable public sector organisations subject to an NPM approach, the political management level and employees who demonstrate public service motivation. However, one limitation of this study is its case study approach. While it provides an in-depth understanding of the topic at hand, this study cannot claim to have exhausted all the contextual factors that may exist regarding internal brand management and employee brand commitment in this sector. Nor does the study claim that the findings are representative of all public sector organisations, or of all national contexts.

Further studies are therefore needed. For example, our knowledge can be further enhanced by multiple-case and cross-country studies, qualitatively or quantitatively, which offer greater understanding of how contextual factors influence the branding in public sector organisations. Indeed, further research may wish to investigate whether these findings are mainly relevant to large public sector organisations, with varied offerings, and subject to political steering, and whether there are other contextual factors that may need to be considered in this type of organisation. Also, the political leadership perspective and its role for employee brand commitment may be an interesting avenue for future studies.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

Notes on contributor

Ulrika Leijerholt is a senior lecturer at Umeå School of Business, Economics and Statistics at Umeå University. As an experienced marketing practitioner Dr. Leijerholt has worked in strategic and operational roles across multiple industries and in both the public and private sectors. Her research primarily focuses on various aspects of public sector branding.

References

- Albert, S., & Whetten, D. A. (1985). Organizational identity. In L.L. Cummings, B. M. Staw (Eds.), *Research in organizational behavior* (pp. 263–295). JAI Press.
- Berry, L. L., Wall, E. A., & Carbone, L. P. (2006). Service clues and customer assessment of the service experience: Lessons from marketing. *Academy of Management Perspectives*, 20(2), 43–57. <https://doi.org/10.5465/amp.2006.20591004>
- Bettencourt, L. A., Gwinner, K. P., & Meuter, M. L. (2001). A comparison of attitude, personality, and knowledge predictors of service. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 86(1), 29–41. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0021-9010.86.1.29>
- Burmans, C., & Zeplin, S. (2005). Building brand commitment: A behavioural approach to internal brand management. *Journal of Brand Management*, 12(4), 279–300. <https://doi.org/10.1057/palgrave.bm.2540223>
- Burmans, C., Zeplin, S., & Riley, N. (2009). Key determinants of internal brand management success: An exploratory empirical analysis. *Brand Management*, 16(4), 264–384. <https://doi.org/10.1057/bm.2008.6>
- Chapleo, C. (2010). What defines “successful” university brands? *International Journal of Public Sector Management*, 23(2), 169–183. <https://doi.org/10.1108/09513551011022519>
- Chapleo, C. (2015a). Brands in Higher Education. *International Studies of Management & Organization*, 45(2), 150–163. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00208825.2015.1006014>
- Chapleo, C. (2015b). Brand “infrastructure” in nonprofit organizations: Challenges to successful brand building? *Journal of Marketing Communications*, 21(3), 199–209. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13527266.2012.741609>
- Chapleo, C., & Clark, P. (2016). Branding a tertiary institution by committee: An exploration of internal brand analysis and management processes. *Journal of Brand Management*, 23(6), 631–647. <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41262-016-0009-1>
- Charmaz, K. (2006). *Constructing grounded theory* (1st ed.). SAGE Publications, Inc.
- Dahlqvist, U., & Melin, F. (2010). *Varumärken i offentlig tjänst*. Liber.
- De Chernatony, L. (2002). Would a brand smell any sweeter by a corporate name? *Corporate Reputation Review*, 5(2–3), 114–132. <https://doi.org/10.1057/palgrave.crr.1540169>
- De Chernatony, L., Cottam, S., & Segal-Horn, S. (2006). Communicating services brands’ values internally and externally. *The Service Industries Journal*, 26(8), 819–836. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02642060601011616>
- Dean, D., Arroyo-Gamez, R. E., Punjaisri, K., & Pich, C. (2016). Internal brand co-creation: The experiential brand meaning cycle in higher education. *Journal of Business Research*, 69(8), 3041–3048. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2016.01.019>
- DiMaggio, P. J., & Powell, W. W. (1983). The iron cage revisited: Institutional isomorphism and collective rationality in organizational fields. *American Sociological Review*, 48(2), 147–160. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2095101>
- Eisenhardt, K. M., & Graebner, M. E. (2007). Theory building from cases: Opportunities and challenges. *Academy of Management Journal*, 50(1), 25–32. <https://doi.org/10.5465/amj.2007.24160888>

- Glaser, B. G., & Strauss, A. L. (1967). *The discovery of grounded theory : Strategies for qualitative research*. Aldine de Gruyter.
- Gromark, J., & Melin, F. (2013). From market orientation to brand orientation in the public sector. *Journal of Marketing Management*, 29(9–10), 1099–1123. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0267257X.2013.812134>
- Guest, G., Bunce, A., & Johnson, L. (2006). How many interviews are enough? An experiment with data saturation and variability. *Field Methods*, 18(1), 59–82. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1525822X05279903>
- Gyrd-Jones, R. I., Helm, C., & Munk, J. (2013). Exploring the impact of silos in achieving brand orientation. *Journal of Marketing Management*, 29(9–10), 1056–1078. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0267257X.2013.811283>
- Hankinson, P. (2004). The internal brand in leading UK charities. *Journal of Product & Brand Management*, 13(2), 84–93. <https://doi.org/10.1108/10610420410529717>
- Harris, F., & De Chernatony, L. (2001). Corporate branding and corporate brand performance. *European Journal of Marketing*, 35(3/4), 441–456. <https://doi.org/10.1108/03090560110382101>
- Hatch, M. J., & Schultz, M. (2001). Are the strategic stars aligned for your corporate brand? *Harvard Business Review*, 79(2), 128–134.
- Hatch, M. J., & Schultz, M. (2003). Bringing the corporation into corporate branding. *European Journal of Marketing*, 37(7/8), 1041–1064. <https://doi.org/10.1108/03090560310477654>
- Hoffman, A. J. (1999). Institutional evolution and change: Environmentalism and the U.S. chemical industry. *Academy of Management Journal*, 42(4), 351–371. <https://doi.org/10.5465/257008>
- Hoggett, P. (2006). Conflict, ambivalence, and the contested purpose of public organizations. *Human Relations*, 59(2), 175–194. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0018726706062731>
- Hondeghem, A., & Perry, J. L. (2009). EGPA symposium on public service motivation and performance: Introduction. *International Review of Administrative Sciences*, 75(1), 5–9. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0020852308099502>
- Hudson, R. (2009). Brand strategy for acute NHS trusts. *Journal of Communication in Healthcare*, 2(1), 20–33. <https://doi.org/10.1179/cih.2009.2.1.20>
- Hytti, U., Kuoppakangas, P., Suomi, K., Chapleo, C., & Giovanardi, M. (2015). Challenges in delivering brand promise—focusing on municipal healthcare organisations. *International Journal of Public Sector Management*, 28(3), 254–272. <https://doi.org/10.1108/IJPSM-10-2014-0127>
- Juntunen, M., Juntunen, J., & Autere, V. (2013). Co-creating nonprofit brand equity. *Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Marketing*, 18(2), 122–132. <https://doi.org/10.1108/IJPSM-10-2014-0127>
- King, C., & Grace, D. (2008). Internal branding: Exploring the employee’s perspective. *Journal of Brand Management*, 15(5), 358–372. <https://doi.org/10.1057/palgrave.bm.2550136>
- King, C., & Grace, D. (2012). Examining the antecedents of positive employee brand-related attitudes and behaviours. *European Journal of Marketing*, 46(3/4), 469–488. <https://doi.org/10.1108/03090561211202567>
- Kuoppakangas, P., Suomi, K., Clark, P., Chapleo, C., & Stenvall, J. (2020). Dilemmas in re-branding a university - “Maybe people just don’t like change”: Linking meaningfulness and mutuality into the reconciliation. *Corporate Reputation Review*, 23(2), 92–105. <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41299-019-00080-2>
- Leijerholt, U., Biedenbach, G., & Hultén, P. (2019). Branding in the public sector: A systematic literature review and directions for future research. *Journal of Brand Management*, 26(2), 126–140. <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41262-018-0116-2>
- Leijerholt, U., Chapleo, C., & O’Sullivan, H. (2019). A brand within a brand: An integrated understanding of internal brand management and brand architecture in the public sector. *Journal of Brand Management*, 26(3), 277–290. <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41262-018-0128-y>
- MacLavery, N., McQuillan, P., & Oddie, H. (2007). *Internal branding best practices study*. Canadian Marketing Association.
- Matanda, M. J., & Ndubisi, N. O. (2013). Internal marketing, internal branding, and organisational outcomes: The moderating role of perceived goal congruence. *Journal of Marketing Management*, 29(9–10), 1030–1055. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0267257X.2013.800902>

- McCoy, S., & Venter, P. (2016). Corporate brands as catalysts in times of change: Lessons from a South African Bank. *Journal of Brand Management*, 23(1), 38–54. <https://doi.org/10.1057/bm.2015.44>
- Morhart, F. M., Herzog, W., & Tomczak, T. (2009). Brand-specific leadership: Turning employees into brand champions. *Journal of Marketing*, 73(5), 122–142. <https://doi.org/10.1509/jmkg.73.5.122>
- Perry, J. L., & Hondeghem, A. (2008). *Motivation in public management: The call of public service*. Oxford University Press.
- Perry, J. L., & Rainey, H. G. (1988). The public-private distinction in organization theory: A critique and research strategy. *Academy of Management Review*, 13(2), 182–201. <https://doi.org/10.5465/amr.1988.4306858>
- Perry, J. L., & Wise, L. R. (1990). The motivational bases of public service. *Public Administration Review*, 50(3), 367–373. <https://doi.org/10.2307/976618>
- Piehler, R., Grace, D., & Burmann, C. (2018). Internal brand management: Introduction to the special issue and directions for future research. *Journal of Brand Management*, 25, 197–201. <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41262-018-0096-2>
- Pratt, M. G., & Foreman, P. O. (2000). Classifying managerial responses to multiple organizational identities. *The Academy of Management Review*, 25(1), 18–42. <https://doi.org/10.5465/amr.2000.2791601>
- Punjaisri, K., & Wilson, A. (2007). The role of internal branding in the delivery of employee brand promise. *Journal of Brand Management*, 15(1), 57–70. <https://doi.org/10.1057/palgrave.bm.2550110>
- Punjaisri, K., & Wilson, A. (2011). Internal branding process: Key mechanisms, outcomes and moderating factors. *European Journal of Marketing*, 45(9–10), 1521–1537. <https://doi.org/10.1108/03090561111151871>
- Saleem, F. Z., & Iglesias, O. (2016). Mapping the domain of the fragmented field of internal branding. *Journal of Product & Brand Management*, 25(1), 43–57. <https://doi.org/10.1108/JPBM-11-2014-0751>
- Sataøen, H. L., & Wæraas, A. (2015). Branding without unique brands: Managing similarity and difference in a public sector context. *Public Management Review*, 17(3), 443–461. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14719037.2013.841976>
- Silverman, D. (2011). *Interpreting qualitative data* (4th ed.). SAGE Publications Inc.
- Sirianni, N. J., Bitner, M. J., Brown, S. W., & Mandel, N. (2013). Branded service encounters: Strategically aligning employee behavior with the brand positioning. *Journal of Marketing*, 77(6), 108–123. <https://doi.org/10.1509/jm.11.0485>
- Suomi, K., Saraniemi, S., Vähätalo, M., Kallio, T. J., & Tevameri, T. (2019). Employee engagement and internal branding: Two sides of the same coin? *Corporate Reputation Review*, 24(1), 48–63. <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41299-019-00090-0>
- Thomas, G. (2011). A typology for the case study in social science following a review of definition, discourse, and structure. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 17(6), 511–521. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1077800411409884>
- Vallaster, C., & de Chernatony, L. (2006). Internal brand building and structuration: The role of leadership. *European Journal of Marketing*, 40(7/8), 761–784. <https://doi.org/10.1108/03090560610669982>
- Vallaster, C., & De Chernatony, L. (2005). Internationalisation of services brands: The role of leadership during the internal brand building process. *Journal of Marketing Management*, 21(1–2), 181–203. <https://doi.org/10.1362/0267257053166839>
- Vallaster, C., & Lindgreen, A. (2013). The role of social interactions in building internal corporate brands: Implications for sustainability. *Journal of World Business*, 48(3), 297–310. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jwb.2012.07.014>
- Wæraas, A. (2008). Can public sector organizations be coherent corporate brands? *Marketing Theory*, 8(2), 205–221. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1470593108093325>
- Wæraas, A., Bjørnå, H., & Moldenæs, T. (2015). Place, organization, democracy: Three strategies for municipal branding. *Public Management Review*, 17(9), 1282–1304. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14719037.2014.906965>

- Wæraas, A., & Byrkjeflot, H. (2012). Public sector organizations and reputation management: Five problems. *International Public Management Journal*, 15(2), 186–206. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10967494.2012.702590>
- Wæraas, A., & Solbakk, M. N. (2009). Defining the essence of a university: Lessons from higher education branding. *Higher Education*, 57, 449–462. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10734-008-9155-z>
- Whisman, R. (2009). Internal branding: A university's most valuable intangible asset. *Journal of Product & Brand Management*, 18(5), 367–370. <https://doi.org/10.1108/10610420910981846>
- Wright, G. H., Chew, C., & Hines, A. (2012). The relevance and efficacy of marketing in public and non-profit service management. *Public Management Review*, 14(4), 433–450. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14719037.2011.649973>
- Yin, R. K. (2003). *Case study research: Design and methods, applied social research methods series* (3rd ed.). SAGE Publications, Inc.
- Yin, R. K. (2012). *Applications of case study research* (3rd ed.). SAGE Publications, Inc.