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Corporate Brands: A Strategic Management Framework

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CORPORATE BRANDS: A STRATEGIC MANAGEMENT FRAMEWORK

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ABSTRACT
Of late, the management, and maintenance, of corporate brands has emerged as an issue of considerable importance for senior managers. However, the absence of a comprehensive framework for the strategic management of corporate brand has been a problematic one for strategic planners. This article seeks to fill this avoid by introducing such a framework. It is based on the premise that corporate brand management marshals multiple disciplinary perspectives. Labelled The AC3ID Test of Corporate Brand Management the framework draws on perspectives from case study research undertaken in the US and UK; the literature on corporate brand and also marshals managerial insights regarding its application from a variety of organisations.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS
I especially wish to thank all those managers who have provided insights/feedback vis a vis their application of the framework (with permission) in organisational contexts. I also wish to thank Dr. Guillaume Soenen and Professor Stephen A. Greyser who were involved in the first phase of the research relating to the study reported here. The former was my research assistant and the latter served as a special adviser.

TRADEMARKS: NB
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INTRODUCTION

Considerable interest is now accorded to corporate brands as strategic resources[1]. Corporations such as Coca Cola, IBM, Microsoft, Disney, and even an ancient institution such as the British Monarchy,[2] are being viewed not merely as corporate entities but as corporate brands in addition. Environmental factors have played their part in contributing to the heightened interest in institutional brands. For instance, the acceleration of product life cycles has means that corporate brands are seen to offer a degree of stability in the minds of customers and others that can always be offered by products and services.[3] In addition, mergers, divestures and acquisitions and the deregulations and privatisation programmes have given birth of a plethora of new corporate brands.

The realisation that many organisations are brand-like has resulted in a radical reappraisal in our conceptualisation of brands and what is required of their management. Institutional brands are of greater breadth and depth than product brands and are in many ways distinct from most service brands (not all service brands are corporate brands and not all corporate brands are service brands. Consider the service brands of airlines (such as British Airway's Club World brand) or BP (primarily a non-service corporate brand). Whereas many product and service brands have an explicit customer focus corporate brands have a meaning for a much wider brand community encompassing both customers and other stakeholder groups. The breadth of the latter is significant. To us it seems clear that whereas legal ownership of the corporate brand resides with one or more entities emotional ownership of the brand resides with the corporate brand community: it is the latter rather than the former that explains why corporate brands are valuable. Moreover, corporate brands are underpinned by corporate rather than marketing communications. They are multidisciplinary in scope and are not the sole remit of the marketing department. For instance, every employee is an ambassador for the corporate brand and the corporate brand manage none other than the CEO.

Proctor and Gamble (P&G) is illustrative of the ascendancy of, and the importance accorded to, corporate brands. For many years P&G accorded primary importance to their product brands and eschewed raising their corporate umbrella but, increasingly, P&G has, realized the leverage power of the Proctor and Gamble brand especially in critical markets such as Japan, India and Russia[4]. Successful corporate brands appear to be infused with three, key, attributes that are of considerable strategic value. This is because corporate brands are a currency, a language and a navigational tool.

As currencies they have a worth not only to corporations but also to customers, employees, suppliers and shareholders. This can be financial in terms of a premium price that certain brands command. Consider the $12.6 billion buyout of Kraft by Philip Morris: six times its book value. Corporate brands are, of course, portable assets in that they can be bought, sold and borrowed (franchise arrangements being an example of this). The latter helps to explain why 59% of Coca-Cola's, 61% of Disney's, and 64% of McDonald's capitalisation is directly attributable directly to the value of the corporate brand.[5] The literature reveals that increased profile company profile, customer attractiveness, product support, visual recognition, and investor confidence are among the benefits associated with corporate brands. Corporate brands have other types of value in that individuals sometimes marshal brands to define the self as encapsulated in the phrase *"I am what I brand."* This helps to explain why some organisations use their corporate brand as guide in recruiting personnel: corporate brand define both institution and individual and this makes the task of managing the corporate brand much easier. The bookshop Waterstone's and Virgin Atlantic Airways use the brand promise as a guide *vis a vis* staff recruitment.

As languages corporate brands have a voice in local, national and, sometimes, global markets. Consider the corporate brands of Coca Cola, Sony, Mercedes Benz, Shell and the BBC: all have a global reach and loyalty. In China the most popular brands for students are foreign. Tellingly, all are corporate brands: Nike, Sony, Adidas and BMW[6]. Other brands resonate only in national markets such as Vauxhall in the UK. Others speak to local markets: Clydesdale Bank in the West of Scotland being one such example. Whether local, national, or global it would appear that corporate brands cut through the communications hubbub that characterises many markets. For this reason institutional values as manifest in the corporate brand are audible and comprehendible as languages whether they are a *patois* or a *lingua franca*.

As *navigational tools* they are of inestimable value to customers, and others, in making purchase, employment, investment and other important decisions.

BACKGROUND

The diagnostic framework outlined here aims to meet the needs to strategic planners having responsibility for the corporate brand. The model is underpinned by two distinctive features: (a) it reflects the various disciplinary roots relating to corporate brand management and (b) draws on interface theory that characterizes the literature relating to corporate image and corporate identity.

The framework has its origins in a major transatlantic study undertaken with the support, and co-operation, of an international corporate branding consultancy. A total of three weeks was spent in the London and New York offices with over thirty interviews taking place senior consultants (including Chairmen, CEOs, and Directors) actively engaged in consultancy work. In addition, an in-depth examination of documentary material relating to approximately forty consultancy projects covering a range of industries and countries. Furthermore, documentary material from twenty leading corporate consultancies was examined. This provided insight in terms of the methodologies employed by such consultancies.

The model outlined here has undergone several refinements and incorporates refinements that have resulted from the use by over one hundred and fifty managers in Europe and Asia who have used the framework.

METHODOLOGY

A qualitative and inductive research design has been employed for this study. Generally speaking, qualitative approach is appropriate where the objective is to, '*describe, decode and translate, and otherwise come to terms with the meaning, not the frequency, of certain more or less naturally occurring phenomena in the social world*[7].' Particular recourse was made to case study research which are particularly efficacious for explanatory purposes and for studying processes within organisations.[8]' There is a long tradition of explanatory and explorative research which utilises a case study methodology in both research and consultancy[9] and which draws on the principles of grounded theory[10]: Adopting an inductive and case study research design was felt to be the most efficacious in revealing the complex activities undertaken by the consultancy[11].

DATA ANALYSIS

Broadly speaking, the research mirrored the four stage learning cycle outlined by Kolb[12], namely: *concrete experience* (data collection), *reflective observation* (using the pre-understanding of the data to reflect upon the processes used by the consultancy), *conceptualisation* (the synthesis of the data and the marshalling of insights from the data leading to the creation of the framework and, over time, refinements) and *active experimentation* (insights gained from managers using the framework).

For instance, respondents were asked to detail innovative methodologies employed as well as standard processes ordained by their consultancy. Documentary material was analysed using the techniques of content analysis[13].

THE LITERATURE

An examination of the literature has taken place throughout the study. This encompassed a review of the literature relating to corporate identity in the first instance[14]. This was subsequently broadened to encompass the literature relating to the nascent area of corporate[15]. Specific reference was made to the marketing literature relating to the corporate image/corporate identity interface[16] and to the literature relating to gap analysis[17]: both of the aforementioned underpin and broadly inform the framework outlined here.

RESEARCH FINDINGS

The principle finding revealed the methodologies used for corporate identity/corporate branding change programmes were vision driven. For instance, consultancy practice used management vision as template for bringing perception and corporate communication into alignment and accorded particular importance to graphic design to effect such changes. The study revealed there to be major weaknesses in the methods used for corporate brand management and confirmed the necessity of examining a broader set of interfaces than those which placed emphasis on vision, communication and perception. Such an approach has characterised the literature[18]. Curiously, little importance was accorded to strategy and to the organisation's current characteristics even though these are a key tenets within the literature relating to the associated areas of corporate image and corporate reputation.[19 I]

Five principle weaknesses emerged from the study in terms of a failure to:

(a) Adopt a broad, multidisciplinary, perspective

(b) Distinguish between corporate strategy and the desires of senior management

(c) Acknowledge that the temporal dimension could reveal inconsistencies and, moreover, that

(d) Regard the corporate brand promise should act as a key cornerstone for corporate activities.

(e) Appreciate the need for there to be a dynamic alignment between the various interfaces

It was concluded that it would be possible to capture the key insights from the research and the literature in terms of a new framework (the ACID Test). One difficulty to be overcome was to reflect both practitioner and academic traditions and, as such, it was decided that the framework should be:

(a) Memorable,

(a) Simple to use,

(b) Progressive (reflects recent developments within the academic literature such as the existence of multiple interfaces) and

(c) Practical (it should have a utility for consultants and managers alike).

THE AC^{3}ID TEST™ OF CORPORATE BRAND MANAGEMENT™

The corporate brand framework consists of six dimensions (what are called identity types). The *modus operandi* of the framework is to *attain a dynamic congruency between all six-identity types (and not perfect congruency).* The notion of dynamic congruency accommodates the realisation that the actual identity of the organisation is constantly evolving and the fact that the business environment is in a constant state of flux. In addition, it acknowledge that although brands can be relatively stable they are not invariably so. Sometimes there is change in terms of the application and nature of the corporate brand promise. Changes in application can mean that the brand becomes associated with a new area of activity such as or the nature of the brand promise can alter

Each element is described as an identity type since (a) each dimension can be regarded as a reality for a group, or groups, and (b) these perceptions are often regarded as facts. Facts, or that which is perceived to be fact does of course affect behaviour[20].

THE AC^{3}ID TEST OF CORPORATE BRAND MANAGEMENT™

For chemists, the acid test, is used as a conclusive test of the authenticity, and thereby, value of gold[21]. As used here it also intends to impart value and have a utility as a diagnostic tool for strategic planners in managing corporate brands. It incorporates insights from the literatures, which stress the importance of having a clear brand promise, and for this to be underpinned/taken account of *vis a vis*: corporate identity, corporate communications, corporate reputation, corporate strategy, and management vision.

The AC^{3}ID Test in effect is a mnemonic. It captures six, so-called, “identity” types which need to be scrutinized as part of the strategic planning process or whenever the organisation comes to a strategic fork in the road: mergers, acquisitions, divestures and changes in status being cases in point. A broad description of each of the identity types is outlined below:

ACTUAL IDENTITY	“What we emphatically are” (corporate identity: multidisciplinary)
COMMUNICATED IDENTITY	“What we state we are” (corporate communications)
CONCEIVED IDENTITY	“What we’re thought to be” (corporate reputation)
COVENANTED IDENTITY	“What we promise to be” (the corporate brand promise)
IDEAL IDENTITY (strategy)	“What we need to be”
DESIRED IDENTITY	“What we long to be” (ceo vision/leadership)*

*(*In this framework a clear distinction is made between the articulation of corporate strategy by strategic planners-IDEAL IDENTITY-and vision and desires of the CEO and senior management - DESIRED IDENTITY- since, from the study, it became apparent that the two are not always in alignment. It is recognised that such a distinction is sometimes regarded as being synthetic in the first instance but it reality may be of critical importance.)*

The following section describes the nature of each of the identity types detailed above.

ACTUAL IDENTITY (DISCIPLINARY AREA: CORPORATE IDENTITY)

This relates to the current mix of organisational attributes that distinguish one identity from another: not dissimilar to the core competencies of the corporation[22]. .Winterschied describes core competencies in terms of specific tangible and intangible assets of the firm assembled into integrated clusters which transcend individuals and groups resulting in distinctive activities to be performed. These elements include corporate activities, markets served, corporate ownership and structure, organisational type, corporate philosophy and corporate history[23]. An informed judgement on the distinctive, and defining, attributes of the current identity needs to be made on the part of senior management. Differences in product performance and style, for instance, are some of the distinguishing characteristics of the automotive sector as BMW, Ford, Proton and Volkswagen illustrate. Differences of organisational type also provide other types of difference with there being different stakeholder emphasis: Shell (shareholders) Coop (customers), John Lewis Partnership (employees), Yorkshire Building Society (traditionally, both lenders and borrowers are members of such mutual entities).

COMMUNICATED IDENTITY (DISCIPLINARY AREA: CORPORATE COMMUNICATIONS)

Includes those controllable elements of corporate communication such as graphic design, corporate advertising, corporate sponsorship and corporate public relations and their orchestration[24]. Organisations use, and orchestrate, the corporate communications mix in different ways. For instance, whereas Coca Cola invests very heavily in corporate communications activities and uses many different channels of communications organisations the Virgin brand relies far more heavily on more informal channels of communications. For many years, the eponymous UK retail outlet, Marks and Spencer's, completely eschewed advertising and many other formal communications channels without and remained a highly successful corporate brand.

CONCEIVED IDENTITY (DISCIPLINARY AREA: CORPORATE BRAND REPUTATION*)

This is a particularly important category for two reasons. The first is because the real value of a corporate brand is (we argue) derived from its *emotional ownership* on the part of customers and other groups. The second is for the reason that it is the task of senior management to select which groups to be taken account of vis a vis this identity type. (In most cases this will involve several variants of the model to reflect the different group perceptions of the corporate brand.)

In order to accommodate the new type of brand relationship encompassed by the above a new label has been introduced and this is called *corporate brand reputation** In many ways it is similar to the notion of corporate reputation with the important caveat that corporate reputation is explicitly concerned with an institution and not a corporate brand. This is by no means as synthetic a distinction as at first might appear since there can be multiple ownership of corporate brands (Hilton and the franchising of the Body Shop brand) but there is only one brand community. Issues of employee and customer affinity to organisations (rather than corporate brands) and the stakeholder concept are important themes within the literature[25 26]. The importance of corporate brand affinity can be seen in terms of the broad stakeholder affinity that certain corporate brands engender such as the City of London, Nokia, Singapore Airlines, Philips, and Yale University, among others.

COVENANTED IDENTITY (DISCIPLINARY AREA: CORPORATE BRAND MANAGEMENT)

At its heart, the corporate brand is akin to an informal contract, between the owners of the corporate brand and the brand community. Here, the word covenant is used, (rather than the more usual corporate brand "promise") for the simple reason that many corporate brands have an iconic status and can engender almost religious-like loyalty: supporters of Manchester United Soccer Club, devotees of Martha Stewart products, users of Apple Computers and drivers of Saab cars, for instance. In the literature reference is often made to a more prosaic explanation of the above in terms of the 'corporate brand promise'. Increasingly, an identity-based view of corporate branding characterises the literature and this comes with the view that corporate brands represent a distillation of an organisation's values (i.e. the Swedish ness, and idiosyncrasies, of Saab even though it is US-owned), notes their strategic importance and the role of CEO as corporate brand manager[27].

IDEAL IDENTITY (MANAGEMENT AREA: STRATEGIC PLANNING)

The ideal identity refers to an organisation's espoused corporate strategy aimed at achieving the optimum positioning and identity for the organisation in its markets in a given time frame. Andrews illustrates how strategy shapes an organisation's identity by stating that corporate strategy is *"the pattern of major objectives, purposes or goals and essential policies or plans for achieving those goals, stated in such a way as to define what business the company is in or is to be in and the kind of company it is to be"*[28] The source of this identity type is based on current knowledge from strategic planners and others regarding the company's capabilities and prospects and takes cognisance of organisation's prospects in the context of projections vis-à-vis the general business environment[29].

DESIRED IDENTITY (MANAGEMENT AREA: MANAGEMENT VISION)

This lives in the minds of corporate leaders: it is their vision for the organisation. Although this identity type is misguidedly assumed to be inseparable from the ideal identity, there are instances where CEO vision differs from the espoused corporate strategy. Sometimes, as a result, it is the former, rather than the latter, that shapes a corporation's strategic direction. Whereas the ideal identity normally emerges after a period of research and analysis, the desired identity may have more to do with an individual's personality and ego than with a rational assessment of the organisation's current identity within the time frame of current corporate plans. Authors such as Zaleznik[30] make a distinction, for instance, between the CEO as a manager (transmitting and enforcing rules) and the CEO as a leader (infusing organisational values, initiating change, and inspiring confidence). Examples of the latter are often discernable in the formative years of an organisation: consider Lord Reith at the BBC, Adriano Olivetti at Olivetti, Thomas Watson at IBM and, more recently, Sir Richard Branson at the Virgin Group.

OPERATIONALISING THE AC3ID TEST: INTERFACE ANALYSIS AND THE REDS²A PROCESS™

In terms of the strategic management of corporate brands and the AC³ID Test it was also found that gap analyses was also efficacious. In strategic planning, gap analysis is a key component in formulating a new corporate strategy.[31] Typically, gap analyses examines the various gaps that exist and militate against the fulfilment of corporate objectives (breadth, depth and quality of product line, issues relating to distribution etc are cases in point).

The process to be used for operationalising the framework is another mnemonic: the REDS² Process. The process consists of five, distinct, steps which, although are easy to explain, does, as with any strategic review, require a good deal of data collection, analysis, synthesis and reflection. It can be described as follows:

REVEAL	the six identity types
EXAMINE	the interfaces between them
DIAGNOSE	the interfaces which are misaligned and ascertain the nature of the problem
SELECT	which interfaces require attention and then prioritise. Take into account what is (a) urgent (b) desirable and (c) feasible. (scenario planning may be efficacious in terms of prioritisation)
STRATEGY	decide upon the most efficacious course/s of action in order to bring the designated identity interfaces into alignment. (it is important to establish a standard time frame to apply to the desired and ideal identity types)

EXHIBIT 1: CORPORATE BRAND INTERFACES

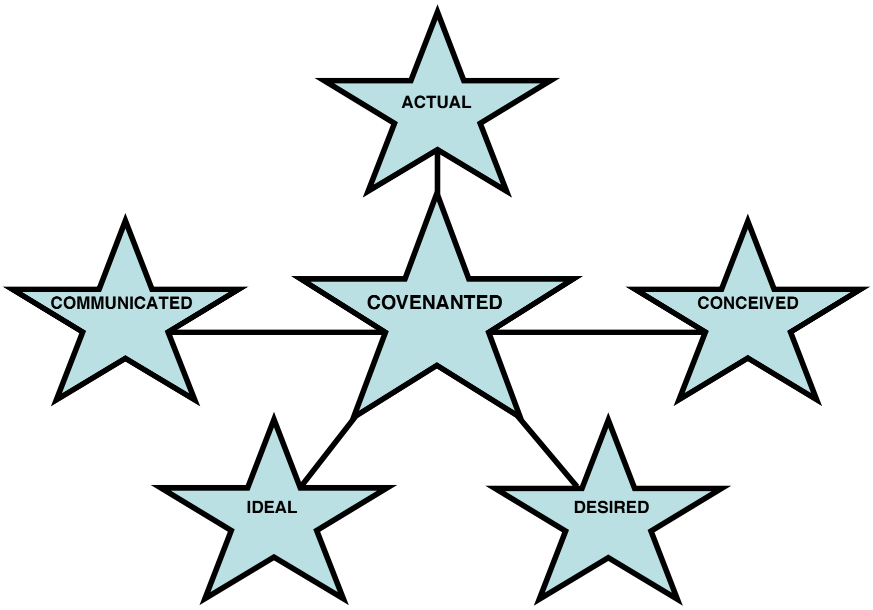


EXHIBIT 2: CORPORATE BRAND INTERFACES - CURRENT SNAPSHOT

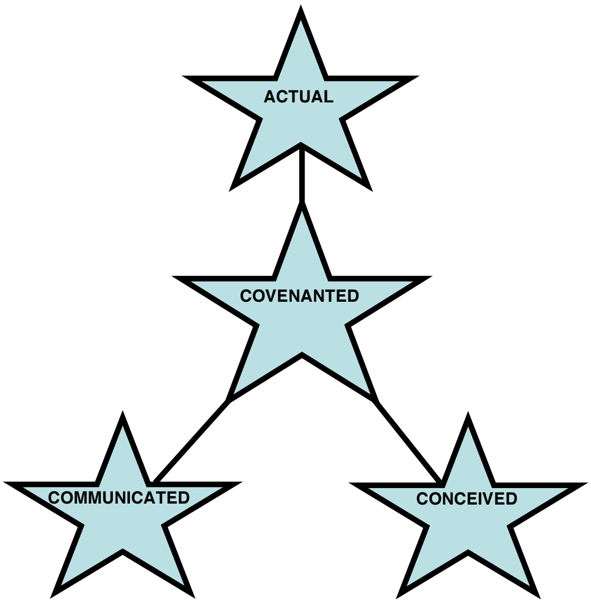
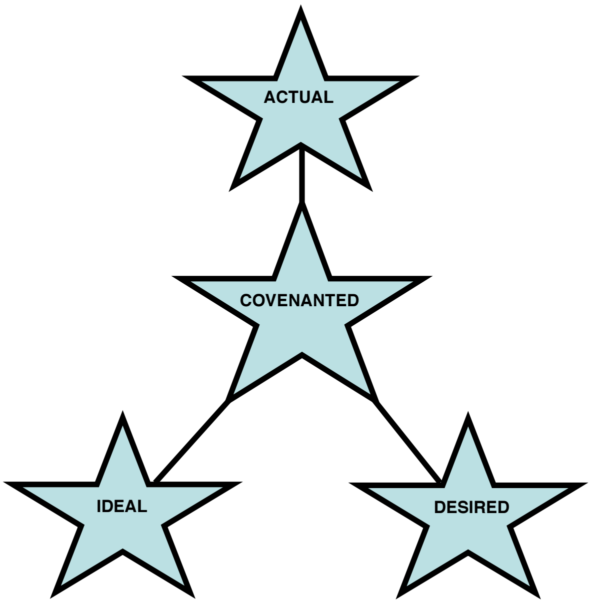


EXHIBIT 3: CORPORATE BRAND INTERFACES - FUTURE SNAPSHOT



Managerial insights regarding the operationalisation of the framework confirmed the need for a simplification of the model. This was achieved by respectively focussing on (a) current concerns and (b) future concerns. In terms of the former this entailed undertaking a gap analysis relating to the covenanted identity (the corporate brand covenant) and the actual, communicated, and conceived identities, In terms of the latter a gap analysis relating to the covenanted identity and the actual ideal and desired identities took place.

Exhibit one illustrates, in diagrammatic form, the elements comprising a detailed gap analysis relating to the corporate brand. The brand is at the centre of the framework since the values, promise, and reputation of the corporate brand (for many institutions) acts as guiding light just as mariners of old were reliant upon stars in the past. There is another reason that it is at the centre and this is because it is not uncommon for organisations to share the same corporate brand by virtue of ownership as with Hilton or in terms of franchise operations such as McDonalds.

Exhibit two illustrates a simplified gap appropriate to the current position.

The gap analysis appropriate to the corporate brand's future prospects is detailed in Exhibit Three. Such an analysis requires a high degree of access to senior managers since the desired identity (comprehending the vision of the CEO and Senior Manager) is a difficult task and is most likely to be undertaken by external strategic consultants. In operationalising the model many managers (for the reasons just mentioned) left out the ideal component. Others felt that the snapshot of the present position (Exhibit Two) sufficed in terms of their immediate concerns.

GAP-ANALYSIS AND THE TIME DIMENSION

The time dimension was also found to efficacious in terms of gap analysis and the use of the temporal dimension was found to shed light on the nature of certain misalignments. This approach was found to be particularly efficacious when the model is initially employed. Not only was such an approach efficacious in itself but also was found to provide a useful means of thinking about misalignments in corporate branding contexts. Broadly speaking the REDS process outlined above is followed and this results in each identity dimension being assigned a time frame with the following legend being used in this regard: *P*=Past, *C*=Current, and *F*=Future. In certain instances multiple classifications might be required as when mixed messages inform corporate communications policies and as such where two, or even, three classifications might potentially be required. Such an approach can lead to initial findings of some insight for strategic planners. For instance, the finding that perception lags behind reality as perhaps does corporate communications can be highly informative in explaining current (and projected future) travails. The current corporate communications campaign of IBM is illustrative of the above. Although IBM has 3,000 Human Resources and training specialists, for many the IBM corporate brand is not equated with HR and Training consultancy. It would appear that in the recent past the temporal dimensions of the conceived, and communicated identities were past-orientated and so was the corporate brand (in terms of brand stretch). As such, the recent corporate communications campaign asserts the widened breath of the IMB brand, creates awareness of IBM's consultancy activity and aims to shift the conceived identity held by IBM's customers and stakeholders.[32]

DYNAMIC CONGRUENCE AND THE DOMINO EFFECT

A key premise of the framework is the recognition that that the relationships between the various interfaces are dynamic rather than sclerotic in character: they are always in a state of evolution since the actual identity is constantly evolving.

The objective of the framework is not to achieve perfect but rather a general alignment between the various interfaces.

The process of alignment is quite a complicated one since the changes to one dimension necessarily has an impact on many others: a so-called "Domino Effect." For this reason it will be desirable to prioritise the various interfaces that will (subsequently) need to be aligned attuned. (For instance, a change in actual or covenanted identity will have a broad impact).

Of course, there are other interfaces (not explicitly mentioned here) that will almost certainly be affected and which do not included the covenanted identity. Of critical importance in this regard as the Actual-Conceived/Actual-Communicated/Actual-Ideal interfaces.

I have attempted to keep the framework simple but (in addition to the point raised above) it is also highly desirable once the framework has been grasped by managers to include a separate dimension explicitly relating to culture. Appendix 1-3 includes this dimension. In this sense culture refers to the beliefs and norms of employees (a somewhat prosaic definition I agree) but this can act as a barrier to change: mergers and acquisitions, a change of strategic direction or a change of brand promise provide examples of the above.

EXAMPLES OF CORPORATE BRAND MISALIGNMENTS

The manifestation of a corporate brand misalignment can be *'a moment of truth'* for strategic planners when there is a realisation that there has been aggrandisement of the brand promise or, indeed there has been a diminution of the brand promise. Other institutional difficulties in corporate branding terms can be where the corporate strategy entails a questionable extension of the brand into new areas or plans to lower quality levels which could fatally undermine brand reputation. For such reasons recourse to the ACID Test framework outlined here as part of an organisation's strategic audit could avoid such pitfalls. The following case vignettes are illustrative where corporate brand misalignment appears to have arisen:

MISALIGNMENT 1: IDEAL AND COVENANTED (POTENTIAL FUTURE MISALIGNMENT BETWEEN FUTURE STRATEGY AND FORMER BRAND COVENANT)

For many years the UK's middle-classes shopped at the supermarket chains of J.Sainbury and Waitrose were the favoured supermarket outlets for the UK's middle classes rather than Tesco which was viewed as being "blue collar" in customer orientation. Informed by research which revealed that the UK was becoming more middle-class in orientation Tesco's strategic planners have, since the 1990s, pursued a policy which has positioned Tesco as a middle, rather than a, working class corporate brand. Such a strategy for the corporate brand appears to have been successful and the pre-tax profits of the retail brand in 2005 were in excess of £2 billion.[33] This case illustrates that sometimes the nature of the brand promise needs to change to be in alignment with strategy. This explains why there needs to be sensitivity to the notion of dynamic alignment.

MISALIGNMENT 2: DESIRED AND COVENANTED (MISALIGNMENT BETWEEN CORPORATE BRAND AND CEO VALUES)

Disney as a great global brand is associated with wholesome family values and issues of integrity, and trust would appear to be key brand attributes. Yet corporate government issues associated with the management style of a former CEO ran contrary to the values so closely associated with the corporate brand and which led to a serious misalignment fissure arising between the desired and covenanted identities. In a court case the CEO was found to be machiavellian and imperial and appointed directors that served his rather than the corporation's interests and were, therefore were more willing to accede to his wishes.[34] This case example also shed light on an instance where the lack of alignment with the corporate brand covenant was of particular concern to members of Disney's brand community beyond customers.

MISALIGNMENT 3: COMMUNICATED AND COVENANTED (MISALIGNMENT BETWEEN CORPORATE COMMUNICATIONS AND BRAND PROMISE)

Hilton is an eponymous and iconic global hotel brands. However, since 1964 the corporate brand has been in dual ownership and today the corporate brand is jointly owned by a US as well as by a UK corporation. However, from the period 1964 until 1997, although there was a common brand promise, the US and UK organisations had different corporate communications strategies and there was no coordination in terms of communications management and delivery. Recognising the degree of the misalignment in 1997 the UK and US wings of the brand entered into a strategic corporate branding alliance encompassing worldwide reservations, a common loyalty programme and a unified system of visual identification.[35]

MISALIGNMENT 4: CONCEIVED AND COVENANTED (MISALIGNMENT BETWEEN PERCEPTION AND BRAND PROMISE)

Sir Richard Branson's Virgin brand is associated with modernity, flair youthfulness and draws on contemporary notions of Britishness and enjoys the highest reputation among all UK brands. However, Virgin Rail is the exception. It has been notoriously unreliable (in part attributable to a reliance on old rolling stock) and there has been widespread criticism from the travelling public. As such, the perception of the brand is fundamentally different from the brand promise and a major misalignment has surfaced.[36] The introduction of a £2billion fleet replacement programme is gradually assuaging negative public perception.

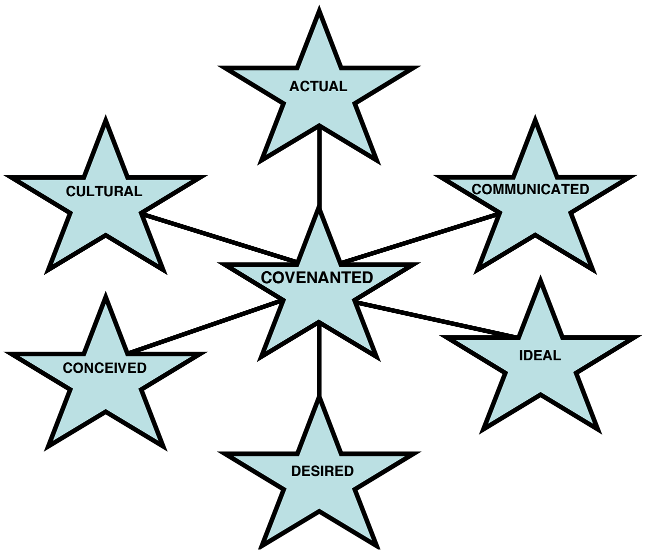
DISCUSSION

The framework discussed here illustrates the utility of adopting a strategic, multidisciplinary, and stakeholder approach to corporate branding: very different from traditional approaches to brand management that characterise a good deal of the marketing literature relating to branding. Such a framework seeks to make a distinct contribution to the strategic management of corporate brands: to date there a comprehensive framework relating to the area has been absent. An important characteristic of The AC^{3}ID– Test is that it should not be used simply as a one-off diagnostic exercise but should be viewed as a strategic framework that can be used as part of strategic analysis and strategy formulation. The benefits of such an approach is that it recognises the strategic importance of an organisation's brand and highlights the importance of considering other factors such as corporate identity, and corporate communications. This is because any change of strategic direction will have a domino-like effect on key organisational interfaces, especially those in relation to the corporate brand (other interfaces not considered here will also need to be considered for such a comprehensive review). In the next version of the framework greater prominence will be accorded to issues relating to other interfaces and the domino effect (see above) and to issues relating to culture (See the appendix section below).

In conclusion, the extant research undertaken by the author clearly suggests that it is the task of senior management not only to monitor, and, moreover, manage these interfaces so that there is a dynamic calibration between them. Senior managers (and the CEO in particular) are the ultimate guardians for the corporate brand.

APPENDIX;
THE AC^{4}ID TEST^{TM} J.M.T. BALMER (2005)

APPENDIX 1 – CORPORATE BRAND INTERFACES



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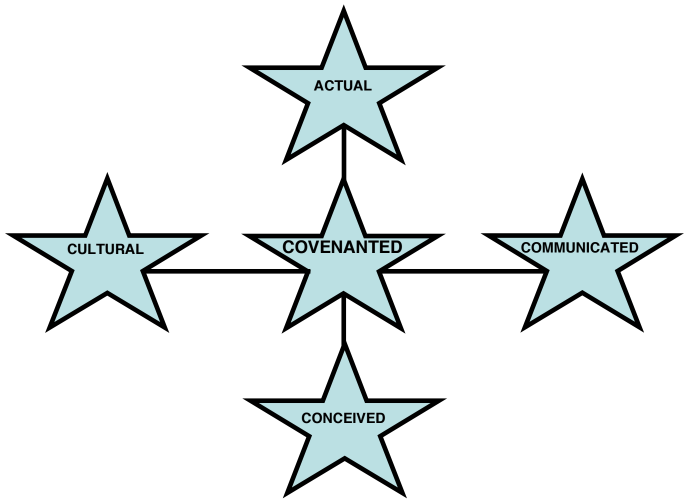

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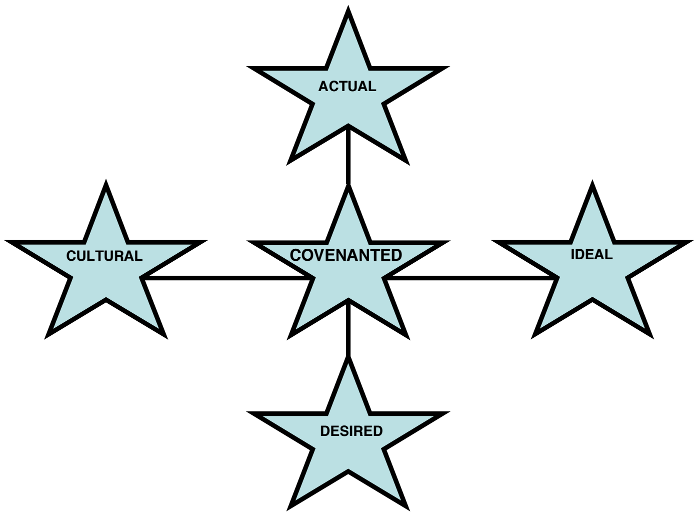

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